

# From Pronoun to Particle: Finnish *tuota* ‘that’ and *tuota* ‘well, erm’

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This article studies the continuum of referential, vaguely referential, and particle-like occurrences of the Finnish demonstrative pronoun *tuota* ‘that’. *Tuota* is peculiar among hesitator demonstratives, since it has pragmaticized to its partitive form *tuota* instead of its nominative form and it is not the same pronoun that is used in the function of a definite article (*se*). The article aims to shed light on the question of why this form in particular has pragmaticized to a hesitation particle. The results reveal that it is not only the partitive forms but also other case forms of the pronoun that may be used without a clear referent. The meaning features of the pronoun *tuota* imply that the referent is only just becoming the target of attention, and the partitive case is used with referents that are not fully individuated. When an abstract entity is referred to in partitive object role, the referentiality of a determiner or a placeholder may become unclear.

Keywords: *demonstrative pronoun, hesitation, discourse particle, pragmaticizing process, word search, Finnish*

## 1 Introduction

The sounds and words used to express hesitation and planning are part of a sporadic group that has been neglected in studies. Early studies on Finnish planning particles (Vuorinen 1981; Ravila 1945; Penttilä 1963) described them as semantically empty and without a syntactic function, often also stating that they should be avoided. However, in everyday conversation, planning particles are a very frequent phenomenon in all languages and they deserve to be thoroughly studied. In interactional linguistics, even the smallest parts of a language are considered to have an important function, even though their meaning may not be easy to describe.

This article focuses on the Finnish planning expression *tuota* ‘well, erm’, which originates from the demonstrative pronoun *tuota* ‘that’. The partitive form of the pronoun, *tuota*, is frequently used non-referentially; in the latest descriptive grammar (Hakulinen et al. 2004: § 861), it is listed among discourse particles. It also often forms particle chains with other particles—for example, the chain *tuota noin* ‘well, erm’—with the instructive form of the corresponding plural pronoun *nuo* ‘those’ (Etelämäki & Jaakola 2009: 191).

Earlier research on the particle *tuota* suggests that its functions include expressing hesitation, word search, the incompleteness of a turn, and self-repair (Penttilä 1963: 545; Lappalainen 2004: 128–131). The only thorough study focusing on the particle (Etelämäki & Jaakola 2009) reveals that *tuota* is not a means for the current speaker to reserve the turn for themselves but a genuine negotiation regarding who is going to speak next. They argue that the main semantic feature of *tuota* ‘well, erm’ is openness, which can be linked to both the meaning of the demonstrative pronoun *tuota* ‘that’ and to the meaning of the partitive case.

In this article, the focus is on borderline cases in which an occurrence of the words *tuota* or *tuota* can be interpreted as having either a function of a referential pronoun or a non-referential particle. By presenting a continuum from clearly referential use via vague referentiality to non-referential use, I show that the referentiality of almost any form based

on the demonstrative may not be very precise. I propose that the pragmaticizing of *tu* may be a part of a more general phenomenon in which Finnish pronouns tend to turn to particles, particularly in their partitive form, and begin occurring at the beginning of a speaking turn. In this article, I focus on syntactic and semantic analysis, touching only lightly upon the prosody of the expressions. My preliminary observation regarding the prosody of *tuota* is that there is no clear pattern which would enable a differentiation between its referential and non-referential occurrences, and the phenomenon requires a thorough study.

I also link the use of the Finnish demonstrative pronoun *tu* and the particle *tuota* ‘well, erm’ to earlier research on atypical uses of demonstrative pronouns in other languages. It is not a typologically uncommon phenomenon that a demonstrative pronoun is used as a filler word in spoken language when a speaker encounters trouble formulating his or her utterance. Demonstratives are shown to have this function in Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Lao, Romani, Russian, and Spanish (Hayashi & Yoon 2006). However, this function is often forgotten when demonstratives are discussed. Both Hayashi and Yoon (2006) and Etelämäki and Jaakola (2009) suggest that, even in highly pragmaticized functions, demonstratives continue to retain a certain degree of indexicality. Hayashi and Yoon (2006) also argue that the features that make demonstratives, among all linguistic devices, suitable for expressing hesitation are their pointing function and the aspects of participant access that they express. While the other two Finnish pronouns that, in partitive form, have a particle function (*sitä*, *bäntä*) have their own meanings linked to those of the corresponding pronouns, *tu* has suitable semantic features to be considered a hesitation particle.

The data of the study comes from Arkisyn, the morphosyntactically annotated corpus of everyday Finnish conversations. I examine conversations from the viewpoints of interactional linguistics and emergent grammar, following Ford’s (1993) thoughts that grammar emerges through interaction among participants who are constantly reusing and modifying prior utterances to achieve current interactive goals.

When referring to the reanalysis of the pronoun to a particle (e.g. in Section 2.2), I use the term *pragmaticization* instead of *grammaticalization* to express that the process does not involve the emergence of new grammatical markers (for discussion on these two terms, see e.g. Heine 2013: 1217–1120).<sup>1</sup> *Pragmaticization* (or *pragmaticalization*) has been defined as a process by which a unit changes its propositional meaning in favour of an essentially discourse interactional meaning (Frank-Job 2006: 397; Hayashi & Yoon 2006). While grammaticalization tends to lead to syntactic integration, pragmaticization involves, for example, increased syntactic freedom, semantic-pragmatic scope, and optionality (Heine 2013: 1218). These are central features of the Finnish particle *tuota* ‘well, erm’ also.

In the next section, I describe the Finnish demonstrative system, earlier research on the particle *tuota*, and the studies on demonstratives that are used to express hesitation in other languages. In Section 3, I present my data. Then, I introduce the use of *tu* and *tuota* as placeholder demonstratives and hesitation particles in the data (Section 4) before concentrating on the borderline cases with unclear referentiality (Section 5). In Section 6, I discuss the relation of *tuota* to other Finnish particles originating from partitive forms of demonstratives, and in Section 7, I conclude the findings and their implications.

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<sup>1</sup> Heine (2013) suggests the term *cooptation* to describe the process.

## 2 Background

The Finnish language has three demonstrative pronouns, *tämä* ‘this’, *tuo* ‘that’, and *se* ‘it; 3SG’. The same forms are used as determiners of a noun. All these pronouns also have plural variants (*nämä* ‘these’, *nuo* ‘those’, *ne* ‘they’) and they inflect in 12 cases.<sup>2</sup> The most frequent case forms of *tuo* in singular and plural and their standard forms and colloquial variants, which the examples of this article mostly represent, are presented in Table 1. Added to these forms, numerous kinds of demonstrative adverbs and proadjectives (pronominal forms used like adjectives) are derived from them.

	Singular	Plural
<b>Nominative</b>	<i>tuo (toi, tua)</i>	<i>nuo (noi)</i>
<b>Genitive</b>	<i>tuon (ton, tuan)</i>	<i>noiden, noitten</i>
<b>Partitive</b>	<i>tuota (tota, tuata)</i>	<i>noita</i>

Table 1: *The standard and colloquial forms of the Finnish pronoun tuo in the most frequent cases*

In 2.1, I present earlier studies on how the pronoun *tuo* differs in meaning and in use from the other two demonstrative pronouns. In 2.2, I discuss the earlier observations on the connection of the pronoun *tuo* and the particle *tuota* ‘well, erm’ that is pragmaticized from the partitive form of the pronoun. In 2.3, the last subsection, I present the continuum from placeholder demonstratives to fully pragmaticized hesitation particles—that is, the typological context where I place the Finnish *tuo* and *tuota* in this article.

### 2.1 *Tuo* ‘that’

*Tämä* ‘this’ is traditionally considered proximal to the speaker and *tuo* ‘that’ as distal or proximal to the hearer (Larjavaara 1990). A recent experimental study (Reile et al. 2019) reveals that with physical objects as referents, speakers refer to targets that are further away significantly more frequently with *tuo* compared to *tämä*. However, examining conversational data has shown that when there is no apparent spatial contrast, the frequency of usage of *tuo* compared to *tämä* is instead explained by cognitive, social, and affective factors (e.g. Östman 1995; Laury 1997). In contrast, *se* ‘it; 3SG’ is a neutral anaphoric pronoun. In informal speech, it is the most common way of referring to any kind of referent, even people, although standard Finnish has a separate third-person personal pronoun *hän* ‘he, she’. In numerous languages, pronouns characterize referents as, for example, animate or inanimate, male or female. However, the Finnish demonstrative pronouns only imply that the entity referred to is a thing or a person, rather than a quality, location, manner, or time. The latter may be referred to with proadjectives (e.g. *tuollainen* ‘that kind’) and pronoun-rooted adverbs (e.g. *tuolla* ‘over there’, *noin* ‘that way’, *tuolloin* ‘at that time’).

