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# That jacksprat: An interactional perspective on English *that*<sup>☆</sup>

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## Abstract

This paper analyses the use of English *that* in a range of socially distinct discourses. The uses that are conventionally considered to be nonstandard or colloquial express interpersonal, affective meanings by co-ordinating the speaker's and the addressee's attention on those points in the discourse where a shared perspective is assumed to exist. Other uses of *that* in the corpus analysed here, including the relativizer and the complementizer, also have a primarily interactive function in discourse. When seen within this perspective, several problems that previous scholars have noted in the analysis of deictic *that* no longer appear problematic, but instead follow a regular pattern of use. This pattern reflects the ways in which speakers and addressees co-operate in order to manage the cognitive and social constraints on their joint creation of discourse.

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## 1. Introduction

Inevitably, the analysis of language requires an 'objectification' of the phenomenon that it attempts to understand. As in any intellectual discipline, we linguists define the boundaries of our object of enquiry, carefully identifying the language or the variety of language on which we are working, and using a methodological framework which forces us to think in terms of discrete, static categories. This has been a necessary procedure, perhaps, but it seems advisable to reflect from time to time on whether the methodological procedures that have become conventional in our disci-

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pline might lead us to overlook any important aspects of language. In this paper, therefore, I explore the insights that can be gained from transgressing some of the discrete categories that are commonly used in linguistics. My analysis focuses on a single form, the word *that*, which occurs in several different syntactic constructions and enters into many different sets of structural oppositions.

Commentators on English have traditionally disapproved of the multiple functions of what Addison termed ‘that jacksprat’. For example, Addison’s *Humble Petition of Who and Which* used sentence (1), below, to illustrate the potential ambiguity caused by *that* ‘usurping the functions’ of *who* and *which* as relative pronouns:

- (1) That that I say is this: that that that that gentleman has advanced, is not that, that he should have proved. (1711, *The Spectator*)

Arthur Sefton, writing over two hundred years later, accepts *that* as a relative pronoun but instead objects to its use as an intensifier. He constructs sentence (2) to illustrate what he considers the ‘legitimate’ uses of *that*, as a demonstrative pronoun, demonstrative adjective, conjunction, relative pronoun and ‘relative adverb’ (the first *that* in his sentence).

- (2) On the day that I came, I saw that that that that man did was wrong. (1984, *Times Education Supplement*)

The ‘illegitimate’ use of *that*, as an intensifier, occurs in expressions such as *it’s not that important*: this use detracts, Sefton claims, from the two essential functions of *that*, which are ‘to join and to demonstrate’. It is interesting that both these authors were as secure in their convictions as they were wrong on their facts: *that* as a relativizer predates the use of the *wh*- pronouns, and *that* as an intensifier has essentially the same function as when it is a demonstrative or a conjunction, as this paper will show. But in any case it is unnecessary to worry about the multifunctionality of *that*, for speakers of English would surely have taken steps to reduce its syntactic functions if these really caused ambiguity. It makes more sense to assume that its continuing survival as a member of a large number of different syntactic categories means that *that* serves an essential communicative function. I will argue in this paper that a single communicative function can be identified for all the syntactic categories to which *that* belongs, but that in order to appreciate this function we need to take an overall view of the ways in which speakers use the form.

Previous research on *that* has not allowed us to take such a general view, for it has mainly focused on one set of structural oppositions at a time, as is conventional in linguistic analysis. Thus Quirk’s (1957) study of relative pronoun usage in English analyses *that* in variation with *who(m)*, *which* and zero. Romaine (1982) also studies relative *that* in relation to the *wh*- forms, this time predominantly from a historical viewpoint. *That* has also been analysed as part of the set-marking tag (or, in Dubois’ (1992) terms, the extension particle) *and that*, *and all that*, *and that sort of thing* (Dines, 1975), in which case it alternates with other set-marking tags such as *and stuff*, *and things* and, of course, with the absence of a tag. A number of scholars

