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Teasing Out *²mm*: Bilabial-Nasal Response Particles in Norwegian

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This article presents initial findings from the first systematic investigation of /²mm/, a disyllabic bilabial-nasal response particle pronounced with the specific high-low-high wave form of the East Norwegian 'second tonal accent'. Estimated frequencies from three extensive corpora indicate /²mm/ as by far the most common bilabial-nasal particle in Norwegian, vastly outnumbering monosyllabic /m/ and disyllabic /mhm/ known from general (English based) literature. In spite of this, /²mm/ has remained largely underexamined, and is often not distinguished from /m/ or /mhm/ in neither transcription nor analysis of interactional work. I here consider alternatives for their distinct representation, and preliminarily analyze a collection of 420 cases in Norwegian, clustered around continuer work and agreement/acknowledgement, where they appear to do discrete social actions.

Keywords: CA/IL, Response Particles, Continuers, Agreement, Tonal Accent

> *As a student of Sacks', I use 'order at all points' as a working hypothesis.*
> *But every now and then I think: Not here. This, surely, is garbage.*
> *And yet, on examination, it seems to be capable of orderliness.*
> G. Jefferson on 'Yeah' and 'Mm hm', 1985, p. 198 (pp.)

1. Introduction

Particles transcribed as "mm" or "mhm" have often been discarded as conversational waste or gathered up in broad categories such as 'interjections' or 'backchanneling', clouding their diversity of both form and function (as

pointed out by Schegloff, 1982; Gardner, 2001; Couper-Kuhlen & Selting, 2018). One of the strengths of Conversation Analysis and Interactional Linguistics has been empirically demonstrating how we rely on such particles in our interactions, and how granular variations in form often do distinct social actions (for bilabial-nasal particles see e.g. Schegloff, 1982; Jefferson, 1985; Goodwin, 1986; Gardner, 1997, 2001, and my Section 2.1; for other particles see e.g. Heritage, 1984; Jefferson, 2002; and overviews in Couper-Kuhlen & Selting, 2018; for particles in Norwegian, see Svennevig, 2007 and this issue, as well as my Section 2.3).

This article presents initial findings from the first[1] systematic investigation of bilabial-nasal response particles in Norwegian, with a primary focus on /²mm/. /²mm/ is almost ubiquitous in Norwegian talk-in-interaction, but has nonetheless remained largely under-examined. Both analysts of talk-in-interaction and second language learners of Norwegian mention this particle as something of a mystery. Although it resembles particles researched in other languages (see Section 2.1 and 2.2), /²mm/ distinguishes itself through its intonation: the specific high-low-high wave form of the East Norwegian 'second tonal accent'[2] (cf. Kristoffersen, 2000, p. 238; see Section 2.3 and 3). In what follows, I examine its estimated frequencies alongside /m/ and /mhm/ in three extensive corpora of Norwegian (Section 3.1), I consider alternatives for more clearly distinguishing them in transcription (Section 3.2), and I give a preliminary overview of their distinct interactional work based on a collection of 420 cases from the aforementioned corpora and a database of more naturalistic data (Section 3.3).

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2. The East Norwegian second tonal accent will here be represented by a superscript ², as is common in Norwegian phonology, and as justified in Section 3.2. For brevity, I use 'bilabial-nasal' as a shorthand adjective for voiced bilabial nasals.

2. Bilabial-nasal response particles

2.1 Bilabial-nasal response particles in general (English based) literature

Bilabial-nasal pragmatic particles come in seemingly infinite variation, but certain groupings have been identified, initially based on data from English. Gardner (1997, 2001) found *eight* major types of "mm", in addition to the "mhm" described by, i.a., Schegloff (1982), Jefferson (1985) and Goodwin (1986). My focus on *response* particles excludes three of them, while I exclude another two for being near-absent in Norwegian data.[3] The remaining varieties cluster around the following two major groupings: one centered around continuer work (see below and Section 3.3.1), and the other around agreeing/acknowledging (see below and Section 3.3.2).[4] These groups are not necessarily mutually exclusive or allways observably distinguishable, perhaps not even to participants themselves, but our Conversation Analytic and Interactional-Linguistic theoretical and methodological perspectives on them are based on the most clearly distinct cases.

The term 'continuers' refers to particles used for treating immediately preceding talk as incomplete, taking the stance that the prior speaker should continue that talk towards completion (Schegloff, 1982, p. 81; cf. Jefferson, 1985; Goodwin, 1986; Gardner, 2001; Mandelbaum, 2013). Particles doing such interactional work can also do other work, and the term 'continuers' – so as not to confound form with function (see Walker, 2014) – should be seen as a shorthand for particles found in a given sequential environment to be doing continuer work. These sequential environments are typically spaces where transition from one speaker to the next is potentially relevant (transition-relevance places; Sacks et al., 1974) where the prior speaker has projected more same-

3. My focus on *response* particles excludes the following: 1) the degustatory /mmm/, "prototypically associated with pleasurable ingestion of food", and usually very long "with strongly rise-falling shape" (Gardner, 2001, p. 78). 2) /mmm/ as lapse terminator, initiating a turn after a >3 second pause, according to Gardner usually a "protracted glissando, that is, a very long, stretched out token" falling from "mostly high pitch to low pitch" (2001, p. 67). 3) /m:/ as hesitation marker, filling one's own turn-internal pause, with a "flat, often level, continuative intonation contour" (2001, p. 88). I also exclude the following two particles for, i.a., their near-absence in the data: 4) /m,/ as repair initiation, according to Gardner "a weaker alternative to *huh?* or *what?* (…) invariably with rising intonation" (2001, p. 93); and 5) /mmm/ with "rise-falling or high-falling contour" as a bilabial-nasal version of Wow (2001, p. 187).