According to Etelämäki (2006, 2009), the main semantic features of *tuo* are referential openness and indexical unmarkedness. Referential openness implies that when *tuo* is used, the process of identifying the referent is still ongoing. The referent may, for example, become the target of attention the moment the reference is uttered, not before. This contrasts with another Finnish demonstrative pronoun, *se*, which implies that the referent

<sup>2</sup> Demonstrative pronouns are not used in the abessive or comitative cases.

is already known by all participants of the conversation. In contrast, indexical unmarkedness implies that the referent is equally (non)accessible for both the speaker and hearer (e.g. both having or not having a visual contact or memory recollection). This feature separates *tuo* from the third demonstrative pronoun, *tämä* ‘this’, which indicates that the speaker has the primary access (Etelämäki 2006, 2009).

*Tuo* points rather than presents—that is, the reference directs attention to the referent but the host utterance does not give it a new interpretation, as it does when *tämä* is used (Etelämäki 2009). In certain contexts, *tuo* also expresses a contrast or a figurative distance between its referent and another subject or the speaker (Laury 1997; Priiki 2015). Similarly to other Finnish demonstratives, it is occasionally used in the tail (or right-dislocation) construction, as in example (1) (Priiki 2020).<sup>3</sup> In the Finnish tail construction, the same referent is first referred to with a demonstrative pronoun and then a second time with a full noun phrase that usually has the same demonstrative as a determiner. In the example below, the first pronoun, the placeholder, is bolded and the full noun phrase, the tail, is underlined.

- (1) **Toi** *hoitaa* *sitä* *toi* *Martta* *nyt*. (Priiki 2020: 182)  
 that takes.care 3SG.PART that NAME now  
 ‘That (woman) takes care of her now, Martta.’

In the tail construction, *tuo* is used as a placeholder demonstrative, a function that I will discuss in Section 2.3, below. Apart from other functions (cf. Priiki 2020), a tail construction may be used to postpone the lexical reference in a situation in which the speaker has trouble finding the appropriate definition. In Finnish, any argument that may be the topic of the sentence—that is, not only a subject—can be the target of the double-reference in this kind of structure (Holmberg & Nikanne 2002: 71). Even though all three demonstratives occur in tail constructions, particularly the variant with the pronoun *tuo* is used in contexts with markers of word search and hesitation. I suggest that analysing this kind of use further may help to explain why a form of *tuo* has pragmaticized to a hesitation particle.

## 2.2 *Tuota* ‘well, erm’

In her sociolinguistic study, Lappalainen (2004: 118) notes that there are significant personal differences in the number of hesitation particles used in general, and people tend to prefer one or another variant. She speculates that hesitation particles in general—and particularly *tuota* ‘well, erm’—are currently spoken more frequently than they were a few decades ago (Lappalainen 2004: 113). However, this is difficult to prove due to the lack of comparable conversational data. In any case, the particle use of *tuota* is not a new phenomenon as such: linguists already made notes about it in the nineteenth century (Lönnebohm 1879; Setälä 1883; Latvala 1894). In dialect interview data recorded in the

<sup>3</sup> The glosses used in the examples: 2SG = second person singular, 3SG = third person singular, ADE = adessive, CLI = clitic, ELA = elative, GEN = genitive, ILL = illative, INE = inessive, MS = misspelled item, NEG = negation verb, PART = partitive, PCP = participle, PL = plural, PTC = particle, TRANSL = translative. In the transcripts, a question mark expresses rising intonation and a period indicates falling intonation at the end of an utterance. In the translations of the examples, the use of ending marks follows the norms of written language.

1960s, there are occurrences of the particle *tuota* in all regional dialects, with an emphasis on eastern dialects (Pihlaja 1971).

Lappalainen (2004: 128) also speculates that the context in which the pragmaticization of the partitive form of the demonstrative pronoun was initiated might be its use as a determiner of a noun (e.g. *tuota tyttö* ‘that girl’). I discuss this claim later in this article. A word pragmaticizing to a particle is described with reductions of phonology, morphology, and syntactic behaviour; in addition, a prototypical particle is non-compositional and short and has a non-restrictive and rather procedural meaning (Hakulinen & Seppänen 1992: 535–537; Heine 2013: 1209). Many of these criteria are listed as central features of particles in the latest comprehensive Finnish grammar (Hakulinen et al. 2004: § 794), which also mentions that particles cannot be targets for a question, negation, or focus, are never inflected, and cannot have or be determiners. The data used in this article includes numerous occurrences of *tuota* ‘well, erm’ that do not fulfil all these criteria. In principle, *tuota* is an inflected form and it may occur in such syntactic positions that it could be interpreted as a placeholder or a determiner of a noun, even though the exact referent may be unclear. In addition, the prosodic behaviour of *tuota* does not form a clear pattern. Even though many occurrences are either prosodically set off from the rest of the utterance, or they have reduced prosodic prominence or, for example, a lengthened final syllable, the data also includes non-referential occurrences with very clear stress (e.g. turn-initial *tota noin* chains). On the other hand, the prosody of clearly referential occurrences may resemble particles in word search contexts.

In her study, Lappalainen (2004: 114) has counted only unambiguous occurrences of the particle *tuota* ‘well, erm’. She observes that, in her data, interpretation as a particle is usually clear because the word occurs in a position where a pronoun would not be possible or the word does not inflect in case or number like a pronoun would. In (2a–c), I present simple examples of a clearly non-referential particle, a typical pronoun, and a vague case falling between both these categories, respectively.

- (2) a. *No saa=ks tuo-ta os-i-ks.* (D131)  
 well can-CLI that.PART part-PL-TRANSL  
 ‘Well can you put that one to parts?’
- b. *Se autto meit jossain noissa mm tota editoinne-i-s.*  
 3SG helped we.PART some.INE those.INE PTC ehm editing-PL-INE  
 ‘S/he helped us in some- those- ehm editings.’ (SG124)
- c. *Meiä tota katuu ei ollu aura-ttu vielä?* (SG151)  
 our that.PART/ehm street.PART NEG be.PCP clear-PCP yet  
 ‘Our- that/ehm street had not been cleared (of snow) yet.’

A clearly referential occurrence of the pronoun *tuo* in partitive is presented in (2a). The pronoun functions as the object of the clause and refers to a concrete object (a puzzle toy) that lies on the table in front of the participants. The speaker touches the object during his utterance, and pronoun *tuo* contrasts the referent with another similar object they discuss. In contrast, the second example (2b) presents a context where the interpretation of *tuota* as a particle is the only possible option. The word *tuota* occurs in the middle of a noun phrase, between a determiner demonstrative and a noun. The noun and its determiner are inflected in plural inessive—the singular partitive form *tuota* cannot refer to the same target. Actually, the determiner used here is the plural form of *tuo* and choosing it for the determiner is another way of expressing hesitation in (2b). There is also a hesitation in the sound (*mm*). In this example, the function of *tuota* is to delay the production of the word

*editoinneissa* ‘in editings’, which the speaker is searching for. The third example (2c) represents a case in between these two ends, the type that is the focus of this article. In (2c), the context of *tuota* resembles the one in (2b), but the word following it is inflected in the same case and number—singular partitive—and *tuota* can be interpreted as the determiner of the noun *katuu* ‘street’, produced as a self-repair to substitute the genitive determiner *meiä* ‘our’. However, the particle interpretation is supported by the fact that *tuota* is unstressed and uttered very fast; moreover, in the context of (2c), it appears to have a rather imprecise meaning that rather projects a story that is to begin rather than being a determiner for the noun ‘street’.