working on deixis have investigated *that* as the unmarked member of the pair *this* and *that* (see Lakoff, 1974; Levinson, 1983; Lyons, 1991); *that* has also been discussed as an alternant to *the* in a series of papers by Thorne (1972, 1982), Lyons (1975) and Seppänen (1988). Linde (1979) and Montgomery (1989) investigate the alternation of the pronouns *that* and *it* in spoken discourse. Macaulay (1991) and Thompson and Mulac (1991) identify some of the factors governing the presence or absence of *that* as a clause connector in utterances such as *I believe that there is life after death*; Rissanen (1991) also analyses variation between *that* and zero as a connector between an object clause and the matrix clause, with a primary focus on the history of the forms. Beal (1988) discusses the use of *that* in subordinating conjunctions such as *provided that* or *seeing that*, again with a historical focus.

Focused analyses of this type allow us to discover structured variation in language, and each of the studies mentioned above has revealed some of the relationships that exist between *that* and the other members of the different structural systems of which it forms part. As already mentioned, however, focused analyses cannot provide a general overview of the communicative function of *that* in English.

Only a few scholars have attempted to give a broader analysis of *that*. Bolinger (1972) discusses *that* mainly as a conjunction, but also considers whether its connective function is related to its deictic use. His insightful discussion, however, is based on invented examples and does not arrive at a clear conclusion. Linguists working on deixis have also taken a broader perspective, considering the meaning of demonstrative *that* both when it refers to some property of the extralinguistic context and when it refers to part of the preceding discourse. They do not, however, take into account the function of *that* when it is a conjunction, intensifier or relativizer. In fact, recent overviews of research on deixis conclude that even for a language as well studied as English the nature of the process of deixis and the syntactic and discourse contexts that condition it are not well understood (Anderson and Keenan, 1985: 301; see also Levinson, 1983: 61). Levinson describes our present understanding of deixis as consisting only of “rather simple philosophical approaches to indexicals” on the one hand and “a mass of complicated linguistic facts” on the other (*ibid.*).

The approach that I have adopted, therefore, is to take the “complicated linguistic facts” of spoken discourse as a starting point, assessing the meaning of *that* within the contexts of the discourse in which it occurs, and attempting to find some order within the mass of apparently contradictory phenomena. This avoids restricting the analysis to an initial classification in terms of a given syntactic or semantic system, such as demonstrative, relative pronoun, or deictic item, and makes it possible to see the basic communicative function that *that* fulfils for speakers of English.

## 2. Methodology

Except where indicated, the analysis and the illustrative examples are taken from three collections of spoken discourse. The first consists of some informal conversations of working-class adolescents, aged between 11 and 18, recorded in adventure playgrounds in Reading (analysed within a variationist framework in Cheshire,

1982); the second consists of recordings of professional interactions made by myself and graduate students at Birkbeck College, University of London between 1984 and 1990 (those interactions analysed here are mainly counselling sessions) and the third consists of my notebook collection of attested stretches of spoken discourse from the informal conversations of 'educated' native speakers of British and American English, together with some recordings of this same type of speech. This third collection also contains some utterances heard on radio and television. The mix is intentional, since my aim, as stated at the beginning of this paper, was to explore the insights that can be gained by transgressing the boundaries that we conventionally impose on the object of our enquiry. These boundaries typically restrict not only the syntactic categories that are considered in any given analysis, but also the social and situational speech styles from which the data are taken.

Berrendonner (1993) justifies a methodological approach of this type on three counts, all of which apply to my analysis. Firstly, speakers themselves sometimes mix so-called regional, social or stylistic variants freely, irrespective of their own social and regional origins and irrespective of a style of speech that an analyst, using non-linguistic criteria, might define as formal, informal or colloquial. Secondly, speakers are often able to understand variants that they do not use themselves, which implies that these variants should be considered as part of their receptive or passive competence. Thirdly, by analysing the use of linguistic features in contexts that are sociolinguistically diverse it is sometimes possible to observe structural regularities, or regularities in meaning and function, that would otherwise have been overlooked. This is the case here, as I will show in later sections of this paper.

