

## Set Marking Tags – ‘and stuff’

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### 1. Introduction

Much sociolinguistic variationist study of ‘youth language’ or *Jugendsprache* (Schlobinski et al 1993) or *ungdomsspråk* (Kotsinas 1994) is based on the identification of a distinct variety characterised by non-standard forms. This characterisation clearly recognises a debt to sociological constructs of age categories and developmental explanations of adolescence as a stage or period of transition. In this discussion we are not going to address the issue of difference ie we are not presenting comparative data that might challenge or confirm the separate identity of ‘youth language’. Nor are we planning to argue the relative merits or limitations of the variety based view of ‘youth’ language. The perspective adopted for the analysis and interpretation of adolescent discourses is one that recognises the social, economic and political marginalisation of young people living and constructing lives in local contexts dominated by global obsessions with representations of youth and youth cultures.

This discussion examines the discourse meanings of set marking tags (SMTs) present in the talk of Australian English (AE) and Swedish speaking adolescents. SMTs have typically been associated with textual cohesive meanings of illustration or generalisations of a set of particular items, activities. We aim to show that the data problematises and confounds firstly, the necessary conditions proposed for the identification of SMTs and secondly to suggest some elaborations to current understandings of the phenomenon. We have not adopted a comparative framework for our study but rather we document and interpret SMTs as part of a project investigating discourse markers, ideologies of youth identities and the processes of grammaticalisation.

### 2. Set marking tags [SMTs]

Our debt to Dines (1980) and her discussion of SMTs has partially been acknowledged through the title of our paper. SMTs have been included in the analysis of pragmatic devices (Stubbe & Holmes 1995), utterance final tags (Aijmer 1985) and discourse particle extensions (S. Dubois 1992). These analyses and research by Cheshire (1996) suggest that scrutiny of SMTs in interactional contexts has been central to elaborating their meanings beyond explanations as

hesitation phenomena to account for their function in the organisation of verbal communication and articulations of identities. However, introductions to such discussions often refer to the optionality of the forms and suggest that coherence would be maintained if the forms were omitted. This approach diminishes the relevance of the forms and relegates them, much like earlier characterisations, as fillers and implies their role lies outside the discourse grammar.

Interestingly, the discussion of meanings for SMTs has focused on the centrality of textual meanings rather than interactional features or discourse markers. Dominant or core meanings of SMTs have been identified. According to Stubbe & Holmes (1995) and Meyerhoff (1992) they can be seen as carrying core content meanings (in contrast to meanings of addressee/ addressor relationships) and primarily cue the listener to interpret the preceding element as an illustrative example of some more general case (Dines 1980:22). According to these studies it is the prior discourse and the possibility for constructing a set that leads to the occurrences of SMTs, ie SMTs are sensitive to sequential constraints and display discourse linking through its function of alerting Hearers to that possibility.

The initial identification of SMTs was carried out using 'traditional' functional and structural criteria reported in the literature. Functionally, they were selected on the recognition of a set marking function (if a very weak or semantically bleached one) to the tag, ie it marks something (a word, phrase or turn) as belonging to a more general category, the set. In (1) the noun *soul* is modified by the SMT *å sånt* ('and such') and it functions to highlight a more general case (styles of music) of which soul is an illustrative example:

(1) HK5: men de har väl änna blitt rätt populärt me nu också (.)<sup>1</sup> tycker jag  
 [(.) me soul liksom soul å sånt

HK5: but it has become sort of quite popular with now too right (.) I think  
 [(.) with soul sort of soul and such

In (2) from the AE data, the tag *and stuff* picks out several nouns: the desert, the area, etc all of which could be interpreted as more specific examples of a general case - natural phenomena.

(2) SB2M: ...maybe Arizona – that's always sort of fascinated me, the desert,  
 that area, an' all the rocks an' cacti an' stuff

Structurally, SMTs were identified based on accounts proposed in the literature but extended beyond nominal categories ie. SMTs must appear in the tag slot following a word, phrase or turn in the preceding (adjacent) discourse. These

<sup>1</sup> Guide to symbols used in transcriptions:

:	speaker exchange	.	brief non-timed pause	@	laughter
[ ]	overlapping talk	CAPS	speaker identification	>>	continuing
—	set marking tag	< >	enclosed voice quality		

were the only obligatory criteria adopted. However, it should be noted that additional structural characteristics have been proposed including the constraint that SMTs occur at end of turns or followed by a pause (but see comments below about interaction meanings) and the observation that SMTs are generally introduced by a connector (*and/or*).

### 3. The discourse data

The data is drawn from 2 corpora – Swedish and Australian English (AE) – that included adolescent interviewees and slightly older postgraduate student(s) interviewers. The AE data comprises 48 interviews with adolescents from different types of schools (independent fee paying, Greek Orthodox college, public government schools) located in urban Melbourne conducted in 1996-1997. The adolescents were enrolled in Year 10 (aged 15-16 years) at the time of data collection. The corpus comprised a total of 99, 596 interviewee words and a mean interview time of 17 minutes.

The Swedish data consists of 14 tape-recorded informal group interviews with senior high school students about music styles and preferences totalling nearly 12 hours or approximately 92,082 interviewee words. The interviews comprised equal numbers of established female and male friendship groups from different schools, grades and study programs and were conducted by a female research assistant.

The focus as elaborated earlier is the functions and meanings of the SMTs and thus the distributional patterns and variation of use will not be addressed in detail in this paper. Furthermore, we have limited the discussion to the three most frequently occurring SMTs in each data sample. The Swedish data yielded 577 students' SMTs with 54 different types. The three most frequent SMTs are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** SMTs (selected) in Swedish

	<b>Set marking tag</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>% (of total corpus)</b>
1	å så ('and so')	150	25.99
2	Eller nånting/nåt ('or something')	102	17.67
3	å sånt ('and such')	72	12.48

Analysis of the 48 AE interviews identified 565 SMTs of 57 different types with the three shown in Table 2 as the most frequent.

**Table 2.** SMTs (selected) in AE.

	<b>Set marking tag</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>% (of total corpus)</b>
1	Or some(th/f)in(g/k)	99	17.52
2	And stuff	80	14.16
3	And that	47	8.32

#### 4. SMTs meanings and functions in the discourse data

Despite adopting the identification criteria described above the SMTs in the data revealed a complexity of meanings. In particular the notion of 'a set' is problematic in both sets of data. Examples range from cases of unambiguous recognition of the preceding element(s) the tag refers to (see (1) and (2)) to those where the reference is ambiguous (see examples (3) and (4)).

- (3) C1M: Well when I've finished school I go home... Walk home .. Um ...  
Get changed.. usually do my homework first . play some  
computer games and stuff ... things like that...
- (4) FM3: alla e samma takt ååe (.) sjunger e- exakt samma eeh texterna å så  
FM3: all are the same beat aand (.) sing e- exactly the same eeh the texts  
and so

The SMTs may refer to one or several constituents within the same phrase (eg referring to a NP - *computer games* or to the whole phrase, including *play* (ie VP) in (3), or the SMT might refer simultaneously to several phrases. Example (4) illustrates a case where the SMT could refer to the whole turn, or just to the final NP *the texts*). In addition, for some SMTs the set meaning has been almost completely bleached: In (5) it is extremely difficult to imagine what set is evoked by *or something* in her discussion of football practices, injuries etc.

- (5) BH6F: being punched up or getting caught, you know, taking someone  
out ... ankle goes on them though .. going to get the ball or  
something

Similarly in (6) below, the SMT *å så* 'and so' in BK3's turn *eller att de här m e Vietnam å så* 'or that this here with Vietnam and so'- parallels this pattern with little evidence of set meaning or composition.

##### 4.1 Participation meanings

The analysis of participation eg politeness, shared assumptions, shows that SMTs can be manipulated in the appeal to and establishment of group relationships and common ground in discourse in the talk of the Australian English and Swedish speaking adolescents. In (6) BK3 displays her participation as a friend and an expert on 'hardcore'.

- (6) BK3: en sak som skiljer också olika hardcorestilar från varann de e ju  
texterna (.) straight edge-hardcore eller dom sjunger ju ganska mycke  
om att man ska i- bli vegetarian å man ska inte döda djuren å man  
ska liksom (.) å alla dom där grejerna [då som dom står för (.) åå eh»  
R: [m  
BK3: »(.) typ (.) såna som spelar kånghardcore : å så : dom sjunger väl  
ganska mycke om (.) \*hur jävligt de e me krig å sånt\* ganska mycke  
att liksom (.) ma ska inte- eller att de här me Vietnam å så [(.)liksom  
de här me att de e så jävligt att man dödade folk åå»  
R: [mm

BK3: »(.) på dee sättet å så(.) och eh- mot nazister (.) mycke (.) åå(.) så  
(.) mot fascism överhuvudtaget mot polisen @[ mot- mot liksom mot  
(.) systemet å så (.) mer

R: [\*mm\*

R: lite mer [anarkistiskt [X m (.) okej

BK3: one thing that differs also different hardcore styles from one another  
that's the texts you know (.) straight edge hardcore or they sing quite a lot  
about that you should n- become a vegetarian and you shouldn't kill the  
animals and you should like (.) and all those things [then that they stand >

R: [m

BK3: for (.) like (.) those who play (.) and eh- bootcore and so they sing  
quite a lot about I suppose (.) \*how awful it is with war and such \* quite a  
lot that like (.) y- you shouldn't- or that this here with Vietnam and so[(.)  
like this that it's so terrible that they killed people and (.)»

R: [mm

BK3: »in that way and so (.) and eh- against nazis (.) a lot (.) and (.) so (.)  
against fascism on the whole against the police @ [against- against like  
against (.) the system and so

R: [\*mm\*

R: a bit more [anarchistic [X m (.) okay

Throughout (6) there is a tension between positive and negative politeness coinciding with a prolific use of SMTs. The SMTs facilitate the inclusion of her friends, by appealing to their shared knowledge of this music style and common group experiences, although she is the expert. This means that her expert role is somewhat mitigated. On the other hand, BK3 is also addressing the researcher. When the distinguishing features of hardcore music are topical BK3 is clearly the expert. But the discussion of the lyrics soon merges into topics about which the research assistant can be assumed to have at least as much knowledge as the girl, eg Vietnam, Nazism, fascism. The presence of the researcher poses two simultaneous meanings. First, shared knowledge, the girl displays that she assumes the researcher is familiar with the topics (ie positive politeness), and second, face saving (negative politeness), the girl recognises that the researcher may have more knowledge about these general concepts. Thus the many SMTs mitigate the force of her claims and work as a face-saving device for the girl vis-à-vis the older and more experienced researcher. This example clearly points to an interpretation of the SMTs as serving participation meanings of different levels of shared meanings. In doing so, they can work both as a means of positive and of negative politeness.

#### 4.2 Interaction meanings

Examination of the SMTs and their sequential placement in turns, topic structures and pause environments reveals that speakers manipulate SMTs as interaction devices. Extending the meanings and functions for SMTs to the interaction context adds to our knowledge of how speakers manage and participate in spoken discourse.

In the Swedish data 42% of SMTs occur in turn final position and a further 30.5% immediately prior to a turn internal pause. In the AE data nearly 66% of the tokens appear immediately prior to a pause (turn final and turn internal) (see (7)) which appears to support many of the early findings that SMTs are sentence final and by implication signalling turn exchange. Turn final SMTs in interviewee's talk are usually followed by a substantive interviewer turn frequently topic initiating. In these cases the SMT features in a topic summarising sequence to an interaction that may have lasted several turns.

- (7) CG1M: Oh I'm not sure .. I've got a couple of ideas I was thinking .... a civil engineer .. or maybe an optometrist or some'ing ...I'm not sure yet .
- (8) BH5F: so some of their songs are in Indian/ and they do one them and their just their writing it looks so artistic  
 RF3: [Mm]  
 BH5F: [and that] .. so it would be really interesting to learn that.
- (9) K4F: But Chaddy has lots of bargain shops downstairs and stuff [so, go there].