Etelämäki and Jaakola (2009) investigated the meaning of the particle from the viewpoint of cognitive linguistics. Their study, based on a relatively small data set, proposes a schematic meaning for the particle: they argue that *tuota* ‘well, erm’ expresses openness on various levels; in other words, the participants are negotiating something. This could be, for example, the form of a reference to a certain target or the entire speech act that is about to follow. Etelämäki and Jaakola (2009) do not comment on the development of the particle other than indicating the link among the meanings of the particle, the pronoun, and the partitive case. They ignore the possible nominative forms among the non-referential uses, do not discuss ambiguous cases, and only examine occurrences where *tuota* ‘well, erm’ is not accompanied by other particles.

The Finnish partitive ending *-(t)a/-(t)ä* used to be a separative case, indicating movement away from something. Since it lost its locative meaning, it transformed into a partitive. The Finnish partitive case has multiple uses; among other things, it expresses quantification and aspectual distinctions, particularly unboundedness (Huomo 2010; Larjavaara 2019). Huomo (2010: 95) mentions that the general function of the partitive is to indicate incompleteness. In contrast, according to Helasvuo (1996: 13), what connects the different uses of partitive in interaction is low transitivity, when transitivity is understood as a feature of the entire clause rather than an individual verb. In conversational data, partitive noun phrases (NPs) are often mass nouns or refer to inanimate targets. Thus, they are less individuated than are objects in the accusative or nominative cases. Referents that are introduced to a conversation with an NP in the partitive case are not usually mentioned again and they are not central to communication (Helasvuo 1996: 28–30).

*Tuo* is not the only Finnish pronoun that has pragmaticized to a particle in singular partitive form. The partitive form of another demonstrative *se* (*sitä*) is frequently used in particle function; moreover, the third person pronoun *hän* (*häntä*) has similar, even though less frequent, uses in spoken dialects. I discuss the relationship among these three particles and the partitive case in greater detail in Section 6.

### 2.3 Placeholder and hesitation demonstratives

In this subsection, I compare the Finnish *tuo* with demonstratives used to express hesitation in other languages. In the context of word-formulation difficulty, there are three distinct usage types of demonstratives, described by Hayashi and Yoon (2006): the placeholder use, the avoidance use, and the interjective hesitator use. The placeholder use and the interjective hesitator use are relevant where the Finnish pronoun *tuo* is concerned.

Placeholders are referential and participate in the syntactic structure of the utterance—that is, those forms of demonstrative pronouns are used that correspond syntactically and semantically to the word for which the pronoun is functioning as the placeholder. In contrast, a pronominal form used as an interjective hesitator is not

referential, has no role as a clausal constituent, and usually has little correspondence to the word a speaker is searching for. The function of a placeholder is to advance the progress of a syntactic structure that is being produced by filling a required slot. The lexical reference is then produced later, often as an independent nominal phrase, which connects the placeholder use to self-repairs and tail constructions. In contrast, an interjective hesitator merely delays the production of the remainder of the utterance, thereby signalling that the speaker aims to continue their turn.

Placeholder use may resemble the cataphoric use of demonstratives, where a pronoun refers forward to a lexical noun phrase that is about to follow. However, using placeholders is motivated by constraints in cognitive processes, such as difficulty in remembering a word when it requires articulation. Thus, the use of placeholders is different from the cataphoric uses of demonstratives in terms of motivation. In certain languages, separate pronouns are used in these functions: in Japanese and Korean, proximal forms are used in cataphora, distal, and medial forms as placeholders (Hayashi & Yoon 2006). If the same variants are used in both functions, like in Finnish, cataphoric references may result in similar structures as using placeholders: a first mention with a demonstrative pronoun is subsequently followed by a lexical noun phrase. The difference is that cataphoric references are planned structures. In Finnish, for example, tail constructions may be used to modify the word order and information structure of an utterance by presenting a long lexical phrase at the end of the utterance, where new information is usually presented (Priiki 2020). Of course, it is not possible to know the motivation for a certain linguistic structure for sure. However, if a first-mention demonstrative is accompanied by markers of hesitation, such as pauses and hesitation sounds, we may assume that its use is at least partially motivated by difficulties in lexical retrieval.

Whether proximal or distal demonstratives are used as placeholders varies in different languages. In Japanese, the forms used are the distal variants in the three-part distance-based system. In Korean, distal and medial forms may be used. In Mandarin and Indonesian, with two distance categories for demonstratives, both distal and proximal demonstratives are used as placeholders. Moreover, the kind of an entity a placeholder can project varies. In Indonesian, a placeholder demonstrative may substitute linguistic items on various levels: it may even be used instead of a verb root. Occasionally, placeholder demonstratives form fixed expressions with certain other words. For example, in Mandarin, the distal placeholder *na-ge* is often followed by the word *shenme* ‘what’ (Hayashi & Yoon 2006). Finnish *tuota* also, when used in hesitation and word search, often occurs together with certain adverbs and particles—for example, *tuota noin* ‘well erm’.

When interjective hesitators are pragmaticized for the function, they diverge from ordinary demonstratives for syntactic distribution, referentiality, and correspondence between morphology and semantics. In other words, they turn into discourse particles, which have more distributional freedom than the original demonstratives. Unlike referential placeholders, interjective hesitators can appear anywhere during an utterance-in-progress. For example, Japanese *ano* is an adnominal demonstrative and must be placed before a noun, but as a hesitator it can appear anywhere (Hayashi & Yoon 2006: 507). Similarly, Finnish *tuota*, a singular partitive form, may appear as an interjective hesitator in contexts where the word searched for is in plural form and inflects in some other case.

Interjective hesitators may acquire functions that pragmaticize further from their use in word searches. In Japanese and Korean, hesitator demonstratives often preface the introduction of a new topic or an initial action, like a proposition (Hayashi & Yoon 2006: 528). In Russian, too, the compound hesitator *eto samoe* ‘this very’ is often used at the beginning of a turn (Podlesskaya 2010: 20). In this kind of context, the function of

interjective hesitators is to draw the hearer's attention to the next action and to give a hint of how to interpret the utterance. Moreover, Finnish *tuota* is said to have other functions than merely word search. According to Etelämäki and Jaakola (2009), when it occurs at the end of a turn or forms a whole turn alone, it indicates that the next action is not yet decided.

Both Hayashi and Yoon (2006) and Etelämäki and Jaakola (2009) suggest that, even in these highly pragmaticized functions, the interjective hesitator demonstratives retain a certain degree of indexicality. Hayashi and Yoon (2006) also argue that the features that make demonstratives—among all linguistic devices—suitable for expressing hesitation, are their pointing function and the aspects of participant access that they express. For example, in Korean, different demonstratives used in word searches invite a different kind of participation: forms that propose shared access to the referent, invite emphatic reactions, or collaborative word search. In turn, when speaker-centred forms are used, the recipient is passive (Hayashi & Yoon 2006: 516–517). As mentioned above, the Finnish pronoun *tuo* implies that the referent is not currently the centre of attention but is accessible independently by all participants, not just the speaker.

It is evident from a variety of languages that the same forms are often used as hesitation particles and definite articles, thereby invoking the sense of 'you know what I'm talking about'. This is the case in Estonian, a language closely related to Finnish, where the pronoun *see* may express word search (Keevalik 2010). However, in Finnish, the definite article, used only in colloquial language, is the anaphoric demonstrative *se* (Laury 1997). *Tämä* 'this' and *se* 'it; 3SG' may also occasionally occur as placeholders in word searches, but only *tuo* 'that' has extensive, conventionalized, and pragmaticized use as a hesitator demonstrative. Further, in Swedish spoken in Finland, both *dedär* 'that' and *debär* 'this' have conventionalised to word searches (Wide 2011). Their pragmaticization is said to have Finnish influence, even though in Finnish, only *tuo*, which corresponds to *dedär* (and not to *debär* that translated as *tämä*), is frequently used in word searches.

In Finnish, the partitive form, in particular, has pragmaticized to a hesitator. This is noteworthy because usually the default form that projects a referent in some other number and case is the singular nominative form. For example, in Russian, the default hesitator demonstrative is *eto*, which is a nominative singular neuter form (Podlesskaya 2010). However, Podlesskaya (2010) notes that other demonstrative forms are used as placeholders when they correspond to the word searched. She also provides an example where a placeholder is in accusative without a corresponding referent, thereby interpreting this to be due to an elliptic verb (*ibid.*: 21); moreover, she provides an example from nineteenth century Russian, in which it was possible to use a genitive form of a distal demonstrative (*togo*) as this kind of hesitator demonstrative (*ibid.*: 19). In Section 5.2, I reflect on the possibility of elliptic structures also being responsible for the partitive form of the Finnish *tuota*.

