



On reference work and issues related to the management of knowledge: An analysis of the Farsi particle *dige* in turn-final position



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Abstract

This paper provides a conversation analytic description of the particle *dige* in turn-final position in Farsi conversation, and demonstrates its function as an epistemic marker. The analysis suggests that the turn-final particle *dige* occurs in turns that signal problems with the prior turn(s) that may have been motivated by matters related to managing epistemic dimensions. The analysis proposes two specific interactional contexts in which turn-final *dige* occurs: (a) in turns that are devoted to showing speaker's access to specific knowledge, and (b) in situations in which participants deal with misalignment in their respective presumed epistemic status. In addition, the paper illustrates (a) how issues related to indexing access to knowledge and knowledge primacy in conversation involve management of referential information, and (b) that in designing their turns, speakers select specific referential formulations in order to make reference to information and knowledge, and to signal their epistemic stance toward that knowledge.

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1. Introduction

When interacting with one another, participants regularly attend to the distribution of knowledge and information. They assess and negotiate who knows what information, how much they know, how they know it, and how certain they are about it. In recent years, these dimensions of knowledge and their management in social interaction have increasingly become of interest to conversation analysts. In general, conversation analytic studies have shown that participants display their orientation to these issues and employ a wide variety of linguistic resources to attend to and manage epistemic dimensions when interacting with one another (Clift, 2006; Drake, 2013; Drew, 2012; Hayano, 2013; Heritage, 2012a,b, 2013; Heritage and Raymond, 2005, 2012; Pomerantz, 1980, 1984; Sacks, 1992; Schegloff, 1992, 2007; Sidnell, 2012; Stivers, 2008, 2011; Raymond and Heritage, 2006; Stivers et al., 2011).

One of the primary concepts in conversation analytic research on epistemic and social interaction is epistemic stance. This concept has to do with the moment-by-moment expression of knowledge distribution and of the social relationship in question, and how they are linguistically (grammatically) and prosodically manifested in utterances. For example, as Heritage (2012a:6) shows, each of the three utterances below signals a different epistemic stance:

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- (1) Are you married?
- (2) You're married, aren't you?
- (3) You're married.

According to Heritage, each utterance addresses information that is within the epistemic domain of its recipient. Utterance 1 suggests that the speaker has no knowledge about the recipient's marital status, hence it indexes K– (unknowing) “epistemic gradients” (Heritage, 2012a:7). However, utterances 2 and 3 signal the likelihood that the recipient is married and thereby the speaker claims a certain degree of knowledge about the recipient's marital status. In comparison to utterance 1, utterances 2 and 3 present higher K+ epistemic gradients. In sum, depending on how much a speaker claims to know and how much epistemic access they have to a given domain of information, a speaker may have K+ (more knowledgeable) or K– (less knowledgeable) epistemic status and may employ a variety of linguistic resources to display their epistemic stance.

In addition to marking the degree of access that a speaker claims to have to specific knowledge, epistemic stance may also involve displaying relative primacy (that is, priority in knowledge based on one's experience), or epistemic right/authority. For example, Heritage and Raymond (2005) note that in the context of assessment sequences, the first speaker who offers an assessment implicitly claims epistemic authority. In such situations, the first speaker has resources, such as tag questions, to modify their epistemic stance and downgrade their claim. Similarly, the recipient can, in response, assume superior epistemic status or epistemic independence by confirming the prior speaker's assessment or producing an *oh*-prefaced second assessment (Heritage, 2002).

Recent CA research on epistemic and social interaction that is based on data in languages other than English has also shown that participants display their orientations to issues such as epistemic access and epistemic primacy, and that they employ a wide variety of linguistic resources to mark these interactive objectives and their epistemic stance. For example, it has been shown that German speakers use response tokens with distinct prosodic features to mark their epistemic stance. Golato and Fagyal (2008) show that the acknowledgment token *ja* when produced as a double [^]*jaja* with pitch peak on the first syllable indicates that the prior turn contains information that the [^]*jaja* speaker already knows. In contrast, when producing *ja*[^]*ja* with pitch peak on the second syllable, the speaker treats the content or action of the previous turn as either not justified or self-evident (p. 242). Another study on German response tokens and epistemic distribution in German conversation shows that speakers may use *achso* to mark a shift from “not knowing to knowing” and *ach* to mark receipt of information with no epistemic access (Golato and Betz, 2008). Focusing on question–answer sequences in Danish and Swedish, Heinemann et al. (2011) demonstrate that participants may use specific adverbs, such as Danish *jo* and Swedish *ju*, in their answer turns to imply that the questioner failed to take into account shared knowledge. More specifically, the authors note that the insertion of *jo/ju* in a slot where an answer is due signals epistemic incongruence.¹

Other studies of epistemic distribution and social interaction have shown that many languages have a set of particles that occur in turn-final position and that are used by speakers to claim epistemic stance. For example, in a recent comparative study on particles in interrogatives in Dutch, Lao and Tzeltal suggests that speakers of these languages have a number of final particles available to them to mark various epistemic features related to evidence and relative certainty (Enfield et al., 2012). It has also been shown that German speakers use the particle *ne* in turn-final position to mark relative certainty about what they have just said (Harren, 2001). Drake's (2013) study on *or* in final position in American English shows that speakers use the tag in their turns to mark an uncertain stance and claim lower epistemic status. Similarly, studies of Japanese conversations have shown that Japanese speakers employ a set of turn-final particles that mark epistemic stance (Hayashi, 2012; Hayano, 2011, 2013). These studies have demonstrated that turn-final particles such as *yo*, *yone* and *ne* are not interchangeable, and that each serves a specific interactional function pertaining to relative epistemic distribution among speakers (Hayano, 2013). For example, Hayano (2011) notes that the Japanese final particle *yo* in assessment sequences is used to claim epistemic primacy, and that a speaker of a *yo*-marked assessment may manipulate the intensity of the evaluation to claim stronger or weaker epistemic stance (p. 58). In another study, Hayano (2013) shows that in informing sequences, the turn-final particle *yone* may mark a referent to which both speakers have epistemic access. In cases such as these, the particle serves to invite an agreement, and when the particle occurs in a turn that contains information known only to the recipient, it invites confirmation (p. 189).

The present study is in line with the above-mentioned research, in that it focuses on the linguistic formulation of utterances and actions in Persian conversation and how they are influenced and guided by issues related to knowledge management and display of epistemic stance. In particular, the paper focuses on response turns that display problems

¹ Epistemic congruence refers to compatible epistemic stance between the speakers (Hayano, 2011). For example, in the case of a question the basic organization of epistemic is that the answerer knows something that the questioner does not know.

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