A common denominator for the discourse that was analysed is that it was spontaneous, intimate and involved. I was a participant in all the conversations except for the counselling sessions; in these situations, however, the participants did not know each other well, despite the intimate nature of their talk, so they did not have a great deal of background knowledge available to each other that the analyst (that is, myself) did not share (see also Lee, 1987: 378). We will see that many of the meanings of *that* that I identify in this paper relate to the shared knowledge and attitudes of speakers: it was possible to identify this background understanding because I was a full participant in the conversations, and I knew the speakers well. This ethnographic approach has the obvious disadvantage that the data form part of a 'private' collection that cannot be publicly verified, but the publicly available corpora, such as the London-Lund corpus, are unsuitable for an analysis that has recourse to the background knowledge of participants, since it is impossible for analysts to have enough background information about the anonymous participants.

It is difficult to avoid the problems of the analyst attributing meaning and functions to a linguistic feature in a discourse context, other than to avoid this kind of qualitative analysis altogether. Wherever possible I have justified the interpretation that I propose by taking account of the subsequent linguistic behaviour of speakers, as is usual in conversation analysis. In addition, I have included only those interpretations of *that* that I could identify at least five times in the speech of at least two speakers, in order to ensure some consistency in the analysis. Thus each of the examples given in this paper is representative of at least five similar examples. The analy-

sis is qualitative, based on approximately 600 occurrences of *that*. I cannot, of course, claim that it is necessarily representative of a wider sample of English, and at a later stage it may be instructive to carry out a quantitative analysis of a larger corpus. For the time being, my view is that the various readings of *that* identified in my relatively small corpus are probably not unrepresentative of the communicative function of this form. In any case, these readings can certainly contribute to our understanding of the general function of *that*.

Rather than beginning with a pre-existing classificatory system, I allowed the data to determine the syntactic categories that were analysed. In other words, I first identified all the occurrences of *that* in the corpus, and then classified them in terms of their apparent discourse meaning and function. In this way I determined three general functions: firstly, *that* was used to refer to an entity in the extra-linguistic context; secondly, *that* was used to refer to something that had been mentioned within the preceding discourse (the cotext); thirdly, *that* was used as a discourse ‘bridge’, to connect sections of discourse together. The categories correspond to those used to describe deixis by, for example, Halliday and Hasan (1975), so a first reaction might be that this methodology has not resulted in any new discoveries. However, the ‘entities’ to which *that* refers most often in my corpus are very different from those that have previously been identified. And although the three functions are rather disparate, I argue here that all three reflect the ways in which speakers orient their discourse towards their addressees. In all cases, therefore, *that* has a common, primarily interactive, function. Furthermore, many of the analytic problems that have perplexed previous scholars can be seen as straightforward illustrations of the basic function of *that*, if the starting point for our analysis is that it has a primarily interactive function in face-to-face communication.

### 3. Reference to the context of speech

I begin with an example of what many would consider to be the basic function of *that*: as a “pure place-deictic word” (Levinson, 1983: 79) in a simple structural relationship with *this*. Conventional analyses see *this* as encoding proximal deixis, referring to items near to the speaker; *that* is then considered to encode non-proximal deixis, referring to items further away. Example (3), from the playground recordings, contains an apparently straightforward example of the spatial deictic meaning of *that*. *That* is in construction with the word *bag*; as she spoke Jacky pointed to the bag in question, presumably in order to indicate to her addressee the specific bag that she had in mind.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Transcription conventions used in this paper are as follows:

- . brief pause (not timed)
- .. longer pause (not timed)
- (2 secs) timed pause
- see more loudly
- ? uttered with rising (question) intonation
- ! uttered with rising (exclamatory) intonation

(3) Jacky: Pass me that bag would you?

Deixis is frequently said to be egocentric, identifying things in the world and relating them to the speaker's point of view (Traugott, 1982: 252). Thus, since the bag is not immediately near to Jacky, she would be expected to choose the non-proximal deictic term *that* rather than the proximal term *this*. However, if we conceive of the meanings of *this* and *that* in this way, we then have to account for utterances where a spatial interpretation cannot apply. These utterances constitute some of the 'complicated linguistic facts' referred to in section 1, which have not so far been satisfactorily explained in the research literature. Thus Levinson (1983: 81) gives the invented example of searching through a tin of needles for a size 9: examples (4) and (5), he writes, would each be an appropriate exclamation when the right needle was found:

(4) This is it!