### 3 *Tuo* and *tuota* in the data

The data for the study is the morphosyntactically annotated corpus of conversational Finnish, Arkisyn. It comprises approximately 40 hours of naturally occurring video- or audio-recorded and transcribed conversations. In the corpus, there are 4,066 occurrences of the pronoun *tuo* or the particle *tuota* 'well, erm'. Of these, 907 are different variants of the nominative form (*tuo*, *toi*, *tua*), while 1,646 are variants of the partitive form (*tuota*, *tota*, *tuata*). The remainder are forms inflected in other cases. Further, 2,553 of the occurrences



are coded (by the coders of the corpus) as different forms of the demonstrative pronoun, while 1,513 are interpreted as particles.

However, with regard to *tuo* and *tuota*, the coding of the corpus is unstable, which reflects the fact that, in this case, the line between a pronoun and a particle is not straightforward. The fact that only the partitive form is listed in grammar as a particle has affected the coding, thereby causing the coders to likely interpret the partitive forms as particles and other forms as pronouns; however, this solution is not entirely systematic. In this article, I do not suggest that the nominative form or any other case forms apart from the partitive must be considered to belong to the class of particles. Instead, my aim is to show that the other forms can be used non-referentially in the particle function, as in the next example. In (3), three girls are doing their homework together. One of them repeats the nominative form *toi* multiple times. During her turn in (3), the speaker is fidgeting around, not able to concentrate, and the words she produces are mostly nonsense. Apparently, she is looking for some new topic for conversation. The context, or checking the video recording, does not provide any clues for a possible referent.

- (3) SG120<sup>4</sup>
- |    |               |                          |             |              |              |            |              |            |             |
|----|---------------|--------------------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|------------|--------------|------------|-------------|
| 01 | <i>Hmm::?</i> | <i>(minä olen niin)?</i> | <i>hm::</i> | <i>hm::;</i> | <i>(0.5)</i> | <i>°no</i> | <i>voih,</i> | <i>°</i>   | <i>(.)</i>  |
|    | PTC           | I                        | am          | so           | PTC          | PTC        | well         | oh         |             |
| 02 | <i>.hh</i>    | <i>toi</i>               | <i>toi</i>  | <i>toi</i>   | <i>toi,</i>  | <i>(.)</i> | <i>°(pum</i> | <i>pum</i> | <i>pum)</i> |
|    | BREATH        | that                     | that        | that         | that         |            | boom         | boom       | boom        |

Moreover, the *toi* forms here do not belong to any syntactic structure; they cannot be interpreted in as straightforward a manner as placeholder demonstratives. At the most, they could be holding place for some abstract topic of conversation that the speaker is searching for. Thus, their function is that of hesitation particles, even though the form is nominative.

The number of pronominal occurrences of *tuo* (only singular pronouns) in different case forms is presented in Table 2. Because demonstrative adverbs behave differently from demonstrative pronouns—for example, their inflection paradigm and the ability to function as determiners are limited—the numbers are separated from pronominal occurrences. There are 2,067 pronominal occurrences and, of these, 666 function as determiners of nouns. The nominative and partitive cases are a target of interest and together with the genitive case, they are the most frequent cases. The other cases are grouped together in Table 2.

The number of case forms rests on the annotation of the corpus, and the coding may contain other errors in addition to the ones reported above. While I have corrected mistakes when encountering them in data searches, I have not checked each of the occurrences personally. However, I believe the coding is sufficiently accurate to provide an overview of the distribution of different forms in the data. In Table 2, it is evident that the partitive case is not a very common case for the demonstrative pronoun *tuo*: it only constitutes 6% of the occurrences. For nouns in Arkisyn, the share of the nominative case is 37%, partitive case 20%, and genitive case 11%. However, among *tuo* determiners, the share of the partitive case is closer to the nouns (11%). In Finnish, the determiners always

<sup>4</sup> The transcription symbols used in the following examples are: lengthening of a sound; ? rising intonation; . falling intonation; , levelled intonation; (.) a short pause, .hh inhale, (1.5) a pause longer than 0.5 seconds (length mentioned); ° whispered part; # creaky voice; £ smiling voice; @ altered voice; ↑ high pitch; ↓ low pitch; [ overlap; >< fast tempo; <> slow tempo.

inflect in the same case as the main word. In Section 5.2, I reflect upon whether the use of the determiner is a possible context for the pragmaticizing development of *tuota*, as Lappalainen (2004: 128) speculated.

Case	All occurrences	Pronominal occurrences	Adverbs	Determiners	Independent pronoun phrases
<b>Nominative</b> ( <i>tu</i> )	1,060 (42%)	1,060 (51%)	0	342 (51%)	718 (51%)
<b>Genitive</b> ( <i>tuon</i> )	165 (6%)	165 (8%)	0	76 (11%)	89 (6%)
<b>Partitive</b> ( <i>tuota</i> )	146 (6%)	146 (7%)	0	73 (11%)	73 (5%)
<b>Other cases</b>	1,182 (46%)	696 (34%)	486	175 (26%)	521 (37%)
<b>All</b>	2,553	2,067	486	666	1,401

Table 2. *The pronoun tuo in singular in different cases in Arkisyn*

The tendency in the coding of the corpus appears to be that vague cases are interpreted as pronouns rather than particles, not the other way around. In this article, these vague cases are the target of interest. From the automatic search results<sup>5</sup> of both lemmas, *tuo* ‘that’ and *tuota* ‘well, erm’, I have collected all such occurrences where the interpretation of the referentiality of the word is not clear by judging the transcribed context that is visible in the search results and listening the recording of the collected utterances. My collection includes 318 examples, which means that approximately 8% of the occurrences of *tuo* and *tuota* may be ambiguously referential. However, the interpretation of the referentiality is subjective at least to a certain extent and, added to this, the number of vague cases has significant variation among different recordings that could be related to topics that are discussed as well as to personal strategies of expressing hesitation. Providing reliable quantitative observations of the phenomenon would require a more extensive study. Thereafter, I have inspected the broader context and the original video recordings of examples that represent the types recurring in the data.

#### 4 *Tuo* and *tuota* as placeholders and hesitators

In this section, I describe how the Finnish demonstrative pronoun *tuo* is used in the data as a placeholder and hesitator demonstrative—that is, the functions presented above. The examples below represent typical cases documented in earlier studies: (4) and (5) are cases where *tuo* functions as a demonstrative pronoun but expresses difficulties in retrieving a lexical reference (see Priiki 2015, 2020), while (6) represents the partitive form *tuota* as a fully pragmatized particle that has lost inflection and referentiality (see Etelämäki & Jaakola 2009). The vague cases, where the division into referential placeholder function and non-referential hesitator function is not clear, are discussed in Section 5.

<sup>5</sup> Command [(lemma = “tuota”) | (lemma = “tuo”)] in Korp search interface.

The demonstrative pronoun *tuo* may be used as a placeholder in, for example, the tail construction, presented above in (1). Other demonstrative pronouns are also possible and frequent in tail construction placeholders; however, in the Arkisyn corpus, among tail constructions with *tuo*, in particular, there are occurrences where a speaker has trouble identifying the appropriate lexical definition and, occasionally, the lexical description of the referent stays missing. Priiki (2020) focuses on cases where a tail construction with a *tuo* placeholder is used as a means of modifying the word order and information structure. This article continues the study by focusing on such occurrences where hesitation and processing trouble appear to be a plausible explanation for choosing a *tuo* placeholder. The majority of the *tuo* placeholder demonstratives in the Arkisyn data are in the nominative case, but other case forms also occur.

In (4), two women, Iina and Ritva, are discussing a new curtain fabric Iina has bought. At the beginning of the excerpt, Ritva refers to the fabric with the pronouns *se* ‘it; 3SG’ and *tuo* ‘that’. *Tonne välii* ‘into there between’ refers to a ventilation gap.