4. Confirmations also belong to this grouping, and bilabial-nasal particles are often found in second position after confirmation-seeking questions (see e.g. Stivers, 2005, p. 135). However, they are left out of the scope of this article for the sake of brevity and focus.

speaker talk to come. In such possibility spaces, continuers "hand the floor straight back to the [prior] speaker" (Gardner, 2001, p. 129), "demonstrating both that one unit has been received and that another is now awaited" (Goodwin, 1986, p. 208), as seen below in an example from Schegloff (1982; extract 1):

Ex. 1: BC, Red: 190 (Schegloff, 1982, p. 82; my marking of focus lines)

```
1   B°:    I've listen' to all the things that chu've said,
2   B°:    an' I agree with you so much.
3   B°:    Now,
4   B°:    I wanna ask you something,
5   B°:    I wrote a letter.
6          (pause)
7   A: ->  Mh hm,
8   B°:    T'the governor.
9   A: ->  Mh hm::,
10  B°:    -telling 'im what I thought about i(hh)m!
11  (A):   (Sh:::!)
12  B°:    Will I get an answer d'you think,
13  A:     Ye:s,
```

The form doing such continuer work in Schegloff's example is /mhm/ (transcribed as "Mm hm") – a disyllabic, bilabial-nasal particle with the two syllables separated by a voiceless glottal fricative. /mhm/ is considered a 'classic continuer' in English (Gardner, 2001, p. 105), typically then rising slightly in terminal pitch (ibid.).

The actions in the second grouping – agreeing and acknowledging – are made relevant by 'assertions', as the term is used by Stivers (2005, pp. 133–137; see also Williams et al., 2020, and Couper-Kuhlen & Selting, 2018, p. 506) for both descriptions of states of affairs and assessments (Pomerantz, 1984; Goodwin & Goodwin, 1992). According to Jefferson (2002), *acknowledgement* can be done by 'minimal responses' such as /mhm/, which in her example does not rise terminally in pitch (extract 2, line 4):

Ex. 2: [SBL:3:1:R:11:mso] (Jefferson, 2002, p. 1346). My line numbering.

```
1   Mary:    However people (.) don't have to be quite so fussy
2   Mary:    'cause if they know they like fruitcake
3   Mary:    they:'re usually very good fruit[cake.]
4   Celia:                                    [Mm:  ]hm
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5   Celia:  .t.hhh WE:LL uh I: can:'t eat fruitcake
6   Celia:  but I:'m going to keep a couple ofe'm:
```

In Jefferson's example, Celia's /mhm/ in line 4 is acknowledging an assertion by Mary, that combines describing and assessing states of affairs. The /mhm/ is positioned in a space of potential transition to next speaker – however, it does not hand the floor back but is rather followed by more same-speaker talk.[5] According to Gardner, there are systematic relations between such "non-canonical" uses of /mhm/ and their falling rather than rising terminal pitch (2001, p. 116).

Furthermore, although Jefferson viewed the aforementioned /mhm/ as 'minimal response', Gardner has demonstrated that such acknowledgement can also be done by the monosyllabic /m/ (2001, p. 105; see example in Norwegian in Section 3.3.2), which is even more economical than /mhm/. Gardner relates this use of /m/ to its neutrality, saying it can be used to diffuse a potentially conflictual situation by treating the prior turn as unproblematic while dodging the choice between (dishonest) agreement and (escalating) disagreement (2001, p. 106; see also Allwood et al., 1992, and Section 2.2).

The relation between acknowledgement and (levels of) agreement may depend on participant's epistemic access (Pomerantz, 1984; Heritage, 2012a, 2012b). Assessing something requires access to or experience/knowledge of that something (Pomerantz, 1984, p. 57). If the participant responding to an assessment lacks such access, then acknowledging is relevant as response, but agreeing is not. On the other hand, if the recipient *has* epistemic access to what is assessed, then the first assessment makes relevant a *second* assessment from the recipient, displaying the level of (dis)agreement in her stance (Pomerantz, 1984, p. 59).

In English, second assessments do agreement by *upgrading* the first assessment, lexically through stronger evaluative terms or intensifiers (Pomerantz, 1984) and prosodically/phonetically through, i.a., higher pitch or more dynamic pitch contours (Ogden, 2006). By contrast, a second assessment that repeats or downgrades lexically (Heritage & Raymond, 2005) and/or prosodically/phonetically (Ogden, 2006), comes off as projecting *dis*agreement. This is likely related to how being the first to assess something positions you as epistemically superior, so the second assessor has to do extra work to overcome her secondness and assert that she is not just following the first but has epistemic

5. According to Jefferson (1985) and Gardner (2001), /yeah/ is more often found with such 'speakership incipiency' than /mhm/, while /m/ is in-between.

agency and rights of her own (Heritage & Raymond, 2005; Stivers, 2010; Thompson et al., 2015, p. 199).

Although second assessments are often upgraded by fuller turns, Jefferson (2002) has shown that levels of agreement/affiliation can relate to the choice and phonetic design of certain particles. Jefferson (2002) also, however, showed such particles to be used differently in American and British English, a point which is recently strengthened by studies of other particles by Bolden, Hepburn and Mandelbaum (2023). According to Couper-Kuhlen and Selting (2018), evidence is emerging that suggests considerable cross-linguistic variation in whether agreement is (dis-)preferably done through upgrading or downgrading, where particles may play a decisive role.

2.2 Bilabial-nasal response particles cross-linguistically

Cross-linguistically, bilabial-nasal response particles are found in languages from all over the world (cf. Dingemanse et al., 2022), but vary in both form, frequency and action. In Wa'ikhana, an East Tukano language of northwestern Amazonia, Williams, Stenzel and Fox (2020) found high frequencies of the particles "mm" and "mMm" following both universal and potentially language/culture-specific principles. Speakers of Wa'ikhana would often use "*mm* particles with low and slightly falling prosody as affectively "stance-neutral" continuers following assertions and (some) informings, which are often produced within extended tellings" (2020, p. 375). On the other hand, they also found a "longer *mMm* particle produced with higher pitch and a rise-fall contour" that they analyzed as signaling agreement (Williams et al., 2020, p. 376).

In Greek, Pavlidou et al. (2022) demonstrates a preferential relationship between the monosyllabic /m/ with falling pitch (being the most frequent in their data) and actions of, i.a., receipting information or agreeing with an assessment (2022, p. 105). In their analysis, prosodically unmarked variants do interactionally economical alignment, while upgraded pitch and/or stress "additionally displays affiliation with the co-interlocutor", "without affecting the type of action accomplished" (2022, p. 121).