(5) That's it!

Levinson explains this possibility as a "systematic neutralization of the proximal-distal dimension when it is not especially relevant" (ibid.). In my corpus, however, the proximal-distal dimension is rarely relevant: in fact, Jacky's utterance in example (3) is the only example of *that* as an apparently straightforward place deictic. In the other utterances in my corpus where *that* appears to be in a simple structural relationship with *this*, the interpretation is much less straightforward. Consider example (6), where Jacky again made a gesture to show what she meant, as in example (3):

(6) Jacky: She kept on fiddling with my bracelet and trying  
→ to pull it off me and I went like that . see.

The gesture that Jacky made to accompany her utterance was a tap on her left wrist, made with her right hand; here, both *this* and *that* would seem to have been equally possible choices, just as in Levinson's examples, with the distance from the speaker identical in each case. Examples such as (6), where either *this* or *that* seem equally possible, are very frequent in my data, as I have already said. In order to account for the occurrences in my corpus, therefore, it is pointless to imagine a basic spatial meaning for the demonstratives *this* and *that*, for it would then be necessary to conclude that the spatial dimension of their meaning is virtually always neutralised. Example (7) shows that *this* also occurs in a context where *that* seems equally possible. Here Jeff was holding out a piece of chewing-gum and giving his reasons for not wanting it himself:

(7) Jeff: You can have this one .. I don't want it . I don't like the spearmint ones

Instead, if we examine the larger stretch of discourse in which *this* or *that* occur, a different basic meaning can be seen as more appropriate. In order to appreciate this, we must take account of what researchers on spoken language have termed

‘involvement’ (see, for example, Chafe, 1982, 1986; Gumperz, 1982; Tannen, 1989). Although different writers use the term in somewhat different ways, it refers, in all cases, to the assumption that spoken discourse is a collaborative production, with speakers and addressees working together to produce meaning as the discourse unfolds. Gumperz (1982) sees conversational involvement as the felicitous result of inference: conversationalists not only infer, locally, what utterances mean, but also infer globally what the interaction is about and what their participation in it is expected to be (see Tannen (1989: 10) for discussion). Chafe (1982) identifies a number of linguistic features that speakers use to show their own involvement in what they are saying (for example, frequent reference to themselves, or to their mental processes) as well as a number of features that result from speakers attempting to ensure interpersonal involvement between themselves and their addressee (such as the use of *you know*). Cheshire (1989) discusses some linguistic features that appear to achieve interpersonal involvement as a result of the conversational inferences that they require addressees to draw. A single utterance may, of course, contain markers of both speaker involvement and speaker–addressee involvement. Chafe further identifies markers of topic involvement – although when analysing spoken discourse it can be difficult to draw clear distinctions between these different types of involvement.

If we now consider example (6) in its wider discourse context, we can note that Jacky’s use of *that* occurs at a point in her narrative where she is explicitly involving her addressee in the discourse by her judicious placing of *see*. She also uses *never* as a negative marker, which is one of the markers of speaker–addressee involvement discussed by Cheshire (1989). In the following extract these markers of speaker–addressee involvement are given in italics:

Jacky: The other day . when we was up Ridgeway . when we was at primary school .. she always used to get me in trouble and I used to hate that . I didn’t mind getting in trouble but her . she kept on getting me in trouble . and one day I was sitting in class and a student was reading us a story . I wasn’t listening anyway. but she kept on fiddling with my bracelet and trying to pull it off me and I went like *that .. see* . and she sent me outside the door . but it was her *see* . and when the teacher come . Mr. Mayhews . he come in and told me off *see* . and he blamed everything onto me . so I told him what happened and when he asked Wendy Wendy said that she *never* .. and they all agreed with her *see*