- (4) SG446
- 01 Ritva: *Ni et se on sen verran pidempi*  
so that 3SG is it.GEN much longer  
(1.3)
- 02 *että se ei jää tonne #välii sitte toi#*,  
that it NEG stay over.there between then that  
‘So that it (the fabric) is that much longer so it won’t go there in  
between, that,’
- 03 Iina: *Joo. (.).Hbb (1.7)no mut toi=han on tosi syväällä toi (.)*  
yeah BREATH well but that=CLI is really deep.ADE that
- 04 *siis toi t- ikkuna et*  
I.mean that window that  
(shows a measure with hands)
- 05 *ei=hän se tuu sinne se verho.*  
NEG=CLI 3SG come there the curtain  
‘Well but that is so deep that, I mean that t- window so it won’t go  
there, the curtain.’

When Iina utters *toihan*, which is the nominative form with a clitic particle *-han*, referring to the window, a pronoun reference alone is difficult to interpret because there are several possible referents (the window, the fabric, the ventilation gap). Iina adds another *toi* and after a slight pause yet another; then, she begins a word with a *t*-sound. However, the noun she finally produces, *ikkuna* ‘window’, does not begin with a *t*-sound. The formulation trouble here is probably caused by difficulty in briefly describing a situation where, due to, for example, a thick wall a curtain hangs rather far from a window. ‘Deep’ is not an adjective that is usually used to describe windows. Iina uses placeholders to acquire more time to decide which word to use and to signal to Ritva that the choice of description may be somehow problematic.

Based on the video recording, both Iina and Ritva appear to be situated rather far from the window and even though Ritva makes a few gestures towards the window during the utterances of lines 1 and 2, these references are not accompanied by exact pointing. In turn, Iina is holding the fabric in one hand during her utterance; producing the first *toi*, she looks at the window and while uttering the latter part of her turn (from *toi t- ikkuna* onwards), she gestures and returns her gaze towards Ritva.

In (5), a speaker is in conversation with a friend on the telephone, discussing a student party she has attended. She appears to have trouble choosing how to explain the location of the party to the friend, who does not know the city where the speaker lives. She first uses *tossa* ‘over there’, an inessive form of *tuota*, and then replaces it with the name of the place, which has a demonstrative proadjective as a determiner (*semmosessa* ‘in [something] like it’). After this, she uses another demonstrative proadjective (*sella[se]ssa* ‘in [something] like it’) and two more inessive forms of *tuota* (*tossa*, *tos* ‘there’ or ‘in that’), the latter of which is the determiner of the noun *keskusta* ‘centre’.

## (5) SG113

- 01 *Et ne oli **tossa** semmosessa Driimissä sellassa, (.) pupissa*  
 so they were that.INE sort.of.INE NAME.INE like.it.INE pub.INE
- 02 *(.) **tossa** mbh **tota** noin **tos** keskustassa ja (.) .h*  
 that.INE PTC that.PART PTC that.INE centre.INE and BREATH
- 03 *me oltii sitten sillä Ullalla aluks ja hb me mentii*  
 we were then the.ADE NAME.ADE first and BREATH we went
- 04 *sitt↑es sii↓tä siibe pupij - -*  
 then from.there the.ILL pub.ILL  
 ‘So the party was [lit. ‘they were’<sup>6</sup>] in a kind of a pub, Driimi, over there, well, there in the centre, and first we were at Ulla’s place and from there we went to the pub - -’

Among the referential forms in (5), there also occurs the non-referential partitive form *tuota*, which is accompanied by another particle, *noin*. While the inessive forms convey a location (perhaps a pub or a district), the particle chain *tuota noin* only indicates that the utterance is going to continue. Typically, the particle *tuota* occurs in the middle or at the beginning of a turn and it is more often accompanied by other particles than alone (Etelämäki and Jaakola 2009: 191–193).

Example (5) includes numerous different markers of hesitation, vagueness, and processing trouble. The demonstrative proadjectives emphasize the type and features of the referent instead of precise identification and they occur in word searches (Hakulinen et al. 2004: § 1411). There are several short pauses and both referential and non-referential occurrences of the pronoun *tuota*. The next excerpt (6) provides another example of the use of the partitive form *tuota* as a hesitation particle. The element postponed may also be a whole turn or action, as in (6). The excerpt is from a telephone conversation, where two friends have just decided the time they will meet on the next day. There are two occurrences of *tuota* in (6), one produced by each speaker. Both of them are accompanied by hesitation sounds and the first one is accompanied by another particle *noin*. The latter occurrence is at the beginning of the turn, which is a typical place for a *tuota* particle.

## (6) SG111

- 01 P: *Läben kolmen junalla et se on puol viis siel [lä.*  
 ‘I will leave on three o’clock train it will be there at half-past four.’
- 02 E: *[Joo.*  
 ‘Yep.’

<sup>6</sup> In Finnish, words expressing numerous kinds of events, including parties—for example, *juhlat*, *bileet*—occur in plural even though they refer to a singular event (Hakulinen et al. 2004: § 558).

- 03 P: *.Hbb (.) jep. Hb tota noi. Tmbb no.*  
 BREATH PTC BREATH that.PART PTC PTC well  
 ‘Okay, erm well.’
- 04 P: *.Mt/bb*  
 PTC
- 05 E: *[/Mtgbh tota mtb (.) soitat=ko sit huomenna.*  
 PTC that.PART PTC call.2SG=CLI then tomorrow  
 ‘Will you then call tomorrow?’

Etelämäki and Jaakola (2009) suggest that the particle *tuota* occurs in contexts where it is undecided how the conversation is going to proceed and that the place of the particle affects what is interpreted as ‘open’. In word searches, *tuota* precedes a certain phrase or constituent which is being searched for or formulated. At the beginning of a turn, *tuota* may project certain new activity: in (6), the speakers negotiate whether the call is already about to end and if they still have something to discuss.

In this section, I have compared the referential placeholder use and the particle use of *tuota* and its partitive form. Examples from the Arkisyn corpus presented here confirm the earlier observations made by Etelämäki and Jaakola (2009). These provide a starting point for the examination of such occurrences in the next section, where an ambiguous interpretation of either the function of a referential pronoun or that of a non-referential particle is possible.

## 5 Ambiguous uses

The focus of this article is on ambiguously referential or non-referential uses of the pronoun *tuota*. In this section, I highlight several phenomena that recur in the data often enough to attract attention. Analysing the ambiguous occurrences reveals that referential vagueness may be approached from at least two perspectives. First, there are occurrences where the word appears to project an entity like a placeholder does, but the target of the reference in the context is somehow fuzzy and ambiguous. I examine these kinds of occurrences of different forms of the demonstrative pronoun *tuota* in Section 5.1 in order to answer the question of what makes this pronoun in particular likely to express hesitation.

On the other hand, there are cases where it is unclear whether the function of a word is a pronoun or a particle because it occurs in a syntactic position that is possible to interpret as part of a structure—a determiner of a noun, an object, or a subject. However, certain other features, like pauses, create an impression of non-referentiality. I examine these phenomena in Section 5.2.

### 5.1 A specific but non-salient referent

In Section 4, I showed how the forms of the Finnish demonstrative pronoun *tuota* may be used in the functions of a referential placeholder and of a non-referential hesitation particle. By using *tuota*, a speaker also implies that the referent is not salient in the ongoing action, for example, storytelling. If the time gained with the placeholder is not sufficient for accessing the lexical phrase, the referent may be left non-explicated without problems in interaction. However, *tuota* also implies that the referent is accessible if necessary and, occasionally, another participant in the conversation wishes to clarify the reference.

In the data, almost any form of the pronoun *tuo* may be used with a non-explicated referent, as (7) shows. The example is from a telephone conversation between a mother and daughter, who are talking about an eye problem the daughter's dog is having. In Irja's turn, there are three different forms of *tuo*—a singular elative form (*tosta* 'from that'), a plural adessive form (*noil* 'on those'), and a demonstrative-rooted locative adverb (*tuol* 'over there'). The reference is not explicated and possibly unclear in all three forms, but this causes no problems for the co-participant in the conversation.

- (7) SG124  
 01 Irja: >Mä< *katon* ***tosta*** *kun* *mul=han* (.) ***noil=ha*** (0.7)  
 I look.1SG that.ELA because I.ADE=CLI those.ADE=CLI  
 02 *oli* ***tuo(l)*** *se* *Koira-n* *ensi-ap#u:#* *se* *Pelle Nab-*  
 was over.there the dog-GEN first-aid the NAME  
 03 *Pelle* *Akselsson-in*.  
 NAME NAME-GEN  
 'I will check that (one), because I- they had over there the First-aid for  
 Dogs, that (one) from Pelle Akselsson's.'  
 04 Heta: *Niib*.  
 'Yeah.'  
 05 Irja: *Niist luennoista. Mä katon nyt vielä sitten mitä vois silmissä olla muuta.*  
 'Those lectures. I will now check what else could be in eyes.'

In (7), the first non-explicated referent is a book, a leaflet, or maybe just a pile of lecture notes from a course. The reason for the unclear reference may be that the speaker cannot decide which description to choose. Thus, the use described here is similar to the use of the pronoun in word searches as a placeholder demonstrative (cf. ex. (1)). The same entity is subsequently referred to with the term *Koiran ensiapu* 'First-aid for dogs', marked known to the hearer with the article-like demonstrative determiner *se* (regarding the definite article in Finnish, see Laury 1997). Moreover, the past tense in the clause ('I-they had') implies that the hearer must remember an earlier mention of the subject. Heta's response (line 3) signals that she understands the references and agrees with Irja's plan.

The second *tuo*-form, the plural adessive form *noil* 'on those', refers to people, because it is produced as a self-repair in which the self-reference (*mul* 'on me') is substituted with it. The third form, the locative adverb *tuol* 'over there', refers to a place other than the speaker's location. The relevant portion of the utterance is to relate that the 'First-aid for dogs' is not in the speaker's possession, but that she can check for it later. The questions who has it, where it is, and whether it should be described as a book or a leaflet are not salient, particularly because the recipient can access the information herself by recollecting an earlier discussion. This follows the Gricean principles that a speaker must give only as much information as needed and no more and only say things that are relevant to the conversation.

How does this kind of vague use of *tuo* compare to other means of expressing vague, unclear, or indefinite referents in Finnish? The indefinite pronouns *joku* 'somebody' and *jokin* 'something' imply that the referent is unknown, not only to the hearer but also to the speaker. These pronouns are also occasionally used to express indifference. In addition to these indefinite pronouns, Finnish has four pronouns that are described as specific indefinite. They are used when the speaker can identify a specific referent but presents it as unknown to the hearer, thereby implying that the hearer has no access to the referent. These pronouns are *eräs* and *muuan*, which imply 'certain', *yksi* 'one', and *tietty* 'known'. *Eräs*

and *muuan* are rather formal in style. Occasionally, *yksi* ‘one’ is also used like an indefinite article in spoken language.

The demonstrative pronoun *tuo* differs from the above pronouns in terms of the kind of participant access it implies. As mentioned above, in (7), the speaker presents the non-salient referents, thereby implying that the recipient may access them independently. *Tuo*, which implies shared (un)accessibility, also aligns with Etelämäki’s (2006) account of the semantic features of Finnish demonstrative pronouns.

References with *tuo* forms to non-explicated targets include a significant number of adverbial forms referring to ‘somewhere over there’, as in (7), which have an adessive case ending (*tuolla*, *tuol*, *tual* ‘over there’<sup>7</sup>). Adverbial forms with the inessive case ending (*tuossa*, *tossa*, *tos*) are used vaguely to refer to a time, usually meaning something like ‘some time ago’, as in (8).

In (7), the locative adverb rooted to *tuo* expresses non-salience and vagueness. Similar uses of the adverbs expressing a time are also found in the data. In (8), sisters Tuula and Jaana are discussing getting old. Tuula mentions that their mother had jokingly reminded her that Tuula will be celebrating her fiftieth birthday next year. *Tossa* ‘over there’, in my interpretation, refers to a time when the reported conversation took place and translates as ‘that time’ or ‘recently’. In the data, this kind of *tossa* reference may be accompanied by some other expression of a time—for example, *tossa viimeviikolla* (‘last week’).

- (8) SG438  
 01 Tuula: *Et se oli äiki äiti naureskele mulle tossa että,*  
 that 3SG was MS mother laughed I.ABL over.there that  
 ‘So it was mother laughing at me recently that’  
 02 *.mth @kukas se täyttää ↑viiskymmentä ↑ens vuonna?@ >°Mä et°<*  
 03 *↑jo↓o? (.) todellaki mi↓nä nyt täytän viiskymmentä ens vuonna?*  
 ‘who is going to turn 50 next year? I was like “now already?  
 ‘Really I’m turning 50 next year?’”

Examples (7) and (8) have presented occurrences of *tuo* pronouns inflected in locative cases and used as adverbials. In contrast, the next example (9) demonstrates a nominative form in subject position. Repeating *tuo* expresses a difficulty in accessing the correct lexical term for the referent. In subject position, referents tend to be salient and usually obtain a lexical definition after word search, as in (9). In the example, the speakers are teenage girls who are doing their mathematics homework together.

- (9) SG120  
 01 Milja: *Ku mie ↑en osaa näit yh:tää.*  
 ‘Cause I can’t do these at all.’  
 02 Oona: **Tota**; *[Milja, toi on, (.)toi toi, (.)toi o’*  
 well NAME that is that that that is  
 ‘Well, Milja, that is’  
 03 Milja: *[Mhy?*  
 PTC

<sup>7</sup> Numerous locative adverbial forms are identical with the inflected forms of the pronoun *tuo*, but some forms are separate: for example, *tuolla* means both ‘on that’ and ‘over there’, but the colloquial *tol* means only ‘on that’.

- 04 Oona: *balkasija.b.*  
           ‘a diameter.’  
 05 Milja: *>Ai nii<?*  
           ‘Oh yes.’

The first partitive form of *tuota* in line 2 functions to draw the other participant’s attention to the speaker’s utterance. Milja’s response is produced simultaneously with Oona saying her name. Then, Oona points out a part that Milja has misunderstood but by repeating the demonstrative pronoun in nominative; she expresses trouble in finding the word ‘diameter’. Nominative subjects may be left unclear in a way that resembles the inflected *tuota*-forms in examples (7) and (8). For instance, this may happen in contexts where a non-explicated reference targets someone who is the original witness of an event that a speaker is reporting (see Priiki 2020: 195; see also example (10) further down in this article). Another context in which unclear referents occur is an abstract situation as the target of the reference. I examine occurrences of *tuota* in these contexts in the next section, as, in these contexts, the focus is on the ambiguity regarding whether or not the pronoun form is referential.

In this section, I have attempted to shed light on the question of why *tuota* ‘that’ is selected to pragmaticize to a hesitation particle. I have suggested that this can be explained partially by the type of participant access it implicates. As Etelämäki (2006, 2009) has shown, references with *tuota* indicate that the referent is equally accessible or non-accessible to the speaker and the recipient. Another feature is that *tuota* refers to targets that are unimportant and, thus, a vague reference is sufficient for the conversation.

## 5.2 Questionable referentiality

The occurrences of the pronoun *tuota* discussed in the previous section were all syntactic constituents or determiners, even though the target of their reference was unclear. In this section, I examine cases that are more advanced in their process of pragmaticizing to a particle. This implies that it is difficult to tell whether they are referential or whether their function is merely to delay completing the utterance or to fill a syntactic slot that needs to be occupied in a certain structure. In the previous section, I have shed light on the question of why *tuota* in particular is chosen to pragmaticize to a hesitation particle. In this section, I reflect on the possible contexts where the pragmaticization may have taken place. I suggest that the line between placeholder function in, for example, a tail construction and non-referential filler function is a fuzzy one and that this could be one factor in explaining how *tuota* acquired the hesitator function.

In Section 3, I noted that the partitive form *tuota* is more common as a determiner of a noun phrase than in other positions. Lappalainen (2010: 128) suggested that the determiner position would be the function where the pronoun has turned to a particle, and the difference in frequency may give the same impression. In Arkisyn data, *tuota* determiners are used in various cases to express word search and hesitation, as presented above in examples (2b–c), (4), and (5). When *tuota* is inflected in other cases than partitive, it is more easily interpreted as referential. However, as already shown in example (3), non-referential nominative forms are also frequent in the data. In both nominative and partitive forms, there is a significant number of such cases where the interpretation of words *tuota* or *tuota* as a determiner of a noun may be questioned, as in the next example (10).



- (10) SG438  
 01 -- *et ainoo mikä sitä nyt, (.) nytte=kää kiinnostaa ni on*  
 02 *se justii että: et se vaan tatu#oi itteensä#.*  
 ‘- that the only (thing) that interests her now is to get herself tattooed.’  
 03 (0.2) **Toi**, (.) äiti sano justii että, .hhhh  
 that/well mother said just that BREATH  
 04 *et ei=ks se, (.) ↑satu jo hirveesti tommone - -*  
 that NEG=CLI 3SG hurt only horribly that.kind  
 ‘Well, mother just said that, ehm, won’t it hurt a lot, that kind of (stuff) - -’

In (10), the speaker is wondering about her daughter’s eagerness to get tattoos. She refers to her mother and quotes her words to support her attitude. The nominative form of *tu* precedes the word ‘mother’, which is also in the singular nominative form. Without a slight pause between the words, it would more straightforwardly be interpreted as a determiner. A *tu* determiner in this kind of context would be natural in spoken Finnish: it would signal that the referent, the mother of the speaker, has not been discussed before this and will not become a salient topic. It is the quote that is central for the flow of the conversation, not the person who is quoted. However, the pause makes it possible to interpret the *tu* word as a non-referential particle, only expressing that the speaker is processing how to continue. The word ‘mother’ without any determiners would also be a natural option.

In this article, I have shown that not only the partitive form of the demonstrative pronoun *tu* but also the nominative form are used in particle function. However, non-referential partitive forms are more frequent in conversational data. The partitive form is a frequent object case in Finnish. Referents presented as objects of a clause are often new information and, thus, more difficult to access. In the next example (11), there appear two partitive occurrences of *tuota*. Whether or not they are referential is questionable. The speakers, Missu and Vikke, are discussing what to buy for a present for a friend.

- (11) SG112  
 01 Missu: **Mitä** siltä puuttuu.  
 what.PART 3SG.ELA lack  
 ‘What would she need?’ (lit. ‘What does she lack?’)  
 02 Vikke: **Tota**, (no) *ku se Hanne=ki on vähän osta-nu*  
 that.PART well because the NAME=CLI is a.little buy-PCP  
 03 *semmos-ta su- tota, semmos-ta lehmä-sarja-a?*  
 such-PART that.PART such-PART cow-series-PART  
 ‘Well, Hanne, too, has bought her some (parts of) that, a kind of cow(-themed) set (of dishes).’

In (11), the partitive form *tuota* occurs at the beginning of an utterance. The turn is an answer to a question, ‘what would she need?’ in line 1, where the question word *mitä* ‘what’ is also in partitive form. *Tuota* projects an answer to this question. The partitive question word in the preceding question makes it possible to interpret *tuota* as referential, which would be the case if Vikke began her answer with a lexical description (e.g. *tota semmossa lehmäsarjaa*). As a particle, *tuota* can project an answer to any kind of a question, and, as Etelämäki and Jaakola (2009) describe, it precedes a phrase that is still being formulated. Vikke does not answer the question directly but begins to explain what another friend has bought. The partitive *tuota* holds a place for the answer and creates an

anticipation of Vikke telling what the friend lacks. The partitive form is repeated in line 3, preceding the lexical description of the present Vikke is suggesting. The noun phrase is preceded by multiple self-repairs, where the partitive forms of a demonstrative adjective *semmosta* and *tuota* alternate. Before choosing the word *lehmäsarjaa* ‘cow(-themed) set’, the speaker attempts another noun phrase (*su-*). Self-repairs are another typical context where *tuota* particles are used (Lappalainen 2004: 128–131). In this context, *tuota* could project just the repair that is coming or it could be produced as a determiner, which is subsequently replaced by the demonstrative adjective.

In the data examined in this article, there are several occurrences of *tuota* at the beginning of an utterance where it may be possible to interpret it as a placeholder for the object of the thought or statement. The objects for such verbs are often abstract entities that are difficult to define with simple noun phrases. The referential relationship may appear unclear when the word projects a certain abstract line of thought. This kind of use may relate to Podlesskaya’s (2010: 21) note that, occasionally, a non-default form of a hesitator demonstrative may create an impression of a certain elliptic verb in a structure that resembles the English placeholder *whatthamacallit* but without an explicit ‘call’ verb; the placeholder form is the object for the verb ‘call’.

In (12), the speakers are discussing the timetable of a participant’s planned graduation. In line 5, Iiro changes the topic a little, asking about the length of this participant’s thesis. The word *tota* occurs at the beginning of his turn to speak.

## (12) SG441

01 Mari: *.Hhy mutta siis jouluna kakstuhattaneljätoista.*

‘But Christmas 2014.’

02 Jussi: *Teoriassa, teoriassa.*

‘In theory, in theory.’

03 Elli: *↑Mm, (tai) keväällä kakstuhattaviistoist silloha*

04 *[se ois jo kuus vuotta (--), ]*

‘Or spring 2015 then it would be six years already - -’

05 Iiro: *[Tota: (märupesi miettiin et] pitää=k se su diplomityän*  
that.PART I started thinking that should=CLI the your thesis

*olla joku kuuskyt sivuu jottain shaiba-a?*

be some sixty page.PART some.PART rubbish-PART

‘This/well I started wondering that should your thesis be like sixty pages of some rubbish?’

At first glance, the word order does not support the thought that the *tuota* in (12) would be a placeholder for the object. Objects are usually located after the finite verb; the neutral order would be *mä rupesi miettiin tota* ‘I started thinking that [thing]’. Despite the unusual word order, interpreting a pronoun-originating placeholder as an expletive object is not a unique idea. Already Rapola (1954) indicated that the particles *sitä* and *tuota* give the impression that they could be expletive objects—or placeholders for a description that is difficult to formulate.

As already mentioned, Finnish has two other particles that originate from partitive forms of demonstrative pronouns, *sitä* and *häntä*. Their pragmaticization process resembles that of *tuota*, since they lost the connection to the number and the case of the possible referent. The place where they occur in the sentence has some similarity to *tuota*, as well, even though *tuota* has more freedom. The pragmaticizing of the pronoun *tuo* may be a part

of a more general tendency of Finnish pronouns—particularly their partitive forms—to turn to discourse particles. I discuss this possibility in the next section.

## 6 Partitive forms *tuota*, *sitä*, and *häntä* in particle function

The particle *sitä* is originally the partitive singular form of the demonstrative pronoun *se* ‘it; 3SG’. As with *tuota*, *sitä* has lost its referentiality and its meaning is difficult to describe. In the Arkisyn corpus, *sitä* forms are systematically coded to demonstrative pronouns instead of particles, even though Finnish grammar (Hakulinen et al. 2004: § 827) mentions *sitä* as a particle. Although Hakulinen (1975: 26) mentions *sitä* as a spoken language feature, in Arkisyn, *sitä* forms are generally less frequent than *tuota* forms and fully pragmatized occurrences are rare. In spoken dialects, yet another pronoun, the personal pronoun *hän* ‘he, she’ is used as a particle (Laitinen 2005, Soikkeli 2013). In Arkisyn, no occurrences of *hän* in particle function are found, and the personal pronoun is little used in informal everyday conversations. Resembling *tuota* and *sitä*, this particle is often frozen in the partitive form, *häntä*, however, other frozen forms also occur—for example, the adessive form in the phrase *hällä väliä* ‘who cares’.<sup>8</sup>

The few examples of the *sitä* particle found in Arkisyn represent its typical contexts (see Hakulinen 1975, 29; Vilkuna 1989: 143–144; Hakulinen et al. 2004: § 827). In (13), the *sitä* particle occurs in a zero-person construction. The conversation is between a hairdresser and customer. The customer is telling the hairdresser about an electric warmer on the roof of his house and the hairdresser is expressing doubt regarding its safety.

- (13) SG108
- |    |   |                                |             |  |                      |                      |                |           |              |
|----|---|--------------------------------|-------------|--|----------------------|----------------------|----------------|-----------|--------------|
| 01 | <i>Joo</i>  | <b><i>sitä</i></b>             | <i>vaan</i> | <i>kuvittelee</i>  | <i>et</i>            | <i>jos</i>           | <i>ränni-s</i> | <i>on</i> | <i>sähkö</i> |
|    | yeah  | 3SG.PART                       | only        | imagine  | that                 | if                   | gutter-INE     | is        | electricity  |
| 02 | <del><i>Et</i></del> ( <i>h</i> ) <del><i>ä</i></del> | <i>s</i> ( <i>h</i> ) <i>e</i> | <i>on</i>   | <i>v</i> ( <i>h</i> ) <i>aa</i> [ <i>rall</i> ( <i>h</i> ) <i>inen</i> ] | <del><i>be</i></del> | <del><i>be</i></del> |                |           |              |
|    | that  | 3SG                            | is          | dangerous  |                      |                      |                |           |              |
- ‘Yeah [you] just imagine that if there is electricity in a gutter, it’s dangerous.’