Examination of the internal structure of (7) shows that *or something* has an illustrative meaning of a type of occupation but it also occurs prior to a the internal evaluation sequence that patterns as a repetition to the opening *I'm not sure*. The SMT occurs at the conclusion of a description and would appear to confirm the illustrative functions of SMTs identified earlier. However, it appears immediately prior to an evaluation topic final sequence. Thus the SMT organises a next turn topic-completion slot. Example (8) documents a SMT that is not bounded by pauses but is featured in overlapping turns. Nevertheless the SMT appears at the end of the documentation of reasons and immediately prior to a summarising turn *so it would be really interesting to learn that*. The intriguing *so* is also a feature of (9) but this time it appears immediately following the SMT, which according to earlier findings might have been expected to reveal a pause. Once again the SMT occurs immediately prior to the topic summarising sequence. The transitional interaction of SMTs and topic management seems to be closely intertwined and suggest that the connective (non-transitional) meaning of SMTs identified by Dubois (1992) overlooks the pivot role of SMTs in the structure of topic and turns. These findings reflect the emergent nature of the SMTs in the complexities of turn and local discourse context management. They feature in the interaction meanings of signalling conclusions or next turn completion. The evidence of increasing location in non-pausal environments and co-occurrence of discourse markers (relative to earlier work on SMTs) in the Australian English and Swedish data demands further investigation to evaluate the possibility of change in the teenagers' use of SMTs in their talk.

### 4.3 Identity meanings

The frequency of SMTs in the data sets suggests that they are an important linguistic resource for the construction and performance of youth identities and realities. Of the 150 tokens of *å så* 'and so' (the most frequently occurring

SMT in the Swedish data) 69% are found in the talk of the girls. Inspection of the AE data reveals that, for the three SMTs under investigation, only slightly more girls speakers (24) include examples of SMTs than boys (21) and a slightly greater use of SMTs (129) than boys (97). But boys make greater use of *and that* SMT (previously identified as reflecting working class membership) than girls. The participant with the greatest use of this SMT was a boy who lived in the eastern suburbs, attended the private high fee paying school and who identified Latin as his favourite subject. To speculate, it is possible that the identity meanings for this SMT have shifted to account for issues of masculinity and informality. Girls use *and stuff* more than boys do (52 and 28 tokens respectively). In the Australian English data it is the second most frequently occurring token compared to the 2 instances in Dines (1980) data.

In this discussion of meanings for the SMTs we would want to move beyond identity meanings of the forms as mere correlations of the user of the forms. The question then becomes what types of identity discourses are constructed: given the quantitative findings and limitations on space we will briefly address *and stuff* and its role in descriptions and opinion episodes. Typically these SMTs are found in responses to 'prying' questions about their friends and their 'usual' habits or practices.

- (10) E2F: or I have just a group of friends come over and we just hang out at my place and listen to music and stuff ... just that kind of stuff [I like to do]
- (11) KL2F: we see a lot of each other coz we sit next to each other/ and then on the weekends . we go out to parties and stuff together and . just hang out
- (12) K5F: I go out with my friends and stuff ...

Earlier discussion identified the limitations of the set notion for accounting for SMTs meanings. In (10) the SMT raises ambiguities about what else they might listen to or perhaps the activity illustrates what else they might do. However, additional identity meanings can be gleaned from firstly the frequent use of the form in discussion of what is normal, ie normal is *and stuff*. Activities are stuff like – they just are like stuff – and work to represent their place in their peer group and distancing them from the researcher. *And stuff* echoes shared knowledge (see (10) and (11)) about the commonalities of 'leisure' activities for example for the adolescent and the interviewer. The frequency of use and the identity of the users of *and stuff* in the Australian English data work together to construct distance between the participants. The frequency of the form constructs the identity meanings for the users about 'youth' and highlights the relative 'non-youth' membership of the slightly older interviewers. These two meanings simultaneously link identity and participation meanings for the adolescents.

## 5. Summary

This discussion has argued for an integrated and comprehensive analysis of the discourse meanings and functions of SMTs in youth discourse including contestation of limiting meaning and identification to a set marking function. The results clearly indicate that the SMT is a salient youth feature; it is very frequent in both the AE and the Swedish data, and the rate of use of SMTs far exceeds the results of previous studies. Our findings point to similarities between AE and Swedish speaking youths – frequency, saliency, commonalities of discourse functions for the SMTs – which could indicate that we are dealing with a cross linguistic phenomenon. Young people make use of SMTs in similar and innovative ways to express meanings of participation, interaction and identity.

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