In my corpus, *that* frequently co-occurs with features marking interpersonal involvement in contexts where, in principle, it would seem equally possible for speakers to have chosen to use *this*. *This*, on the other hand, tends to co-occur with linguistic features that encode the speaker’s own involvement in what is being said. Thus example (7) has first person pronouns, and Jeff expresses his personal stance towards spearmint-flavoured chewing gum. On the basis of the occurrences of *this* and *that* in my corpus, then, we could say that *this* tends to encode the speaker’s personal involvement in what he or she is saying, whereas *that* tends to encode the

speaker's desire to ensure interpersonal involvement between themselves and their addressee. Thus in example (7) Jeff could have said *you can have that one*, but that part of his utterance would then have been oriented more explicitly towards securing the involvement of the addressee, rather than towards the expression of his own involvement. Utterances where *this* and *that* appear to be interchangeable (such as Levinson's *This is it!* and *That's it!*) can be accounted for in these terms at least as well as in terms of a neutralization of a basic spatial meaning.

Of course it is impossible to say whether an interpretation in terms of involvement is more 'correct' than an interpretation in terms of spatial orientation. It is worth stressing, however, that the concept of interpersonal involvement can account for some of the uses of *that* that are considered to be problematic, such as those termed 'empathetic' (see, for discussion, Fillmore, 1971; Lakoff, 1974; Lyons, 1977). Lakoff (1974), for example, discusses an utterance, reproduced here as (8), where she suggests that *that* expresses the speaker's concerned interest and, crucially, sympathy, towards the addressee's sore throat:

(8) How's that throat?

From a structural point of view, there are several alternants that could have been used in place of *that*, including *your* and *the*. Using *your*, I assume, would be neutral regarding attitude, indicating simply an awareness of the addressee's illness; using the definite article *the*, on the other hand, could be said to make explicit the fact that the speaker has some previous knowledge of the illness (see Quirk et al. (1985: 265–266) on the functions of the definite article). *That* can then be assumed to indicate not only that the speaker has previous knowledge of the addressee's illness, but also, by virtue of its function as a signal of interpersonal involvement, that he or she empathises with the addressee's suffering. Thus this 'problematic' use of *that* is not problematic at all, but simply reflects the function of *that* as a marker of interpersonal involvement. By contrast, the stereotypical doctor's *how's this throat?* can be seen as indicating speaker involvement – some would say insincerely – in addition to prior knowledge of the illness. The structural alternants trigger different global conversational inferences (in Gumperz' sense) by signalling different types of conversational involvement.

Example (9), which is taken from the television weather forecast, contains a similar use of *that*:

(9) Tomorrow that rain will be here . spreading in from the north-west (ITN male weather forecaster, 30.4.92)

Again, *that* does not function as a straightforward deictic with a spatial meaning: there was no point looking in either the physical context or the discourse context in order to identify the referent, for no rain clouds were visible on the weather map on the television screen, and there had been no previous mention of rain. Once more, the function of *that* becomes easier to see if we consider the form in relation to the other items that could have occurred in its place. The forecaster could, for instance,



have used the definite article rather than the demonstrative: had he said *tomorrow the rain will be here*, he would presumably have implied that his audience would have no problem in identifying the referent (rain, after all, is a cultural phenomenon in Britain). Instead, by using *that*, the forecaster foregrounds speaker–addressee involvement. Different addressees could presumably draw different inferences from the foregrounding of interpersonal involvement: for some the inference may be that the forecaster is aware of his audience’s attitude towards the rain, and that he is in sympathy with it.

In these last two examples, then, *that* appears to function in a similar way to discourse markers such as *oh*, which propose stretches of discourse as joint centres of attention for speakers and addressees (Schiffrin, 1987). In example (3) (Jacky’s *pass me that bag would you?*) the speaker involves the addressee by proposing as centre of attention a noun for which the referent must be located: in examples such as (8) and (9), on the other hand, a straightforward identification of the referent cannot be made and an additional inference is therefore generated. Since in some conversational contexts *that* typically co-occurs with features indicating interpersonal involvement, I have suggested that the additional inference is that the speaker wishes to foreground speaker–addressee involvement – perhaps by indicating that the speaker is aware of the addressee’s attitude towards the referent, and that they share that attitude. In the examples considered so far the stretches of discourse marked as joint centres of attention in this way have been the nouns with which *that* is in construction, but there are many other possibilities, as we will see.