As for North-Germanic languages, Allwood et al. (1992) shows an example of Swedish seemingly monosyllabic "mm" oriented to a controversial assertion, saying it conveys less acceptance of veridicality than "ja" (*yes*) (1992, p. 5; cf. Gardner, 2001, p. 106, and Section 2.1). Steensig and Sørensen (2019) include in their overview of Danish dialogue particles "*mm* both short and long and with one or two syllables" (2019, p. 66). Their preliminary collection of "mm"

consisted of 20 instances of both continuers and second and third position responses (2019, p. 68). Focusing on third position in question-answer sequences, they analyze an instance of "m:," with a slight rise in pitch, from a secondary recipient, as aligning but not affiliating, and as less engaged and committed than "ja" (yes) and "nej" (no) (2019, p. 73). Dalum (2017) presents an example of a Danish continuer "*mmm*↗" shown in a pitch diagram to be steadily rising without fluctuation. As Modern Danish does not share the Norwegian system of tonal accents (Kristoffersen, 2000, p. 234), it is unsurprising that the intonations mentioned do not resemble the East Norwegian second tonal accent of /²mm/.

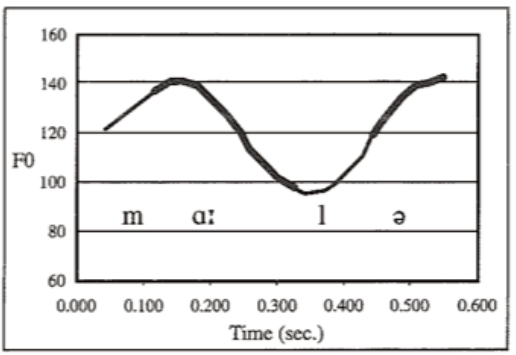
2.3 Bilabial-nasal particles in literature on Norwegian

Prior publications on Norwegian talk-in-interaction do touch on what they write as "mm", but without mentioning its tonal accent or focally investigating its interactional work. Svennevig (2018) describes how a practice of decomposing multi-unit-turns leaving pauses in-between for recipients to respond, often then with particles transcribed as "mm" or "mhm", can enhance understanding by L2 speakers. On the other hand, Landmark, Svennevig, Gerwing and Gulbrandsen (2017) analyze an interaction where an L2 speaker of Norwegian consults a physician with Danish as L1, where the physician's *best practice* attempts at securing understanding and patient-centeredness in choice of treatment, fails to receive more than "minimal, affirmative responses (e.g. "mm")", which the physician treats as potential disagreement. These minimal responses are mostly transcribed as either "°m°" or "mm,", although it is not mentioned whether the latter is pronounced with a tonal accent, nor whether that would matter for its interactional work.

Sikveland (2012) investigates whether "a sequence of phonetically similar response tokens [are produced] to disengage from the current topic, and dissimilar responses to engage with the current topic" (2012, p. 77). In Sikveland's Norwegian data, the token most frequently found in consecutive pairs 'doing the same' was "mm" (2012, p. 87). In such pairs, he investigates with great detail the phonetic (dis-)similarities between consecutive tokens, but does not mention tonal accents nor differentiate specific interactional work. In a more recent study, Sikveland, Solem and Skovholt (2021) examine 'acknowledgement tokens' in third position following a teacher/examiner question and a student answer, and phonetically analyze differing prosodic design features of *ja* ('yes') and similar variants. Although they explicitly exclude "mm" from their collection, they do discuss it in their introduction, suggesting that English

"mhm/mm" correspond to Norwegian "mm" (2021, p. 1), still without mentioning the tonal accent of the latter. When it comes to its interactional work, however, they preliminarily analyse a "mm," with rising terminal pitch as a *continuer*, focusing on its treatment of the student answer as incomplete.

The only source I have found to mention the tonal accent of /²mm/ is the Norwegian Academy Dictionary (NAOB), a diachronic-contemporary dictionary based on data from literary texts from 1830 until the present time.[6] In NAOB's entry for "mm" (retrieved June 28th, 2023), its pronunciation is specified as *stress with toneme 2*. Although the term 'toneme 2' is widely used, Kristoffersen recommends referring to this pattern as the 'second tonal accent' (2000, p. 233). Norwegian is a tonal language where syllables with primary stress are *necessarily* pronounced with either a 'first' or 'second' tonal accent, constituting lexically contrastive melodies. Furthermore, since the exact patterns are distinct in so-called East Norwegian and West Norwegian (with considerable intra-group variation in the latter; 2000, p. 238), /²mm/ should be specified as the *East* Norwegian second tonal accent. The pitch diagram below visualizes the East Norwegian second tonal accent in Kristoffersen's chosen example, the verb "male" (*paint*; ibid; figure 1):



As seen in Figure 1, this tonal accent is a high-low-high continuous wave form, first rising slightly, then falling to lower than pitch onset, before rising again more strongly. Although this pattern does not correspond to any of the intonations described by Gardner (2001), Dingemanse et al. (2022), Steensig and Sørensen (2019), Dalum (2017) or Sikveland et al. (2021), Section 3 will

6. In the more general dictionaries by the Norwegian Language Council and the University of Bergen, the only entry for "mm" is an abbreviation of "millimeters" ("Bokmålsordboka and Nynorskordboka", retrieved June 28th, 2023).

show estimated frequencies indicating it to be *the most frequent* intonation of bilabial-nasal particles in Norwegian.

3. Bilabial-nasal particles in Norwegian: Forms, frequencies and actions

The method for my investigation of bilabial-nasal response particles in Norwegian is Conversation Analysis / Interactional Linguistics (see Sidnell & Stivers, 2012; Couper-Kuhlen & Selting, 2018; Raymond et al., forthcoming; for introductions in Norwegian, see Svennevig, this issue and 2020; Skovholt et al., 2021). Starting from early, unmotivated observation of data in Norwegian, moving on to more focused attention to bilabial-nasal particles, groupings of /ʔmm/, /m/ and /mhm/ as discrete forms appeared bottom-up in the data, before I found some support in the literature previously presented. My estimation of their frequencies is based on three extensive, multi-modal, digitized corpora of conversational Norwegian (see Section 3.1), while the overview of their interactional work is based on a collection of 420 cases drawn from both the aforementioned corpora and a work-in-progress database of more naturalistic data (see Section 3.3). In Section 3.2, I consider alternatives for more clearly distinguishing /ʔmm/ from /m/ and /mhm/ in transcription, before presenting my initial analysis of their interactional work in Section 3.3.

3.1 Estimated frequencies of bilabial-nasal response particles in Norwegian

The three aforementioned digitized corpora are as follows, in order of size: 1) the Norwegian part of the Nordic Dialect Corpus (Johannessen et al., 2009), consisting of 1.054.429 tokens from casual dyadic conversations between friends, family members, acquaintances or strangers, produced in studio-like settings, in work places or homes; 2) the Norwegian Corpus of Spoken Language, Oslo (NoTa-Oslo; Hagen & Johannessen, 2008), consisting of 607.423 tokens from casual dyadic conversations between friends, family members, acquaintances or strangers, produced in studio-like settings; 3) the Big Brother Corpus (Text Laboratory, ILN, UiO), consisting of 401.009 tokens produced by participants in the first season of the Norwegian version of the reality television show Big Brother, aired in 2001. All three were developed between 2001 and 2015 by the Text Laboratory of the Faculty of Humanities, University of Oslo, under the direction of Janne Bondi Johannessen, and all are

orthographically transcribed[7], morphologically tagged and available in digital search interfaces.

Digital queries for "mm", "m" and "mhm" in these three corpora, with error margins based on auditive validation as /ˀmm/, /m/ and /mhm/ in 323 instances, yield the estimated frequencies visualized in Figure 3 below, normalized per million tokens:

Fig. 3: Estimated frequencies of /ˀmm/ (green), /m/ (yellow) and /mhm/ (blue) in three Norwegian corpora.

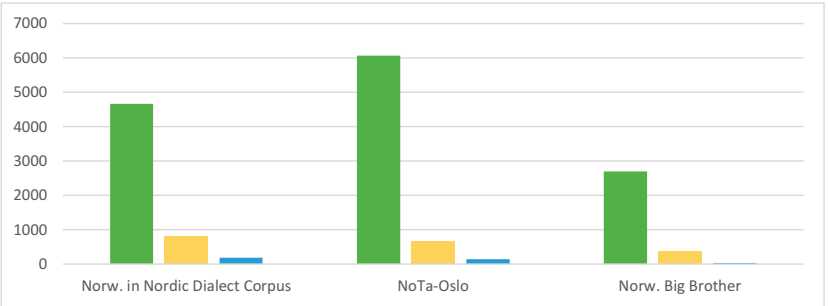


Figure 3 indicates, consistently throughout the three corpora, that /ˀmm/ with the East Norwegian second tonal accent is by far the most common bilabial-nasal particle in Norwegian, with estimated frequencies of, respectively, 4.667, 6.069 and 2.697 instances per million tokens. In second place, at dramatically lower frequencies, comes the monosyllabic /m/ with, respectively, 798, 654 and 364 instances per million tokens. Lastly, the disyllabic /mhm/ where the syllables are separated by a voiceless glottal fricative, although typical in (English based) general literature, is infrequent in the Norwegian data as compared to /ˀmm/, with, respectively, 187, 140 and 30 tokens per million words.[8]

7. The Nordic Dialect Corpus is doubly transcribed, representing both the language varieties as spoken and their orthographic counterparts.
8. I also tested results for, i.a., «mmhm», «mhmm», «mm hmm», «uh huh» and «aha», where only the latter gave any results, but with minute frequencies. Interestingly, a search for «mm hm» in NoTa-Oslo gave one result representing two separate but consecutive particles, where the first was an /ˀmm/ and the second was an interest-marker /hm/.

3.2 Representing forms of bilabial-nasal response particles in Norwegian

In spite of the frequency contrasts displayed in Section 3.1, the three discrete particles /ˀmm/, /m/ and /mhm/ are often not clearly differentiated in transcription of Norwegian data. I therefore here consider some alternatives for doing so, accounting for the choices I have applied in the text so far and in the further analysis of extracts in Section 3.3. These choices may serve as recommendations for further Conversation Analytic and Interactional-Linguistic transcription of Norwegian, along lines I will touch on in Section 4 on future directions and applications, motivated by the relations displayed in Section 3.3 between such forms and their interactional work.

As we have seen in Section 2.1, Gardner (2001) transcribes the monosyllabic bilabial-nasal response particle as "mm", while both Schegloff (1982), Jefferson (2002) and Stivers (2010) represent the disyllabic variant with syllables separated by a voiceless glottal friccative as "Mm hm". However, Pavlidou et al. (2022) explicitly represent the monosyllabic "basic form" as a single "m", leaving the double-letter "mm" for the disyllabic variants (2022, p. 106). This is in line with transcription manuals for the aforementioned Norwegian corpora (Hagen, 2008, p. 36; Johannessen et al., 2009, p. 30), where, in addition, the variant with voiceless glottal fricative is transcribed as "mhm". I opt for the latter alternatives as allowing more precise representation of syllables in continuous and relatively consistently shaped, discrete particles.

For my focus particle, however, I find it necessary to differentiate not only the number of syllables but the pitch contours of the East Norwegian second tonal accent, in order to tease out both its granularity and its normality, as separate from other disyllabic or prolonged monosyllabic realizations. While Figure 1 from Section 2.3 again shows the high-low-high wave form of the East Norwegian second tonal accent in phonologist Gjert Kristoffersen's chosen example (2000, p. 238), figure 2 below shows it to be close-to-parallel in an example of my focus particle /ˀmm/ from my collection, whose pitch contours have been extracted through Praat (Boersma & Weenink, 2023).

Although Jeffersonian/CA transcription (Jefferson, 2004; Hepburn & Bolden, 2013) does include conventions for word-final and word-internal pitch movements, they are, naturally, not developed for the sake of representing the normality of lexically distinguishing tonal accents. The International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) does include a symbol for high-low-high pitch movements, which, applied to my focal particle would yield /m̰m/ (similar to the Spanish tilde, but with sharper curves). A weakness of this representation is that it may

Fig. 1

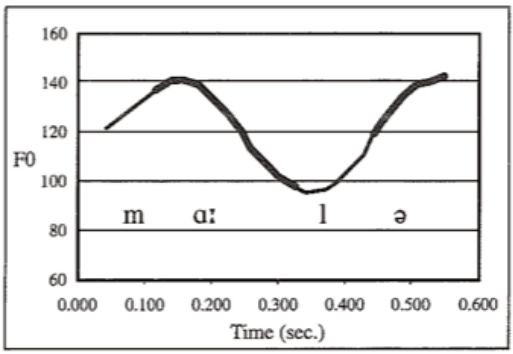
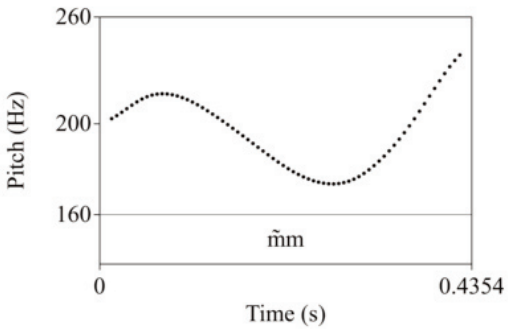


Fig. 2



give the false impression that such symbols be standard elements of Norwegian orthography.

In Norwegian phonological tradition, on the other hand, the second tonal accent(s) are typically represented by a superscript [2], which applied to my focus particle yields /[2]mm/.[9] This will then represent the second tonal accent in either East or West Norwegian, in spite of their intonational contrasts (but see footnote 18, Section 4). In addition to the benefits of following an established semiotic norm, this convention *phonologically* denotes the second tonal accent independently of its exact phonetic expressions, which do vary.

My collection includes 38 cases where /[2]mm/ rises higher than normal in the second syllable, often then with a more shallow central fall. Combining the Norwegian phonological tradition with Jeffersonian/CA conventions for transcribing slight (continuative) terminal rise with a comma and markedly higher

9. My thanks to Jan Svennevig for this suggestion, and to Jardar Eggesbø Abrahamsen for further elaboration.

terminal rises with question marks, such cases can be represented as "²mm," or "²mm?". As I am tentatively analyzing these, they largely co-vary with doing continuer work (see Section 3.3.1; currently being researched for separate publication).

On the other hand, my collection also holds many cases of /²mm/ where the *first* syllable is phonetically upgraded, through higher pitch, stress and/or prolongation (cf. Ogden, 2006; Section 2.1). Combining the Norwegian phonological tradition with Jeffersonian/CA conventions of denoting markedly higher initial pitch with an upward arrow, stress with underscore and prolongation with a colon, yields [↑²m:m]. As will be suggested in Section 3.3.2, cases with one or more of these upgrading features largely co-vary with doing agreement.

The aforementioned phonetic variations are still phonologically perceived as the East Norwegian second tonal accent, as distinct from both the first tonal accent and other pitch contours such as the fall of the monosyllabic /m/, the typically even-rising /mhm/, or (infrequent) even-rising varieties of a disyllabic /mm/. I therefore employ the phonological representation /²mm/ in running text, while in transcripts I represent its normal expression as ²mm and mark phonetic variation according to Jeffersonian/CA conventions (Jefferson, 2004; Hepburn & Bolden, 2013), as suggested above.

My intention here is not to insist on tonal accents always being represented in transcriptions of Norwegian talk-in-interaction (although their relevance in other lexical items are sometimes made observable in the data). Transcripts are "necessarily selective in the details that are represented", and are "never treated by conversation analysts as a replacement for the data" (Hepburn & Bolden, 2013, p. 57). However, consistent underrepresentation of certain phenomena may blur their roles and importance, while paying attention to them could well turn out to be fruitful (cf. Jefferson, 2004, p. 15). In teasing out features of bilabial-nasal particles in Norwegian, I hope to demonstrate how such attention and representation may be worth our efforts, not just for understanding the particles in themselves but for unlocking our analysis of the interactions that they rather ubiquitously partake in.

3.3 Bilabial-nasal response particles and their interactional work

In this section, I will preview my on-going investigation of the interactional work of bilabial-nasal response particles in Norwegian, with the aim of indicating possible systematicities in the relation between their forms and their actions. My analysis is based on a collection of 420 /²mm/, /mhm/ and /m/ from

the three aforementioned corpora (see Section 3.1) and from Database of Norwegian Everyday Interactions (Etelämäki & colleagues, work-in-progress), where participants have multi-modally recorded themselves in their own natural environments. Observing the cases in view of the conditional relevance set up by the preceeding action as well as how they are treated in the immediately following talk (see, e.g., Schegloff, 1968; Raymond et al., forthcoming), the collection has clustered into the two major groupings described by general literature in Section 2.1: Cases in Norwegian centered around continuer work are analyzed in the following Section 3.3.1, while those centered around agreeing/acknowledging are analyzed in Section 3.3.2.

3.3.1 Continuer work and *ʔmm* or *mhm* in Norwegian

As presented in Section 2.1, particles doing continuer work "hand the floor straight back to the [prior] speaker" (Gardner, 2001, p. 129), "demonstrating both that one unit has been received and that another is now awaited" (Goodwin, 1986, p. 208). According to Gardner, the 'classic continuer' in English is /mhm/ (2001, p. 105), which, as seen in Section 3.1, is rare in the data from Norwegian. Continuer work in Norwegian is instead often done by /ʔmm/, while /mhm/ tends to appear where there is something else going on, as represented by their contrasts in extract 3 below.

Prior to the extract, Kåre and Jon have been telling each other a series of stories, the latest of which being Jon's about a radio reporter having a call of nature inside a tightly confined space. Upon its completion, Kåre initiates a re-telling of a story he heard in his navy days about a jovial ship commander, framing it as a distant relative (sic.) of Jon's telling. As we will see, this larger sequential context is important for understanding Jon's choice of responses.

Ex. 3: NoTa-Oslo. My naming: Jon (Id.067) & Kåre (Id.068).

1	KÅRE	=å::: e: gjør fast,=og overnatter,=
	LTR[10]	and eh ≈anchores and ≈spends-the-night
2	KÅRE	=og så atte de ligger stille om ↓natta da.
	LTR	and so that-eh they lay quiet at night ≈then
3		(.)
4	JON ->	ʔmm=
5	KÅRE	=.hhh og e:m da (var e:)
	LTR	and eh:m then (was eh)

10. LTR: Literal translation. Where such word-by-word translation is unavailable or would be too misleading, I explain in a footnote or suggest an idiomatic translation marked with "≈" for approximate equivalence.

```
6           (.)
7   KÅRE    skjedde det ↓mer ↑enn ↓én ↑gang?=
    LTR     happened it more than one time
8   KÅRE    =atte   skipssjefen       han kom  ruslende::=
    LTR     that-eh ship-commander-D[11] he came strolling
9   KÅRE    =bak i akterenden: og: ned til ↑kokken?=
    LTR     back in stern-D   and  down to  cook-D
10  KÅRE    =og så   bakte'n   boller til hele mannskapet?
    LTR     and then bakted'he buns   to  whole crew-D
11          (0.2)
12  JON ->> mhm,
13          (0.4)
14  KÅRE    .hHh  det er jo   på é:n måte littegrann sånn e:::::
    LTR          that is PRT[12] in one way  a-tiny-bit such eh
15          (.)
16  KÅRE    d'æ ↑ikke-prøysisk,=
    LTR     it's  non-Preussian
17  KÅRE    =$her kommer skipssjefen      og  baker boller te:::$
    LTR      here  comes ship-commander-D and bakes buns   to
             $ridiculing tone of voice$
18  KÅRE    =$ska'n: lissom være  kompis og  kamerat  med::$
    LTR      ≈is-he-supposed-to-be buddy and comrade  with
19  KÅRE    =med mannskapet?
    LTR     with crew-D
20          (.)
21  JON ->  ²mm
22  KÅRE    .(t)hhhhh men e: ved en senere anledning så   e:::=
    LTR               but eh at  a   later  occasion then eh
```

Jon's /²mm/ in line 4 is oriented towards a preliminary installment of Kåre's telling. It appears less than 0.2 seconds after Kåre's prior unit (as symbolized by the punctuation mark in parenthesis), and is immediately followed by him drawing breath (.hhh) and moving on in the temporal progression of his telling (lines 5–10). Kåre thereby treats the /²mm/ as doing satisfactory reception of the prior unit and as expecting (or at least *allowing*) him to continue into the next one – i.e., he treats /²mm/ as a continuer.

Jon's /mhm/ in line 12, on the other hand, is followed by a 0.4 second pause before Kåre *re-works* his prior installment from line 10 about the ship commander baking buns for the crew, explaining across the next five units (lines 14–19) why this would or should be considered unexpected. Only when this

11. D: Definite.
12. PRT: Untranslatable particle.

re-working receives a /ʔmm/ from Jon in line 21 does Kåre move on in the temporal progression of his telling, again without noticeable delay.

Now, Kåre did set up his line 10 as something worthy of more affiliative response, such as laughter or an assessment. His talk from line 1 to 10 lays groundwork for this *tellable* element (cf. Sacks, 1989) and his re-working of it may be more related to the absence of response treating it as such, than to the choice of /mhm/ over /ʔmm/. However, the relevance Kåre explicitly projected when introducing his story as a distant relative to Jon's, is still not observable at line 10, where there is still no apparent connection between a ship commander baking buns and someone having a call of nature inside a confined space – their connection is only made clear later in the continued telling, after the extract. Though the choice of /mhm/ in this opportunity space may seem coincidental, there are 20 cases of /mhm/ in my collection orienting to such a lack of apparent relevance (out of a total of 41 continuer *mhm*), leading me to tentatively analyze these as not just doing continuer work but (also) challenging relevance. In contrast, there are 75 cases of /ʔmm/ being treated as an unproblematic continuer allowing progression (of which 38 rise higher than normal in the second syllable).

Extract 3 serves as an indication of /ʔmm/ and /mhm/ in Norwegian being distinct in not only frequency and form but also action. If, as continuers, /ʔmm/ allows progression while /mhm/ challenges the relevance of the prior unit, then keeping them apart in transcription and analysis has consequences for our precise understanding of the interactions they partake in.

3.3.2 Agreement/acknowledgement and *ʔmm, mhm* or *m* in Norwegian

As presented in Section 2.1, agreement is made relevant by assertions when the participants both have epistemic access. While in English, agreement is done through lexical and prosodic/phonetic upgrading, it appears from my collection that there is a relation in Norwegian between agreement and phonetically upgrading the first syllable of /ʔmm/, as seen in Extract 4 below. In the interaction preceding the extract, Gro and Aud are reminiscing on a trip they did together.

Ex. 4: NoTa-Oslo. My naming: Gro (Id.118) & Aud (Id.117).

```
1   GRO     og  så var det     <fint å være *i Pilipeto da.>
    LTR     and so was it(DEC[13]) nice to be   in AP[14]   ≈then
    GRO                                      *smiles and gazes tw Aud->>
2   AUD     ↑²m:m
3   AUD     ts .hh tenker ofte  på det  asså
    LTR            think[15] often on that PRT
4           (0.2)
5   AUD     hvor-m fint det var der
    LTR     ≈how-m nice it  was there
```

In this extract, and in several other instances in the sequence from which it is drawn, Gro produces an assertion involving a positive assessment of one of the places they went to, and Aud agrees by producing a /²mm/ where the first syllable is phonetically upgraded through heightened initial pitch, prolongation and/or stress (cf. Ogden, 2006). She then does a full turn in line 3, overcoming her secondness by not only signaling agreement but also asserting epistemic independence, in saying that she often thinks about this and assesses it in the same way.

Although work on the agreement/acknowledgment grouping of my collection is still in an early phase, I have at least 69 cases of /²mm/ following assertions, of which 50 (72%) are phonetically upgraded in the first syllable. Much analysis remains, but many of these 50 instances appear where the participants both have epistemic access, followed by work to overcome secondness. These preliminary findings suggest that /²mm/ with phonetically upgraded first syllable may be a resource for doing agreement in Norwegian, although extensive and systematic research on a wider collection of assertions is needed to determine preferential relations vis-a-vis full, lexically-prosodically upgraded second turns.

As for /mhm/ following assertions, suggested by Jefferson (2002) to do acknowledgement in English, it is again found to not only be rare in Norwegian (see Section 3.1), but to appear where something else is going on, as represented in extract 5 below. Prior to the extract, Celine has been accounting for her choice not to continue studying social science (“samfunnskunnskap”, “SK”) this year of High School.

13. DEC: Declarative syntax.
14. AP: Anonymized Place.
15. Although this verb in present tense occurs without a pronoun, and Norwegian (normatively) requires pronouns, this common use implies first person singular.

Ex. 5: NoTa-Oslo. My naming: Celine (CEL, Id.141) and Martine (MAR, Id.142). My title: “So much politics”

```
1  CEL      .hhh °hva° ska’ jeg med det lism,=
   LTR           what shall I with that like
2  CEL      =for det første så f::ikk jeg ikke akkurat verdens beste
   LTR       for the first  so  got    I   not exactly world's best
3  CEL      karakter i SK  i fjor?
   LTR       grade  in SK ≈last-year
4           (.)
5  CEL      .hh så hvorfor* ska’ jeg ha det i å£rhh-hh£
   LTR          so   why sha(ll) I have it ≈this-year
   mar                  *shakes head laterally------>
6  CEL      £jeg hadde [jo sli:£ti,]
   LTR        I ≈would PRT struggled
7  MAR                [*det er så ] det er utrolig     vanskelig
   LTR                  it  is so   it is increadibly hard
   MAR      ---------->*
8  MAR      (>og så   er det<) så mye  politikk,
   LTR       and then is there so much politics
9           (0.3)
10 CEL ->>  ↑mhm,
11 MAR      ja, [hh hh hh hh]
   LTR      yes
12 CEL          [>hehehehehehe<]
13 MAR      nå stopper   vi
   LTR      now stop-PT[16] we
14 CEL      £he [ja:,£ he-he]
   LTR          yes
15 MAR          [°hh hh hh°] (.)
16 CEL      ns [nh-hh]
17 MAR         [°hh hh°]
18 CEL      .hhh m[en:]
   LTR           but
19 MAR             [>og] så  er det veldig sånn< tungt=
   LTR              and then is it  very   ≈like heavy
20 MAR      det   er så mye  du  må   lære deg
   LTR      there is so much you must learn RP
21 CEL  ->  ²m:°m° [de’æ så]
   LTR             it’s so
22 MAR             [så må  ] du være flink på å   drøfte og de’ække jeg’ss
   LTR             so must  you be  adept at to ≈discuss & that’aint I PRT
```

When Martine affiliates with Celine’s stance through assertions assessing social science as incredibly hard (line 7), with so much politics (line 8), there is a 0.3 second pause before Celine responds with an /mhm/ that is upgraded by stress

16. PT: Present tense.

and heightened initial pitch (line 10). After Martine responds to this with "ja," (*yes*, line 11), they both laugh in overlap, Celine rapidly and emphatically (line 12). Although the exact work of this /mhm/ is not clearly observable, there are 4 similar cases in my collection, which my participant's knowledge conduces me towards interpreting as not just agreeing but (also) asserting strong epistemic superiority, as if saying "tell me about it; preaching to the choir here, sister".

When Martine does another round of affiliative assertions, assessing social science as very heavy (line 19), that there is so much you must learn (line 20), Celine *agrees*, without pause, again by doing a /ʔmm/ where the first syllable is phonetically upgraded through stress and prolongation (and where the second syllable is weakened). As in extract 4, and in contrast with the /mhm/, this /ʔmm/ is followed by its speaker initiating a second assessment (*it's so*, or possibly *there's so*, line 21), although this one is aborted and overlapped by Martine moving on to another assertion (line 22).

As for /m/ after assertions, let us turn to my final exemplar analysis. Prior to extract 6, Anette has been asserting to Roy that who gets her vote for leaving the Big Brother house will in the end come down to personal chemistry, seemingly arguing against herself for liking some participants more than others. To this, Roy responds as follows:

Ex. 6: Big Brother Corpus. Roy and Anette (ANE).

```
1   ROY     det   er ehm det   er ingen ↑av de   (t)som har  vært her,
    LTR     there is uhm there is no-one of they (t)who have been here
2   ROY     av de  tolv   som har  vært her=
    LTR     of the twelve who have been here
3   ROY     =som ikke kunne:: vært en venn   av meg=
    LTR      who not  could   been a  friend of me
4   ROY     hvis jeg treffi   dem°::° >°utenom°<
    LTR     if    I  (had)met them     ≈outside-of
5           *(0.4)
    ANE     *shakes head laterally->
6   ANE     £ikke meg heller£
    LTR       not me  either
7           (0.5)
8   ANE     £ʔHHh >hə hə hə<* .HHh£
    ANE                  ->*
9           (0.3)
10  ANE     *det er  kjemperart *[hh-khh] ((kremter))
    LTR      it  is ≈very-strange         ((hawks))
    ANE     *smile stiffens->   *and fades
11  ROY ->                       [ m.   ]
12          (0.2)
13  ANE     ↑men jeg må  si  at   det   er noen=
    LTR      but  I must say that there is someone
```

```
14  ANE     ↑d'e:r'eh  .hh noen   hvor  kjemien     stemmer >↓dårligere<=
    LTR     there'is'uh   someone where chemistry-D matches   more-badly
15  ANE     =>↑det er det<
    LTR       that is there
```

When Roy asserts that none of the participants could not have been his friend on the outside (L1-4), Anette verbally asserts the parallel stance (L6, *not me either*), while shaking her head laterally. However, she says this while smiling (£), and after a 0.5 second pause breaks out laughing (L8, while still shaking her head). When this laughter is not reciprocated by Roy through a 0.3 second pause (L9), her smile stiffens and she produces an assessment of "it" as very strange, before hawking (L10). In overlap with the hawk, Roy produces a monosyllabic /m/ with falling pitch (L11), minimally acknowledging Anette's assessment. Anette then does a full turn largely contradicting her prior stance (L13-15).

Roy's choice of /m/ could be related to lack of epistemic access or rights to Anette's stance on who she likes, making acknowledgement relevant over agreement (see Section 2.1). On the other hand, Anette has largely given Roy access to her stance in the interaction prior to the extract, which contradicts the stance she takes in line 6 – a contradiction that she herself makes clear from line 13. Although more systematic research is needed on bilabial-nasal particles in such sequential environments, the relation between Roy's minimally acknowledging /m/ and Anette's somewhat low-credibility assertions does fit well with Gardner's claims (2001, p.106; see Section 2.1), and Allwood et al.'s example (1992, p. 5; see Section 2.2), of /m/ as neutrally diffusing a potentially conflictual situation by treating the prior turn as unproblematic while dodging the choice between (dishonest) agreement and (potentially escalating) disagreement.

For now, extracts 4–6 serve as an indication of /ˀmm/, /mhm/ and /m/ in Norwegian again being distinct in not only frequency and form but also action. If, following assertions, /ˀmm/ with upgraded first syllable does agreement, /mhm/ asserts epistemic superiority, and /m/ minimally acknowledges while potentially dodging disagreement, then keeping them apart in transcription and analysis again has consequences for our precise understanding of the interactions in which they partake.

4. Future directions and applications

As continuers (Section 2 and 3.3.1), /ˀmm/ and /mhm/ in Norwegian are being investigated more thoroughly for separate publication. As doing agreement (Section 2 and 3.3.2), /ˀmm/ compared to not only /mhm/, /m/ and other particles but to full turns lexically and/or prosodically/phonetically down-, upgrading or repeating, needs more extensive and systematic research as a future project of its own, potentially revealing language-/culture-specific practices (cf. Williams et al., 2020, Section 2.2), maybe even touching on variations in cultural emphasis. Taken for what they are, however, the initial findings presented in this current article give some pointers as to both what actions may explain the high frequencies of /ˀmm/ as opposed to /mhm/ and /m/ in Norwegian, and how we may to a higher extent discretely identify them, in transcription and in analysis.

Applied to research on student-teacher interaction, my initial findings may support Sikveland, Solem and Skovholt's (2021; see Section 2.3) preliminary analysis of a teacher's "mm" with rising terminal pitch as a continuer treating a student answer as incomplete. Knowing whether the particle was produced with a tonal accent, however, and in that case, whether the first syllable was phonetically upgraded, could lead us to analyse it as instead doing agreement – if not in this case, then perhaps in others.

Research on health interactions, such as Landmark et al. (2017; see Section 2.3) where the L1 Danish physician treated "°m°" and "mm," from the L2 Norwegian patient as potential disagreement, may benefit from further analysis of these distinct particles and their phonetic realizations, if the monosyllabic /m/ with falling pitch does dodge or project disagreement, while /mhm/ challenges relevance or asserts epistemic superiority, and /ˀmm/ with upgraded first or second syllable could, respectively, do agreement or continuer work. Although full clause responses would likely have made the patient's stance more observable, such work to overcome secondness and assert epistemic independence may be avoided in a context of institutionalized asymmetry, in spite of the physician's (best practice) efforts at achieving patient-centeredness in choice of treatment. Furthermore, if bilabial-nasal particles are different in both form and action between Norwegian and Danish (see Section 2.2, 2.3 and 3), as well as other languages such as e.g. English, Greek and Wa'ikhana (Section 2.1 and 2.2), then the primary language of both physician and patient may have influenced their choices and interpretations.

As if intra-Scandinavian contrasts were not enough, we should expect considerable regional variations in bilabial-nasal particles within Norwegian,

i.a. since, as mentioned in Section 2.3, tonal accents vary strongly between East and West Norwegian. Still, in data from the Nordic Dialect Corpus (see Section 3.1), /²mm/ with the East Norwegian high-low-high pitch contour does seem to appear in more regions than would be expected, which could be further explored combining Norwegian phonology, CA/IL, dialectology and sociolinguistics.[17] In the other end, the frequencies for /mhm/ in the Nordic Dialect Corpus are higher in Rogaland, which, in addition to pertaining to West Norwegian in terms of tonal accents, has among the country's highest US immigration, which may have favored importing /mhm/ from English.

In summary, my initial findings on bilabial-nasal response particles in Norwegian, although preliminary to more conclusive work, open up future directions for both basic and applied research, as well as for practitioner training and general teaching of Norwegian as a second language. Teasing apart /²mm/, /mhm/ and /m/ in Norwegian, and tracing systematicities in the relation between their phonetic realizations and their interactional work, takes us – as analysts, practitioners and second language learners – a step closer to resolving their mysteries.

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17. In this case, representing second tonal accents in both East Norwegian and West Norwegian with the superscript ² will blur the issue beyond recognition, so the use of IPA's symbol for high-low-high pitch contours, as in /m̃m̃/ (see Section 3.2), may yet have its day.

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Special transcription symbols

Mondada conventions for multi-modal transcription utilized in this article (cf. Mondada, 2014):

*	onset of participant action described in line below
*––>	action described continues across subsequent lines
*––>>	action described continues until and after extract's end
––>*	action described continues until the same symbol is reached

Other transcription symbols utilized in this article:

≈	aproximately equivalent idiomatic translation
²	Norwegian second tonal accent (see Section 3.2)

Norsk sammendrag

Denne artikkelen presenterer foreløpige funn fra den første systematiske utforskingen av /²mm/, en bilabial-nasal responspartikkel med østnorsk andre tonelag. Frekvensberegninger fra tre omfattende korpus fremhever /²mm/ som den mest frekvente bilabial-nasale responspartikkelen i norsk, med langt høyere tall enn énstavelses /m/ og tostavelses /mhm/ kjent fra generell (engelskbasert) litteratur. På tross av dette har /²mm/ stort sett forblitt under-utforsket, og skilles ofte ikke fra /m/ eller /mhm/ i verken transkripsjon eller analyse av interaksjonelt arbeid. Jeg vurderer her alternativer for å tydeligere representere dem, og gir en foreløpig analyse av en samling på 420 tilfeller i norsk, klynget rundt fortsetter-arbeid og enighet/anerkjennelse, hvor de ser ut til å gjøre subtilt ulike, men like fullt viktige, sosiale handlinger.

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