In (13), the position of *sitä* is similar to *tuota* in (12): the possible placeholder is situated before the finite verb and both verbs ‘think’ (in 12) and ‘imagine’ (in 13) would require a partitive case for their objects. Thus, both pronouns could be placeholders for the object, an abstract thought. However, Holmberg and Nikanne (2002) argue that *sitä* has no connection to case and agreement. According to them, it is rather used as a pure expletive merely to fill the required position in clauses that lack a natural subject, such as a zero-person construction. All Arkisyn examples, though rare, show a certain connection between *sitä* and the partitive case. *Sitä* used in intransitive clauses, documented in the earlier studies (Holmberg & Nikanne 2002; Vilkuna 1989: 144–145), seem to be rare in contemporary everyday conversations, or at least it is not found in this corpus.

While earlier studies present *sitä* as obligatory in certain contexts, such contexts are not frequent in contemporary conversation data. *Sitä* could be used in (12) without significantly changing the meaning—but, unlike *tuota*, *sitä* would, in this context, be clearly referential. *Tuota* would not be quite natural in (13), since zero-person construction

<sup>8</sup> The gloss for the phrase is *3SG-ADE matter* and its literal meaning would be elliptic ‘it (does not) matter’ or ‘(what does) it matter’.

typically occurs with *sitü*. However, among the few examples of the *sitü* particle found in Arkisyn, a few occurrences could be changed to *tuota* or even to *häntä*. Example (14) is from the same conversation as (13) and it is possible to interpret this as a tail construction where *sitü* is coreferential to the noun *lomaa* ‘vacation’ in singular partitive.

- (14) SG108 (H=hairdresser, C=customer)
- 01 C: *Hh meinaaksä nyt pitää l- lomaa sitte heinäkuussa* (.) °vai miten,°  
 ‘Do you intend to have a holiday in July, or when?’
- 02 H: *Hh kyllä mä: tota m* (.) .hbb ↑mä en ihan oikein tiedä sitte että mbh  
 03 *koska mä pitäsin mutta* (.)  
 ‘Yes I well- I don’t really know when I would have but’
- 04 *kyllä=hä **sitü** täytyy vähä yrittää pitää loma-a - -*  
 PTC=CLI 3SG.PART must little try have holiday-PART  
 ‘of course (one) must try to have a little time off - -’

Vilkuna (1989: 145) suggests that the function of *sitü* in this kind of order, where there is a verb-initial constituent (*kyllähä* in 14), is to ensure that the constituent preceding *sitü* is interpreted as topicalized. The same result would be obtained if *sitü* in (14) were replaced with *tuota*. All three pronouns or particles project something on the turn that follows, thereby indicating different implications. *Sitü* implicates that the speaker would like to introduce the topic of having a holiday for further discussion, while *tuota* presents the topic in a non-salient manner, or it would be interpreted as a hesitator. *Häntä*, in contemporary everyday speech, would sound playful and archaic, since it is so rarely used. The functions of these particle-like forms have been studied in different data. According to Hakulinen (1975), *sitü* softens questions, marks the utterance as a discussion opening, and guides a hearer to seek a metaphorical interpretation. According to Laitinen (2005) and Soikkeli (2013), *hän* used in particle function is connected to the functions of the pronoun *hän* in dialects in general, where it is typically used in quotes when referring to the original speaker.<sup>9</sup>

As mentioned, example (14) may be interpreted as a tail construction. Moreover, Vilkuna (1989: 139–141) notes the possible connection of the *sitü* particle to the tail construction, but indicates that while the placeholder pronoun of a tail construction may be freely situated anywhere in the clause, the *sitü* particle is tied to the verb-initial theme or topic position. Despite being free in principle, analysing naturally occurring conversations indicate that the tail construction placeholders are usually also situated in the same position (Priiki 2020: 195–196). Considering *häntä*, Laitinen (2005: 102) brings up the tail construction as a context where questionably referential pronouns occur. I suggest that the pragmaticizing process of the *tuota* particle may have some connection to the same phenomenon.

Why do these three pronouns tend to be used as particles, particularly in their partitive forms? The referents of a partitive NP are usually less individuated, less central to communication, and less frequently mentioned again than referents of an NP in accusative or nominative cases (Helasvuo 1996: 28–30). In the object role, the referentiality of a pronoun may easily become unclear, particularly when the referent is an abstract entity—such as the target of speaking, thinking, or imagining—as in the examples above.

<sup>9</sup> See Laitinen 2002, 2005; Nau 2002; Priiki 2017.

## 7 Conclusions

In this article, I examined the continuum of referential, vaguely or questionably referential, and particle-like occurrences of the Finnish demonstrative pronoun *tuota* ‘that’. I focused on the forms that are open to interpretation on this continuum, aiming to shed light on the question of why the partitive form *tuota* in particular has been pragmaticized to a particle expressing hesitation and word search. The study complements the examination of the hesitation word *tuota* in conversation data that was initiated by Etelämäki and Jaakola (2009). Their article focused on occurrences of *tuota* in clearly particle function without taking a stance on the context where the pragmaticizing of the pronoun has occurred.

I showed that not only the partitive forms but also other case forms of the pronoun may be used without a clear referent. As already noted by Etelämäki and Jaakola (2009), the semantic features of the pronoun *tuota* make it the most suitable to express hesitation among all the Finnish demonstratives. *Tuota* forms as determiners and placeholders can project the type of the referent while the speaker is still processing the lexical definition. While the other demonstratives *se* and *tämä* implicate that the referent is already known or that it is central for the conversation, *tuota* projects a non-salient referent that is only just becoming the target of attention. In spatial contexts, *tuota* is distal; in numerous other languages as well, distal demonstratives are selected for the placeholder and hesitator functions. What is peculiar in the consideration of the Finnish hesitator demonstrative is that the form pragmaticized to the particle function is the inflected singular partitive, *tuota*, while usually the singular nominative form is the most likely to lose the connection to case and number.

Analysing the borderline cases between the referential and non-referential functions of *tuota* reveals that numerous occurrences still retain referentiality, projecting subject, object or location, even though the exact referent is not explicated. The referentiality becomes questionable most easily when the referent is an abstract entity that cannot be lexicalized with a simple noun phrase, such as the object for speaking or thinking. These kinds of verbs usually have their objects in partitive case. In these cases, the partitive *tuota* can have an ambiguous interpretation of projecting either the object or the whole utterance. Numerous borderline cases resemble tail constructions where a referent is referred to twice—first with a demonstrative pronoun placeholder and then with a lexical noun phrase.

Further, I compared the particle *tuota* to two other Finnish particles that have pragmaticized from a partitive form of a demonstrative: *sitä* from *se* ‘it; 3SG’ and *häntä* from *hän* ‘he, she’. I suggest that the process of *tuota* turning into a particle form is part of a more general tendency in Finnish for partitive forms to lose their referentiality when they are used as placeholders for objects. In this function, they occur at the beginning of an utterance, thereby not only projecting implications regarding the possible object referent but also about the entire turn. The different pronouns that participate in this kind of pragmaticizing process still retain meaning features typical to the original pronouns, and the different meanings of the pronouns reflect the different functions of the particles.

Studying naturally occurring conversations can direct research to phenomena that are frequent in everyday speech but have not been thoroughly studied. The *tuota* particle has been little studied compared to the Finnish expletive *sitä*, even though the former is far more frequent in everyday speech. This study has revealed that the neglected and disapproved hesitation particle *tuota* is, in fact, a rather complex phenomenon. Understanding its behavior would require further study—for example, focusing on prosodic patterns and the particle chains it tends to form.

## Data sources

Arkisyn Database of Finnish Conversational Discourse. Compiled at the University of Turku, with material from the Conversation Analysis Archive at the University of Helsinki and the Syntax Archives at the University of Turku. Department of Finnish and Finno-Ugric Languages, University of Turku. Available via Kielipankki, the Language Bank of Finland at <http://urn.fi/urn:nbn:fi:lb-2017022702>

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