In some cases the orientation which the speaker assumes their addressee to have is a negative one, as it was in examples (8) and (9). This is not always the case, however, as example (10) shows (unless, of course, we assume that the only good football is the one that is in the net):

- (10) And here comes Gascoigne again with that ball .. and yes .. it’s a goal! (Football commentary, BBC Radio 1, 13.5.92)

Not surprisingly, television presenters tend to use *that* to foreground speaker–addressee involvement in weather forecasts and in sports commentaries, where an appropriate style of presentation is relaxed, ‘chatty’ and informal; they do not use it when reading the news, when the style is more detached and formal.

I mentioned above that previous writers have seen examples of this kind as ‘complicated’ and difficult to incorporate into a formal analysis of deixis (see, for discussion, Levinson, 1983: 81). It should be clear by now, however, that the problems that analysts have encountered have stemmed from their intuitive assumption that the basic meaning of *that* is to signal spatial deixis, and that *that* is a member of the structural set *this* and *that*. If, instead, we examine the way that speakers use *that* in conversational contexts, it becomes clear that the structural set must be extended to include more determiners than simply *this* (*the* and the possessive adjectives, for example). None of these other determiners has a spatial meaning, and I have argued that it is both unnecessary and unhelpful to assume a spatial meaning for *that*.

If we now widen the analysis to include cases where *that* enters into a structural relationship with a different set of items, we can see further examples where its function appears to be one of securing interpersonal involvement. Consider examples (11) and (12):

- (11) You could go there by train . it doesn't cost that much  
 (12) Sadie: Well .. she usually walks home actually .. it isn't that far  
 Barbara: Oh I thought it was a couple of miles

Here *that* is an adverb, in construction with *much* in (11) and *far* in (12); it is in a paradigmatic relation not only with other adverbs, such as the intensifier *very*, but also with zero. Unlike *very*, however, which merely intensifies the meaning of the item with which it is in construction, *that* requires some additional conversational inferences to be drawn, contrasting the speaker's view with what the speaker appears to think the addressee's view might be. Thus in example (11), someone who says *it costs very little* is clearly stating their own point of view; if they use the negative expression *it doesn't cost much*, however, there is a hint that they believe their addressee could disagree; and if they say *it doesn't cost that much* there is more than a hint – the implication is that the price is not as great as the addressee might think it is. This interpretation is confirmed by the interchange in (12).

When the adverb *that* occurs in a discourse context that is not syntactically negative, as in (13) below, *that* contrasts with the intensifier *so*. Like *so*, it intensifies the force of the item with which it is in construction, inviting the addressee to 'scale up' its force (Quirk et al., 1985: 590–591); I would argue, however, that unlike *so*, it implies that the addressee might disbelieve the strength of the assertion that the speaker is making. Thus in example (13) the speaker, who had just returned to work after a bad attack of influenza, goes on to give further details of the severity of his illness after his phrase *I was that ill*, as if to say that he was more ill than we might reasonably be expected to have imagined:

- (13) I was that ill .. it was awful .. I couldn't even stand up . I was off work for a week.

It is worth stressing that in example (13), just as in (11) and (12), *that* appears to refer to an assumed view that the speaker believes the addressee to have, but it is a view that the speaker does not explicitly state. The same was true of examples (8) and (9). We might expect, therefore, that examples such as these would be more likely to occur in relaxed situations, between people who know each other well enough to believe that they can predict the other's views and attitudes. This was certainly the case in my own corpus; it is confirmed by Quirk et al. (1985: 447), who write that examples such as (11) and (12), where *that* occurs as an intensifier in a syntactically negative context, are typical of informal styles of English, and that examples such as (13), where the intensifier *that* occurs in a non-negative context, are nonstandard (and therefore, presumably, are unlikely to occur in a formal context – or, at least, might be thought inappropriate in a formal context). Irrespective of its

status as a standard or nonstandard feature of English, however, the principles involved in using and interpreting intensifier *that* are no different from the principles that govern its occurrence as a determiner. In all the cases considered so far (with the possible exception of example (3), where a spatial meaning can be attributed to *that*) *that* functions as a marker of positive politeness (Brown and Levinson, 1987), drawing attention to views that are shared by speakers and addressees. In more detached, formal styles of English, when speakers and addressees are less intimately acquainted, it would be presumptuous for speakers to suggest that they might know the views of their addressees. It is not surprising, therefore, if the intensifier *that* is typical of informal styles of English.

When *that* is part of the set-marking tag *and that* it can also signal interpersonal involvement. Consider utterance (14), from the informal conversations recorded in the adventure playgrounds, where speakers knew each other very well.

- (14) Wendy: Russell and that .. they were down there making a a camp .. you know with some other boys . they was messing about

Dines (1975) identified a clear discourse function for set-marking tags: “to cue the listener to interpret the preceding element as an illustrative example of a more general case” (ibid.: 22). *And that* in (14) illustrates this function very clearly, for everyone present knew Russell and could identify the friends with whom he usually spent his time. By saying *Russell and that*, Wendy refers to this set of people by naming just one of the members of the group, expressing a more general notion, therefore, by a specific example. *That* does more than simply identify the set, however, for it simultaneously draws attention to the knowledge that Wendy assumes her addressees to share with her; once again we see that *that* can function as a marker of positive politeness.

Dines (ibid.) found that set marking tags were also used to relate parts to an unknown whole or to a vague complex of ideas. Example (15), also from the playground recordings, illustrates this function. The utterance occurred during a conversation between Cathy, Jacky and myself, during which Cathy was complaining about her grandmother, who lived with Cathy and her family:

- (15) Cathy: Say she was cooking her dinner today . she'd be talking about next year's dinner . God she gets on my nerves sometimes

Jenny: Does she live all by herself?

Cathy: No she lives with me .. she lives over there . with us

→ Jenny: Does she share your kitchen and that?

It is not clear from the following conversation whether my question *does she share your kitchen and that?* was interpreted as referring to a set of potentially shared things, such as kitchens, bathrooms, food and so on, by explicitly naming only one of them; or as referring to the set of situations that can arise when an aged parent lives with her daughter and her family, of which one is the sharing of a kitchen. Just as in example (14), however, the precise nature of the set of referents is not at stake;

in informal conversation it is often more important to communicate a common understanding and a shared perspective on the topic of conversation than to communicate precise information about the topic. It is no surprise to find that *that* frequently occurs in set marking tags, for as Dubois (1992: 182) points out, the reference set of most extension particles – or set marking tags – is ephemeral and context-dependent, based on culturally and individually related concepts, on the association of nuances and on shared knowledge specific to the participants.

In example (16), *that* again orients the discourse towards the addressee, this time by making more explicit reference to the shared experience of speaker and addressee.

- (16) Jacky: Yeah . and that day she wanted . she didn't know when I was going on holiday with her . you know for the day

Jacky and Cathy have again been discussing Cathy's grandmother, whom they find irritating, as we have seen. *That* is not used anaphorically here, for there had been no previous mention of the day in question; instead, it appears to be used to nominate a joint focus of attention. Jacky is about to begin a personal narrative, recounting a family day out when Cathy's grandmother had forgotten that Jacky was to accompany the family and had taken up so much space in the car with her various belongings that there had barely been room for Jacky. Jacky and Cathy have often talked about this event together; Jacky's use of *that* makes explicit reference to their shared experience on that particular day and also, it seems, to their shared attitudes towards the event, as well as their attitudes to Cathy's grandmother. We can note the co-occurrence of *that* and another discourse feature, *you know*, whose function can also be to orient the discourse towards the addressee (Holmes, 1986; Coates, 1987).

In summary, if we adopt a more discourse-oriented view of the functions of *that*, it becomes possible to see a common function in all the utterances considered in this section. