

# Epistemic Calibration: Achieving Affiliation through Access Claims and Generalizations

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## Abstract

Sometimes a division has been made between expressions of knowledge and expressions of emotion, but in the actual instances of interaction, they are deeply intertwined. In this paper we investigate the relationship between these expressions through the notions of affiliation and epistemics. More specifically, we analyze the phenomenon of ‘epistemic calibration’ in response to tellings of personal experience, where recipients fine-tune the strength of their access claims and the degree of their generalizations to be in line with their epistemic statuses in relation to those of the tellers. Drawing on a dataset of Finnish quasi-natural conversations with neurotypical participants and participants diagnosed with Asperger syndrome, we explore how such calibration is done in practice. Our analysis points to different challenges in epistemic calibration, which, we argue, play an important role in influencing the hearing of these responses as less than fully affiliative.

Keywords: conversation analysis, storytelling, affiliation, epistemic access, atypical interaction.

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*Epistemic access is a key aspect of affiliation. To show how we came to know something is intertwined both with our claims to co-experience and with our efforts to affiliate with one another. Future exploration of the ways and extent to which the affiliation relevance of an utterance and action and epistemic access are interrelated and ordered relative to each other are a fruitful avenue for future research.*

(Lindström and Sorjonen 2013, 368)

## **1. Introduction**

Affiliation can be defined as endorsing the affective stance of the previous speaker (Stivers 2008, 35) and showing them that you are on their side (Jefferson 2002, 1346, see Lindström and Sorjonen 2013 for an overview). Different recipient-actions and their relative degree of affiliation have been studied extensively, for example in the context of responses to assessments, troubles telling and storytelling (Couper-Kuhlen 2012; Hakulinen and Sorjonen 2012; Heritage 2011; Koskinen, Stevanovic, and Peräkylä, 2021; Kupetz 2014; Selting 2012; Stivers 2008; Peräkylä et al. 2015). The current study adds to this body of work by examining the reception of tellings of personal experience in interactions with neurotypical participants and participants diagnosed with Asperger syndrome. The aim of the study is to uncover the limits and underlining norms regarding the relationship of affiliation and epistemics in receiving tellings.

### ***1.1. Access Claims and Affiliation***

The management of agreement is consequential for the solidarity between participants (Heritage and Raymond 2005). In the context of making assessments, agreement can be “operationalized” as a sequence of two assessments by two different speakers, where the second assessment is in line with the first speaker’s stance (Goodwin and Goodwin 1992; Pomerantz 1984a). There are several methodic ways for speakers to display that “they are ‘truly’ in full agreement” (Pomerantz and Heritage 2012, 214). Agreements that are to be seen as genuine are generally performed without delays and/or are upgraded by adding an intensifier to the responding turn (e.g. “A: This is great music. B: Really great) (Pomerantz 1984a). Thus, when formulating their agreement, second speakers often engage in interactional work not to be interpreted as merely ‘going along’ with the first speaker, without there being a genuine stance behind the utterance (Heritage 2002; Pomerantz and Heritage 2012; Stivers 2005).

A crucial thing the second speaker must deal with concerns the first speaker's inherent epistemic primacy (Heritage and Raymond 2005). One of the resources that second speakers use in these circumstances is *oh*-prefacing, which is “a method persons use to index the independence of their access and/or judgment in relation to the state of affairs under evaluation” (Heritage 2002, 204). In Finnish, a similar phenomenon has been studied by Sorjonen and Hakulinen (2009), who found that by responding to an assessment (e.g. *se mekko on hieno* “that dress is great”) in subject-verb order (*se on* “it is”), the second speaker both asserts agreement and implies the independence of their stance (agreeing and *confirming*) (Sorjonen and Hakulinen 2009). The function of the Finnish subject-verb response comes very close to that of the partial modified repeats in English, which Stivers (2005) has argued are linked with the display of independent epistemic stance. Displaying independent stance in second assessments is one of the resources with which recipients can “assert stronger affiliation precisely by asserting more agency over their response” (Stivers, Mondada, and Steensig 2011, 22).

When the first speaker describes their own personal experience, the situation becomes more complex. Tellings of personal, first-hand experience usually invite others to produce something similar to agreeing second assessments – namely, an evaluation which affirms the meaning and nature of the experience and in this way affiliates with the tellers' stance towards the experiences (Heritage 2011; Stivers 2008). However, the problem here is that the recipients often lack the specific experiences described by tellers and therefore also the epistemic rights to claim access to them. Heritage (2011) has described some of the resources that are available for recipients under these circumstances. For example, by using so-called *subjunctive assessments*, the recipients can enter provisionally into the other's experience (e.g. “this sounds so good”). With so-called *observer responses* the recipients can place themselves as imaginary witnesses to the experiences described by tellers (e.g. “I wish I could've seen his face”). Finally, with *parallel assessments* the recipients display agreement with the teller by describing a similar, but de-particularized, experience (Heritage 2011, 168-171). In addition to all this, extra caution is needed in situations where the recipients *have* in fact encountered similar experiences as the tellers: a recipient's display of independent access to the teller's experience may strengthen the endorsement of the affective stance, but it runs the risk of appropriating the teller's experience (Heritage 2011; Raymond and Heritage 2006).

Hence, the studies above have suggested that second speakers' upgraded epistemic stances serve as a resource of affiliation. At the same time, however, we see that sometimes these second speakers' epistemic stances can also be too strong to be fully affiliative. Thus,

the careful fine-tuning of the strength of the *access claim* is an important part of the affiliative reception of tellings of personal experiences.

### ***1.2. Generalizations and Affiliation***

Now we turn to another important resource that recipients of tellings of personal experiences can turn to in order to achieve affiliation with the teller. This aspect was implicitly present in the consideration of access claims described above. As stated earlier, with a parallel assessment “the recipient affiliates with the teller by describing a similar experience but in a de-particularized manner” (Heritage 2011, 168-169). These assessments may take the form of “my side” assessments that support the first speaker’s stance, without attempting to enter directly into the experience that is reported (e.g. “I have always liked to do X”). These assessments may also involve a component of impersonal generalization that links the teller’s experience to a series of analogous experiences by many people (e.g. “she can be rude”; Edwards & Fasulo 2006, 357). These kinds of generalizing actions allow recipients to make stance-congruent assessments without stepping into the teller’s epistemic domain (Couper-Kuhlen 2012, 124). Thus, *generalizations* are a valuable resource for recipients of tellings in their attempts to achieve affiliation with the teller. It is also the case that the tellers themselves might facilitate the recipient’s production of affiliative agreement by bringing the description of the story to a more generalized level at the end of the telling (Drew and Holt 1998; Goodwin and Goodwin 1992; Holt and Drew 1995; Jefferson 1984).

However, similarly to what was previously stated with reference to access claims, making generalizations can also go too far: when recipients generalize to other, similar occasions, their responses can *disattend* the specifics of the previous telling and run the risk of being heard as flat or pro forma (Heritage 2011; see also Couper-Kuhlen and Selting 2018, 31). The fine-tuning of the optimal degree of generalization also requires an understanding of the kinds of experiences that the participants can assume to be shared (the generalizability of the event), based on their local interactional history or socio-cultural ‘common knowledge.’

In sum, in order to achieve affiliation, recipients of tellings must calibrate both the strength of access claim and the degree of generalization. We refer to the act of fine-tuning these two dimensions of responsive utterances as *epistemic calibration* (see Figure 1.)

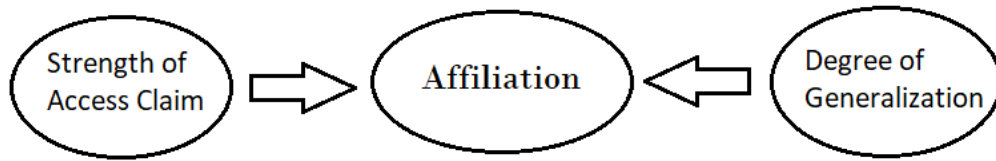


Figure 1. Epistemic calibration. Two dimensions that recipients of tellings of personal experiences need to calibrate in their responsive utterances to achieve affiliation.

Access claims and generalizations are also mutually linked, since generalizing actions allow the recipient more independent access to the described events. Drawing on a dataset of Finnish quasi-natural conversations with neurotypical participants and participants diagnosed with Asperger syndrome, we explore recipients' practices of calibrating the strength of their access claim and the degree of generalization. Our focus is especially on the different challenges that recipients sometimes face in the calibration of their responses, which, we argue, play an important role in influencing the hearing of these responses as less than fully affiliative.

### ***1.3. Autism Spectrum Disorder, Affiliation, and Epistemics***

Normative expectations of epistemic calibration, and the specific interactional work and competencies that it requires, is a challenging topic to study due to the subtlety of the phenomenon as a whole. Epistemic calibration is usually done “below the surface” and thus often escapes explicit appeals to accountability. Therefore, it can be argued, looking at interactions with participants diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) might offer valuable insights into the norms relating to epistemic calibration and also bring to light the subtle competencies required in it (cf. Maynard 2019). In 2013, Asperger syndrome (AS) was merged into the diagnostic category of ASD (American Psychiatric Association 2013). The main diagnostic criteria for ASD are 1) difficulties with social interaction, and 2) restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviors, activities or interests. Especially relevant for the ideas in this paper are findings regarding ASD's connection to the management of epistemics and affiliation in interaction: Previous research has indicated that persons with ASD can have challenges in Theory of Mind, i.e. considering the co-interactants' knowledge and perspective (Baron-Cohen 1995; Happé 1991; see also Ochs and Solomon 2005) and trouble in comprehending the socio-emotional meaning of stories (e.g. Happé 1994) – both crucial for displaying affiliation with the teller's stance. These challenges, however, might be due to atypical ways of expressing affect instead of clearly defined deficits in Theory of Mind (see

Belmonte 2008). In light of these earlier findings, it is possible that analyzing actual, turn-by-turn unfolding telling sequences with participants with and without ASD could provide us with more variation in epistemic calibration patterns, which, in turn, can increase our grasp of the normative orientations to these patterns.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The dataset analyzed in this article consists of a dataset of ten video recordings of dyadic conversations, where one participant has been diagnosed with Asperger syndrome, and the other participant is neurotypical (AS-NT dyads), and nine video recordings of control data, where both participants are neurotypical (NT-NT dyads). This dataset was collected as a part of a project investigating the psychophysiological underpinnings of talk-in-interaction (see e.g. Stevanovic et al. 2019), and for this purpose the participants' psychophysiological activations were also recorded (e.g. heart rate and skin conductance). The conversations took place in an acoustically shielded room where the participants were sitting in armchairs facing each other perpendicularly. The conversations were videotaped with three cameras: two facing each of the two participants, and the third giving an overall view of the situation. The conversations lasted 45–60 minutes. After 45 minutes of discussion, the experimenter asked whether the participants wanted to continue the conversation for a maximum of fifteen minutes. In both AS-NT and NT-NT dyads, there were four that continued the conversation.

The participants were instructed to talk about happy events and losses in their lives, and they were told that the study focuses on their talk and their psychophysiological activations. They were also told that the researchers were not looking for any specific style in the discussion, and that the conversation was free to unfold in any shape or form. All participants were adults, aged 18-40 years, and male (since the AS-participants willing to take part in the study were all male). The data were transcribed using a detailed conversation analytic character set (see Hepburn and Bolden 2017). In examples where we found non-verbal behavior relevant, we have utilized the transcription conventions of Nevile (2004) to represent the timing of bodily activities in relation to talk with which they are concurrent. Upward pointing arrows (↑) are used to indicate the precise points in the talk when a bodily activity begins and ends, with these arrows being joined by underlining to show the duration of that activity (↑\_\_\_\_↑).

The AS-participants were recruited from a private neuropsychiatric clinic specialized in the diagnostics of autism spectrum disorders. The AS diagnoses were based on ICD-10 (World Health Organization 1993). The NT-participants were recruited to the study

via email lists and their neurotypical status was confirmed by using the autism-spectrum quotient (AQ; Baron-Cohen et al. 2001). All participants were informed about the use of the data and signed a consent form. The study and the consent procedure had prior approval by the Ethics Committee of the Helsinki University Central Hospital (date of the decision: 21.09.2011). The NT-participants conversing with AS-participants were informed about the clinical status of their co-participants, and this setting was also clear for the AS-participants.

Conversation analysis has traditionally been applied to the study of naturally-occurring interactions, by which it deviates radically from experimental approaches to the study of social interaction (see Potter 2004). Our data lie somewhere in between these two extremes, and can therefore be characterized as “quasi-natural.” The dataset has been produced for research purposes, but unlike structured interviews, the discussion was allowed to flow freely without any researcher intervention. While caution is needed to apply our results to naturally occurring interactions, what we know, however, is that the phenomenon of affiliation is important not only for the participants in completely naturally-occurring interactions but also for the participants in our dataset. This importance has been established in a series of studies, which have shown that recipients’ affiliative responses “calm down” the (neurotypical) storytellers (Peräkylä et al. 2015; Stevanovic et al. 2019; see also Voutilainen et al. 2014).

Although the participants in our data were instructed to talk about happy events and losses, these tellings were framed in much talk about ordinary “neutral” topics, such as work, studies, family, etc. In other words, these conversations were of the kind typical in all “make-talk” situations in airplanes, queues, or other places, where parties are in each other’s proximity and feel the need to generate conversation (see Maynard 1980, 1989; Maynard and Zimmerman 1984). The instruction, however, worked very well in that the participants also ended up telling a lot of stories about their personal lives. Similarly to naturally-occurring interactions, the stories typically occurred as rounds of stories (Goffman 1974; Tannen 1984) and second stories (Sacks 1992). The collection analyzed for this study is comprised of tellings of personal experience. In this paper, we will focus on the recipients’ practices of epistemic calibration as fine-tuning of access claims and generalizations. The data extracts analyzed below are selected on the basis of their clarity in demonstrating this fine-tuning process.

### **3. Analysis**

In the following, we present examples of recipients' epistemic calibration and the variation we found in these patterns. We begin by showing two examples focusing on the strength of the access claim. Then we present two cases focusing on the degree of generalization. In both instances, we first show an example of an epistemically well-calibrated response, and follow it with an example with some more explicit work in fine-tuning the strength of the access claim or the degree of generalization. All the examples in these two sections, however, can still be analyzed as displaying affiliation, i.e. as endorsing the stances of the tellings. In the final section we present two additional cases, where the tellers do not treat the responses as affiliative, and discuss possible reasons for this.

### ***3.1. Epistemic Calibration: Fine-tuning the strength of access claim***

In example 1 the teller (T) describes the experience of how he finally got accepted to the university after several years of trying. The recipient (R) produces affiliative responses throughout the telling and displays agreement with a strong access claim in line 9.

#### Example 1. (A18; 01:11)

- 01 T: *kesällä ku tuli kirje ni se oli niin .h*  
in the summer when the letter came it was so .h
- 02 R: *no[ni?*  
alright?
- 03 T: *[ihanaa >niiku< (0.6) kolme vuotta oli hakenu sillee, (0.8)*  
lovely >like< (0.6) had applied for three years like, (0.8)
- 04 *yliopistoon yleensäkki [ni, (0.5) sitku se vihmoi- viimeinki*  
to the university in general so, (0.5) when it fin- finally
- 05 R: *[joo.*  
yes.
- 06 T: *tuli se kirje ni. °°.hh [jee°°*  
came the letter so. .hh yess ((makes a fist bump in the air))
- 07 R: *[niinpä?*  
I know?
- 08 T: *ihanaa.*  
lovely. ((with a breathy voice))
- 09 → R: ***no kyl o.***  
PRT PRT BE.3SG  
***well indeed [it] is.***
- 10 (2.5)



In line 6, T uses something resembling direct reported speech when he quotes himself saying “yes” while receiving the acceptance letter and also imitates his celebratory gesture. In this way, T can be seen to bring R to the “brink of the action” (Heritage 2011, 177) and allows him more access to the described events. At this point R indeed displays access with his supportive turn in line 7 (*niinpä* /”I know”). In line 8, T makes a summarizing evaluation of the experience with the assessment term “lovely”, which R agrees with in line 9 (*no kyl o* /”well indeed it is”). T’s assessment is not formulated in a way that it would refer only to his own experience (e.g. “it was lovely”), so again, T can be seen to offer epistemic access of the evaluation to the recipient. The Finnish discourse particle *kyl* in R’s response adds an additional epistemic element to the response, for *kyl(lä)* can convey a stance to a state of affairs as belonging to common experience or general knowledge (Hakulinen 2001b). Thus, R makes a strong access claim displaying agreement with the affective stance of T’s telling, which brings the telling sequence to a close. What is also revealed in the discussion a short while later, is that R himself has got into the study track he wanted:

- 55 R: *mä* ↑*ite* *alotin koulun kans*, (0.4) (*to*)*taa*, (0.6) *pu:oltoist*  
I myself started school also, (0.4), like, (0.6) a year and
- 56 *vuotta sitte*,  
a half ago,
- 57 T: ↑*missä päi*.=  
where at.=
- 58 R: =*seki oli*, (0.9) *mä oon tuo:l*, (0.3) *tai mä opiskelen*  
=it also was, (0.9) I am, (0.3) or I am studying to become
- 59 *röntgenhoitajaks nyt tuol-la* (0.6) *Myllypurossa*.  
a radiographer now at (0.6) Myllypuro.
- 60 T: ↑*joojoo*.  
yesyes.
- 61 (1.8) ((T and R both nod and gaze at each other))
- 62 R: *se o:n kans ollu*, (0.3) *tosi jees*, (0.3) *pääs*, (0.8) *sitä mitä*  
it has also been, (0.3) really nice, (0.3) (I) got to, (0.8) study
- 63 *haluu ni opiskelee*.  
what I wanted.
- 64 T: ↑*mm*.  
mm.
- 65 (1.4)

Since T originally described the experience in a way that allowed R access to the events and, as the extract above demonstrates, R also shares the experience with T, the strong access claim is very much in line with R's epistemic status in relation to the teller.

Example 2 further illuminates the process of epistemic calibration as fine-tuning the strength of the access claim in relation to the participants' epistemic statuses. The example is from the same discussion as example 1. Here the teller (T, the same participant as in the previous example) describes a break-up with his girlfriend, which happened sometime after he had got back from military service. The recipient (R) again displays agreement with the stance of the telling with a strong access claim, but subsequently alters it to a more tentative, subjunctive assessment.

### Example 2. (A18; 15:24)

- 01 T: *ni mua niinku se, (.) senki jälkee oli >sillee niinku.< (0.7)*  
so it like, (.) after that (I) was like. (0.7)
- 02 *@mikä maa mikä valuutta@ eiks mun &starviikaa lähtee takas niinku*  
*@what country which currency@ don't I have to go back like<sup>1</sup>*
- 03 *kassulle e[nääf >sillee (jo)ku< †kak[s kuukautta sen jälkee,*  
to the barracks anymore >like< two months after that,  
↑—————↑  
((T lifts his hand))
- 04 R: *[nii,* *[niinpä,*  
yeah, I know,
- 05 (0.7) ((T & R gaze at each other, R smiles weakly))
- 06 R: *[joo.*  
yes.
- 07 T: *[ni siin, (.) kesti jonku aikaa totutella, (0.3)*  
so that (.) it took some time to get used to,  
*sit niinku, (0.8) eros tyttöystävästä jossai vaiheessa ja,*  
then like, (0.8) (I) broke up with my girlfriend at some point and,
- 09 (0.6)
- 10 R: *joo.*

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<sup>1</sup> "What country which currency" / *Mikä maa mikä valuutta* is a Finnish idiom referring to the state of being confused.

yes.

11 (0.7) ((R is nodding))

12 T: *se oli kyl, (.) niinku, (0.7) suht paskaa aikaa?*  
it was indeed, (.) like, (0.7) quite a crappy time?

13 (0.8)

14 → R: *no se o joo vo- (.) in (.) uskoa.*  
PRT it be PRT I+can believe-INF  
**it is yeah I- (.) can (.) believe [it].**

15 (0.6)

16 T: *siin menee ↑aina sillee, (0.8) joku, (0.3) kuukaus (0.3) pari et*  
it always takes like, (0.8) some, (0.3) a month (0.3) or two that

17 *niinku, (1.0) pääsee siit fiiliksest[ä et niinku et,*  
like, (1.0) for the feelings to pass away like,

18 R: [mm,  
mm,

19 (1.1)

20 R: *no kyl sii ↑ite kans joskus, (0.3) no siit on jo aikaa mut,*  
well indeed I have also sometimes, (0.3) well it was a while back but,

21 (0.8) *[oli pitkää ollu, (0.6) sama tytön kaa niinku,*  
(0.8) had been together a long time, (0.6) with the same girl like,

22 T: [.nff

[SECOND STORY CONTINUES]

The teller (T) makes a “summary assessment” (Jefferson 1984, 211) inviting recipient uptake (“it was indeed like quite a crappy time”, line 12) to which R displays strong agreement (“it is yeah”, line 14). However, R then alters his response by transforming the agreeing turn “it is yeah” to a more subjunctive assessment “I can believe it”. This can be seen as a case of self-repair, which exposes or brings to the surface (cf. Drew, Walker, and Ogden 2013) the work of epistemic calibration. Even though R shares the experience of military service with T, and also the experience of a break-up (both of these are revealed later in the discussion), here the teller is specifically evaluating a particular, difficult and “crappy” time period in his own life, which the recipient does not have access to. Here, we argue, R at first claims a position that can be considered too strong to suit his real-world epistemic status in relation to the teller: orienting to this miscalibration, R fine-tunes his access claim online to be in accord with his epistemic status. Here, R chose to use a more qualified access claim,

which focused more on the teller's particular experience, while the route of generalization would have allowed a more independent epistemic stance.

### 3.2. Epistemic Calibration: Fine-tuning the degree of generalization

Now we turn to the other dimension of epistemic calibration: the degree of generalization. Here the teller (T) tells a story about his grandmother, who has Alzheimer's disease. He describes an incident where his grandmother mistook her son (T's father) to be her late husband. The recipient (R) responds to the telling in line 13.

#### Example 3. (A9: 55:46)

- 01 T: *isän ↑äidillä se oli sitte pahempina niinku se alzhaimeri jo että*  
father's mother had it worse I mean the Alzheimer already that
- 02 *sielt tuli vähä jo näitä, (.) .hhh näitä näitä, hhh (.) mite*  
there was already these, (.) .hhh these these, hhh (.) how
- 03 *sanois niinku, (0.3) vois sanoo tämmösii, (0.2) pahallaatusen*  
would one say like, (0.3) one could say these (0.2) seriously
- 04 *dementikon, (.) hömppä (.) puheita ja muita ja,*  
demented person's (.) nonsense (.) talk and so on and,
- 05 *.hh (.) [että]*  
.hh (.) so
- 06 R: *[joo.]*  
yeah.
- 07 T: *tota, (.) kuvitellaa esimerkiks, (.) m- kuvitteli, (.) isääni*  
that, (.) one imagines for example, (.) [she] imagined (.) my dad
- 08 *elikkä, (.) poikaansan ni, (.) häne mieheksee ja.*  
who is, (.) her son so, (.) to be her husband and.
- 09 (0.3) ((T gazes at R; R nods))
- 10 *joka oli kuollu et sitte et tämmöstä niiku, (.) (monenlaist)*  
who was dead so this kind of thing like, (.) (all kinds)
- 12 *.hh ne o aika surullisii kyllä sillo et.*  
.hh they are really rather sad [situations] then.
- 13 → R: **onha ne kyllä.**  
be-3SG-CLI DEM3.PL PRT  
**they are yes.**
- 14 T: *mm,*  
*mm,*
- 15 R: *et siin mieles sitä vois, (0.2) vois sanoo että toivois aina et*  
in that sense (one) could, (0.2) (one) could say that one always  
hopes

16            *se tapahtus sillee niinku suht, (0.2) nopeesti*  
               that it would happen like quite, (0.2) quickly

T's description of his grandmother's dementia includes many hesitations, hitches and reformulations (lines 2-5) that display some awkwardness concerning the topic. In line 7, T begins his turn with a general passive verb form (*kuvitellaan* "one imagines") but changes to an active imperfect verb form (*kuvitteli* "[she] imagined"), now clearly referring to his own grandmother. There is a slot for recipient uptake (line 9), when T first describes his grandmother's confusion, but R withholds a verbal response at this point. Then T continues by stating that the error was more severe, for her husband was actually dead (line 10). Next, T moves to a more general perspective by using a plural form and assesses the type of experiences: "they are really quite sad [situations] then so" (line 12). R agrees with the generalized assessment (*onha ne kyllä* "they are yes", line 13). Importantly, he uses the Finnish *-han* clitic, which implies that the subject matter is shared knowledge or a "general truth" (Hakulinen 2001a [1976]), thus indicating an epistemically independent position on the matter.

R's response could easily be characterized as "flat" or "pro forma" (cf. Heritage 2011), as the response orients to the experience as common and somewhat apparent (note: the *-han* clitic). Importantly, however, R's response is facilitated by the teller's own generalization in line 12 (the move to plural form). Another important factor is what happens next: after T responds to the agreement minimally (line 14), R elaborates on his reception turn (lines 15-16). In his elaboration, he continues the general perspective by stating that one always hopes that one's death would happen quickly. The use of "always" highlights the general perspective, but the elaboration also gives some more substance and detail to his earlier response. Here, even though R can be considered to be somewhat inattentive to the particulars of T's experience, his generalized reception turn (in line 13) is facilitated by the teller and it displays agreement with the stance of the telling (formulated by T himself in line 12).

Example 4 further illuminates the process of epistemic calibration regarding the fine-tuning of the degree of generalization. Here the recipient (R) makes very explicit and observable work in generalizing the teller's experience. The teller (T) has been describing his time in evening high school, which was not enjoyable in any way. He concludes with the assessment "didn't like feel at all at home there at that place" (line 16).

Example 4. (A8; 7:50)

- 01 T: *ja ku mä kävin iltalukioo.=se oli aika masentavaa s[iinä mielessä ku,]*  
and as I went to evening high school=it was quite depressing when,
- 02 R: [hyi että. ]  
[ew. ]
- 03 (0.2) *joo,*  
(0.2) *yes,*
- 04 T: *tosiaanki, (0.5) ↑o:ppitunnit <alkaa> tossa no:in (0.5) <vii:eltä> ja*  
indeed, (0.5) the lessons start about (0.5) five pm and
- 05 *sitte, (0.8) ne k- hh kestää tohon noin (.) ↑kaheksaa saakka ↑illalla,*  
then, (0.8) they l- last until about (.) eight o'clock at night,
- 06 (.) *>aina ku< (.) pääsee sielt ↑kotii niin on ↑pimeetä.*  
(.) *>always when< (.) one gets home from there it is dark.*
- 07 R: *joo,*  
*yes,*
- 08 T: *ja sitku se ↑alue oli viel, (.) #osittai jopa aika masentavaa*  
and then the area was also, (.) partly even quite depressing
- 09 *että siel ei ollu niinku ollenkaa kiva käyä ihan sen takii?#*  
that it wasn't like nice to go there at all because of that?
- 10 R: *nii just,*  
*right yes,*
- 11 T: *sitku, (0.5) mä olin, (0.3) nh tyylii yksii harvoi niinku, (.)*  
and, (0.5) I was, (.) nh like one of the few like, (.)
- 12 *↑mun ikäsist opiskelijoist siellä.*  
students of my age there.
- 13 R: *mm,*  
*mm,*
- 14 T: *ja: (0.4) suurin osa oli (.) iha reippaasti vanhempia.*  
and: (0.4) most of them where much older.
- 15 (0.3)
- 16 T: *[ni ei siel] niinku, (0.3) mhh ei niinku tuntunu ollenkaa kotosalta*  
so it wasn't like, (0.3) mhh didn't like feel at all at home
- 17 R: *[okei, ]*  
*okay,*
- 18 T: *se mesta.*  
at that place.
- 19 → R: ***joo, (0.7) mm, (0.5) ↑joo tommone (0.5) il-, (.) ilta kautta yö- yötyöt***  
***yes*** ***yes DEM2.SG DEM.2SG.ADJ evening or night+work***  
***yes, (0.4) mm, (0.5) yes that kind of ev-, (.) evening or night work***
- 20 *nii. (0.4) tai ni, (.) työt ylipäättää työ ku työ ni, (0.5) niin nii,*  
so. (0.4) or I mean, (.) work in general whatever work, (0.5) so so,

- 21 (.) *on kyllä, (.) mäsentavaa puuhaa? (.) [tota,] (.)*  
 (.) really is, (.) depressing stuff (.) like,
- 22 T: *[mm-m?]*  
 mm-m?
- 23 R: *ite, (.) ite tota, (0.5) lukion jälkeen olin, (.) olin*  
 I myself, (.) myself like, (0.5) after high school I was, (.) I was
- 24 (.) *puol vuotta enne armeijaa niin, (0.7)*  
 (.) six months before the military service, (0.7)

[SECOND STORY CONTINUES]

T's final assessment is a description of the particular place where he was studying ("didn't like feel at all at home at that place", line 16). R responds with a generalizing turn "yes that kind of evening or night work so..." At this point, however, he seems to be faced with some trouble. T was talking about evening *school*, whereas R makes a generalization to *working* during the evening, which could be considered quite a big leap that perhaps does not relate to T's experience anymore. Thus, R begins a repair, "or I mean work in general, whatever work so." With this turn, he is making it clearer that he refers to all work that has to be done during the evening, including T's experience of attending school. R then makes an independent assessment of evening work as "depressing stuff" (line 21), which mirrors T's evaluation of his experience ("it was quite depressing", line 1; "partly even quite depressing", line 8). R's assessment works as a preface to his own "second story" (Sacks 1992) that he begins in line 23. The second story concerns a six-month time period in R's life when he was working during the evenings. Here, R picks up on the main focus of T's telling and produces a generalization concerning the affective stance, which allows him to make a parallel assessment (cf. Heritage 2011) or an independent evaluation that endorses that stance, while the other route would have been to use a more subjunctive (i.e. "that must've been depressing") assessment.

Now, based on the examples above, we can update the picture we presented earlier on epistemic calibration by including two additional aspects or dimensions into the mix: the real-world epistemic statuses of the participants, and the focus (affective stance) of the telling, which are deeply related to the access claims and generalizations of the recipients, respectively.

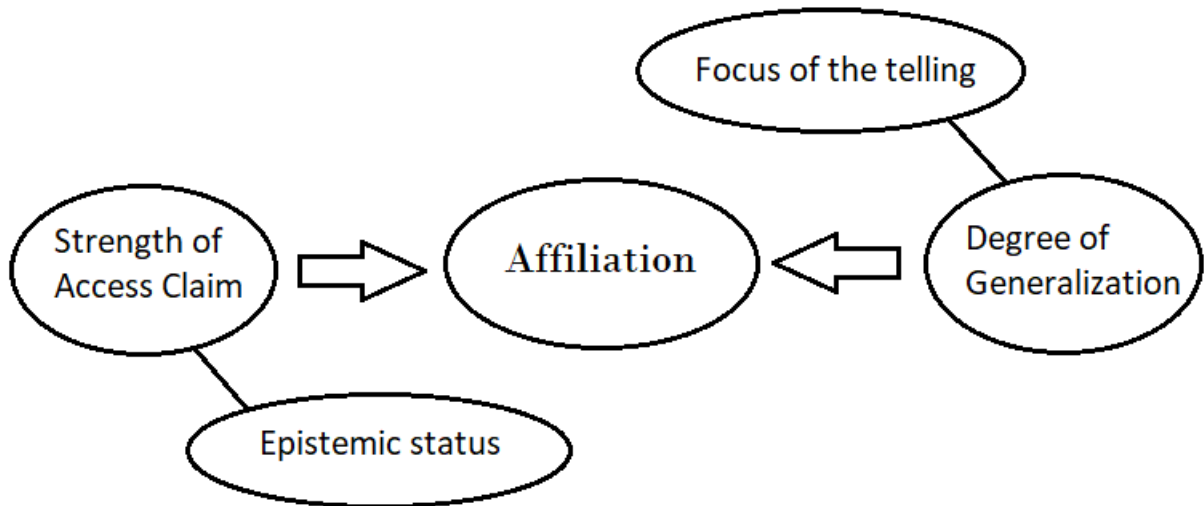


Figure 2. Picture of epistemic calibration including the additional dimensions of epistemic status and focus of the telling.

In the next section, we demonstrate how the two additional dimensions of ‘epistemic status’ and ‘focus of the telling’ can become critical, as we show two examples where the tellers do not treat the recipients’ responses as affiliative.

### 3.3. Epistemic Miscalibrations

In this final section we examine two cases where the tellers do not treat the reception turns as affiliative. In example 5, the teller (T) describes one of the biggest losses in his life: his father’s death, which came as a complete surprise to him. At the end of the telling he turns to the “bright side” (cf. Holt 1993) and states that the experience has made him stronger (lines 13-16). The recipient (R) makes a strong access claim (similarly to example 1) in line 18.

#### Example 5. (A10; 27:52)

01 T: ilman et ei ollu @mitää@ sairaut tai @mitään@. (.) ni se et  
 without having @any@ sickness or @anything@. (.) so when  
 ↑\_\_\_\_\_↑                    ↑\_\_\_\_\_↑  
 ((T waves his hand twice.))

02 toine vaa kualee pois nii .hh et, (.) sä et >tiedätsää<  
 one just dies so .hh that, (.) you don't >you know<  
 ↑\_\_\_\_↑  
 ((T waves  
 his hand.))

03 (0.3) ((T does an 'inviting' circle motion with his hand;  
 R keeps his forefinger in his mouth and looks up))

04 .hh emmäen †tiijätoisaalt et, (.) #ä:# (.) olisko se



- .hh i don't know on the other hand that, (.) #um# (.) would
- 05 *sit ollu helpompaa et ois ollu joku sairaus mut se tuli, .hh*  
it have been easier if had been some sickness but it came, .hh
- 06 *niin yllättäen et, (.) et se sillon ainaki tuntu, (.) tu[ntu*  
so suddenly that, (.) that it at least then felt, (.) felt
- 07 R: [m:;  
m:
- 08 T: *pahalta mut, .hh nyt o aika hyvin nii, (.) ko, (.) aika*  
bad but, .hh now (I) have quite well so, (.) like (.) time
- 09 *just parantaa ↑haavat niinko itekki sanoit ni on,*  
just heals the wounds like you said so (I) have,
- 10 R: .hh[hhhhhh (
- 11 T: *[päässy: (.) hyvin yl[i siit, (.) ↑asiasta ja, (.) °.hh°*  
gotten (.) well over the (.) matter and, (.) .hh
- 12 R: [↑m,  
m
- 13 T: *se on enemmän (.) ↑enemmänki toiminu just niinku vahvistavana*  
it has been more (.) more like a strenghtening
- 14 *tek[ijänä ku et (.) #et se#, (.) vaivais niinku*  
factor than that (.) #that it# (.) would bother me like
- 15 R: [m:h.  
m:h
- 16 T: *enti@sest[(h)ää@,*  
still
- 17 → R: **[mm. (0.2) °m° joo ↑n:, (0.3) on (.) onhan se. (.)**  
yes be-3SG be-3SG-CLI DEM3.SG  
**mm. (0.2) m yes (0.3) it is (.) it is. (.)**  
↑  
((T is nodding, glancing away and then looking at R))
- 18 **.hh[hhh onhan se tottakai tollee ett(h)ä. (1.2)**  
be-3SG-CLI DEM3.SG of+course DEM2.SG.MAN PRT  
**.hhhhh it is of course like that so. (1.2)**
- 19 T: [mm. ↑  
mm. ((T 'freezes', looking at R))
- 20 R: *.mt (.) että tota, (0.2) .hh mä, (.) ↑mä usein oon semmosella*  
*.mt (.) that like (0.2) .hh I'm (.) I often have that kind of*  
↑  
((T stays immobile)) ↑  
((T looks away))
- 21 *elämänasenteella liiken[teessä ku mä mietin (.) aina*  
attitude towards life that when I think (.) every once  
↑  
((T covers his mouth, stroking his nose))
- 22 T: [mm. ((T purses his lips))  
mm.

23 R: *välillä °n° noit(h)a .hh kuolemia että nythän, (.) tosta(.)*  
 in a while those deaths that now, (.) from (.)

24 *khmr .mt meijän naapurintäti kuoli tossa[ #y::ö::: # kaks*  
*krhm .ch our lady next door died about #um# two*

25 T: *[mm.*  
*mm.*

26 R: *viikkoo sitte itteasi's mut hän oli jo aika iäkäs ja vanha*  
 weeks ago as a matter of fact but she was already quite old

[[10 lines omitted about the death of the neighbour]]

37 T: *↓mm, (0.4) .mt (.) ja(ja) huomannu just ite,*  
*mm, (0.4) .tch (.) and(and) I myself have noticed,*

38 *(.) ↑muuttunu ehkä, (.) elämän niinko, (0.2) °.hh° (.)*  
*(.) perhaps a changed, (.) outlook on life, (0.2) .hh (.)*

39 *katsomus sillai just et et °.hh° pyrkii niinko*  
 like that that .hh (I) try to

[TELLING BY NT CONTINUES]

In lines 1-4, T concludes his telling by stating that the experience of his father's death has made him stronger. Here, the ending of T's telling is not formulated as a generalized assessment in search of agreement. R, however, still displays agreement with the previous turn ("Mm. Yes. It is it is. It is of course like that so", lines 17-18). There are linguistic elements that indicate that the recipient has an epistemically independent position on the matter, as the *-hän* clitic points to shared epistemic access (Hakulinen 2001a) and the use of "of course" makes the statement seem self-evident (cf. Stivers 2011; Vatanen 2018, 108). When we look at T's multimodal behavior, we can see that when R utters the word "of course", T's bodily demeanor and facial expression "freezes" and he seems to wait and see where R's response is going. When R begins to share his own experience (lines 20-21) T looks away and covers his face, stroking his nose.

What is relevant here, we argue, is that R's strong access claim is not unpacked after the utterance making his epistemic status clear (as in example 1). The sudden death of one's father is not an experience which is readily shared at this stage of life, and even though T uses some common idioms ("time heals the wounds", line 9), T did not describe the experience in a way that would allow R access to the experience (as in example 1). The following second story by R describing the death of his neighbor (lines 24-26) does not really mirror the affective stance of T's telling, as the neighbor was old and in poor condition and the death was not a surprise. The second story also does not relate to the strengthening aspect of losing

a close family member. All this can also be seen in T's subsequent response: he does not treat R's second story as relevant, since he immediately returns to his own situation and describes the change in his outlook on life (lines 37-39). His turn is and-prefaced (line 37), which marks continuity and links his turn with his prior story (cf. Heritage and Sorjonen 1994), indicating that neither the agreeing reception turn nor the second story is treated as affiliative or sufficient for topic closure. R's access claim was not accompanied by shared knowledge about the participants' epistemic statuses, nor was it made clear after the utterance. This example brings forth the issue of epistemic status described in the previous section and hence the right to make strong access claims. In example 1, the recipient had experienced the happy moment of getting into the school he wanted. In this example the recipient similarly makes a strong access claim and follows it with a second story, but his epistemic status vis à vis the teller was not in line with his access claim. In this way R's access claim implicitly challenges the tellability of the telling or even trivializes the experience (note: the phrase "of course"), which contributes to the hearing of the response as not fully affiliative.

In this final example the recipient (R) uses generalization to achieve independent agreement (as in example 4). T tells a story of how his girlfriend's grandmother died of cancer. Due to a doctor's mistake, they did not get a diagnosis for her in time for treatment.

#### Example 6. (A11; 39:18)

- 01 T: *sitte to-[ta, (0.8) nii] siinähan ihan selvästi mä olin*  
then like, (0.8) yeah there very clearly I was
- 02 R:                    *[.hh hhh            ]*
- 03 T: *sitä mielt kyl et se on vähän niinku, (.) hoitovirhe ja,*  
of the opinion that it is kind of like, (.) a malpractice and,
- 04    (0.7) ((R is nodding))
- 05 T: *sit [tosiaa ite, (0.5) tää tapaus no hän sitte, (0.7) kuoli*  
then indeed, (0.5) this incident well she then, (0.7) died
- 06 R:                    *[mm*  
                             *mm*
- 07 T: *tosiaa tos, (0.5) viime joskus, (0.4) keväällä et, (0.3)*  
indeed like, (0.5) around last, (0.4) spring so, (0.3)
- 08 R: *se mummo?*  
the granny?
- 09 T: *joo.*  
yes.
- 10 R: *joo, (.) [juu juu (.) (kyllähä) ]*  
yes, (.) yeah yeah (.) (indeed)            ((R is nodding))

- 11 T: *[et joku, (0.4) puolisen vuotta sinne meni.*  
so it took about (0.4) six months.
- 12 (0.6)
- 13 R: *juu,=*  
*yeah,=*
- 14 T: *=meni ja siel on suurinpiirtein se keskimääräinen et toi,*  
*=took and there it is about the average so that,*
- 15 (0.5)
- 16 R: *m[m,*  
*mm,*
- 17 T: *[et sitä ei pystytty leikkaa eikä mitään (ni)*  
that it couldn't be operated on or anything (so)  
↑\_\_\_\_\_↑  
(T waves his hand))
- 18 → R: ↓*°näinhän se ↑on.°*  
PRT-CLI DEM3.SG be-3SG  
**that's how it is.**
- 19 *se on nii [jotenki tuolla keskellä [ihan,*  
it is somehow right there in the middle
- 20 T: *[(joo) [nii, (.)*  
(yeah) yeah,
- 21 *nii on joo,=*  
it is yes,=
- 22 R: *=jotenki nii olennainen o[sa ihmistä se ruokatorvi ]*  
*=somehow such an essential part of a human the esophagus*
- 23 T: *[niinpä ja siin oli se oli ]*  
I know and there was it had
- 24 *jotenki, (0.7) menny jonku ↑valtimon ympärille se kasvain*  
*somehow, (0.7) gotten around some artery the tumour*
- 25 *tai jo[tain tällasta] et ei- (.) jos se ois [leikattu ni*  
*or something like that so not- (.) if it had been operated*

In the elaboration, the first possible closure is already in line 11 (“so it took about six months”). Here T is still talking about the specific situation of the grandmother. When R responds only minimally (“yeah”, line 13), T refers to the average course of illness (“and there it is about the average so that”, line 14) but comes back to the particular reported event (“that it couldn’t be operated or anything so”, line 17). The affective stance is embedded in T’s description of a specific experience – it is not formulated as a generalized assessment in search of agreement. At this point, however, R still displays agreement (*Näinhän se on* “This is how it is”, line 18) apparently with the statement that the cancer couldn’t be operated on.

Again, the *-hän* clitic implies that the subject matter is shared knowledge or a “general truth” (Hakulinen 2001a). R continues by referring to his knowledge of the location of the esophagus (line 19), to which T displays agreement (lines 20-21). Next, R says “somehow such an essential part of a human the esophagus.” Interestingly, T starts to talk in overlap, not waiting for the transition relevance place (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974) and almost competing with R’s turn. T starts with *niinpä*, which can be translated as “I know”, which also conveys an epistemic element of competition (simultaneously with displaying agreement). After this, T goes into further detail (lines 23-25) how the specific condition of his girlfriend’s grandmother led to the terminal result. In this way he shifts the focus back from the more general perspective to his particular experience, which can be seen as a subtle way to pursue affiliation or some other, more fitted, response (Jefferson 1978; Pomerantz 1984b). This example brings forth the issue of ‘what’ aspect of the experience to generalize. R focuses on the usual consequences of esophageal cancer and not on the affective stance of disappointment and losing someone because of malpractice conveyed in the telling. Thus, the generalization here is not facilitated by the teller himself (as in example 3), nor is it focused on the affective stance of the telling that leads to the endorsement of that stance (as in example 4).

To summarize this section: In example 5, the recipient claimed an extremely strong epistemic position and followed it with a report or a second story about a similar personal experience. The second story, however, did not make his entitlement to a strong access claim regarding personal loss apparent, and so the original reception turn (“it is of course like that”) is not accounted for. Hence the recipient’s access claim, we argue, was not in line with his real-world epistemic status in relation to the teller and ended up trivializing the experience. In example 6, the recipient used generalization to achieve affiliation. The focus of the generalization, however, was not on the emotionally salient aspects of the experience but the objective facts, and so it rather invoked an image of a doctor who has experiences of these types of tumors than a recipient of an emotionally valenced experience. In both of these examples, the tellers did not treat the recipients’ responses as affiliative and sufficient for topic closure, but continued their telling and provided additional slots for affiliation (cf. Jefferson 1978).

#### **4. Discussion**

In this paper, we have described two main ways in which recipients of tellings of personal experiences fine-tune their responses: they manage (1) the strength of their access claim and

(2) the degree of generalization in these utterances. Furthermore, we have argued that these practices of epistemic calibration contribute essentially to the hearing of these utterances as affiliative. With strong access claims recipients can assert more agency over their agreeing responses. However, what we additionally argued in our analysis of example 5, was that if the strong access claim is not backed up by shared knowledge about the recipient's epistemic status or followed by the 'unpacking' of the access claim, the response can challenge the tellability of the event or even trivialize the experience. Generalizations give recipients a means to make stance-congruent assessments from an independent position without stepping into the teller's epistemic domain. This strategy, however, has the possibility of not being especially attentive to the teller's specific experience. What we additionally argued in our analysis of example 6, was that it is also crucial to consider the main focus and affective stance of the telling when deciding 'what' aspect of the telling is up for generalization.

Even if the explication of the interactional deficits associated with ASD has not been the focus of our study, we may still reflect on the specific nature of how the participants with AS approached access claims and generalizations as resources of affiliation. The first two examples concerning access claims were from the same NT-NT dyad. Examples 3 and 4 were from AS-NT dyads, with an AS-recipient in example 3, and an AS-teller in example 4. In the final two examples, both recipients were AS-participants. We may now ask, what made the responses in the last two examples exhibit more idiosyncrasies? One contributing factor could have been that the affective stances in these two tellings were more embedded (cf. Labov 1972) in the descriptions of specific experiences – they were not formulated as summarized assessments in search of agreement (as in example 3). Both examples had some affordances for generalization, but the tellers did not make them explicitly available for agreement at the end of the tellings. The AS-recipients, then, seemed to have a way of finding "the general" in these specific instances of reports of experience. Future studies with more controlled experiments are needed to find out whether this pattern holds for larger datasets.

The capacity to find the general in conversational interaction can be seen as one example of what Maynard (2005) referred to as "autistic intelligence." In their linguistic anthropological perspective, Ochs and Solomon (2005) found that, when discussing emotional topics not relating to the child him/herself, children with autism or Asperger syndrome sometimes make "proximally relevant" contributions by utilizing two strategies: "The first strategy is to make the interactional contribution locally relevant to what was just said or what just transpired, but not to the more extensive concern or enterprise under consideration. The second strategy is to shift the focus away from personal states and situations to topically

relevant impersonal, objective cultural knowledge (...) Some children mixed the two strategies, proximally relating objective knowledge to a locally prior move.” (Ochs & Solomon 2005, 158.). Their description seems to fit quite nicely to examples 5 and 6 investigated in this paper. When the AS-participants are treating the teller’s previous turn as seeking agreement instead of orienting to the whole telling as seeking affiliation, they are producing an action that is proximally relevant (e.g. example 5: “it is of course like that”, line 18). They are also orienting to the more general aspects of the experience instead of the particular emotional content (e.g. in example 6 the AS-recipient picks up the normative layer in the turn “could not be operated”, line 17, and offers an item of general knowledge about the part of the body where the cancer is). Furthermore, it is important to note that even in the latter examples the AS-recipients showed “concrete competence” (Maynard and Turowetz 2017) in several ways. They responded to the tellings in relevant places, and performed preferred actions, such as displays of agreement, which are usually considered affiliative (on the differences between agreement and affiliation, see Flint, Haugh, and Merrison 2019). Their ability to utilize access claims and generalizations can also be described as forms of concrete competence. Even though the tellers made subtle pursuits for affiliation by recycling the material and providing additional slots for affiliation, they also allowed for the flow of social action to continue without clear disruption (cf. Ochs & Solomon 2005). Based on our data it is evident that speakers can make things work even in those situations that involve different types of asymmetries.

Epistemic calibration in receiving tellings of personal experience involves a complex interplay between the strength of access claim, the degree of generalization, participants’ epistemic statuses and the focus of the telling. Sometimes a division has been made between these kinds of expressions of knowledge and expressions of emotion. This idea has been described with reference to various concepts, such as the distinction between the phatic and informative functions of communication (Bühler 1934; Jakobson 1960; Malinowski 1923; Searle 1969; Tomasello 2008). In the actual instances of interaction, however, these distinctions are seldom clear-cut, the management of one function on the contrary serving as a vehicle for the management of the other (cf. Heritage 2002; Stivers 2005; Stivers, Mondada, and Steensig 2011). Indeed, as shown in this paper, not only are affiliation and epistemics deeply intertwined, but there are systematic practices through which this linkage is constructed and maintained on a story-by-story basis.

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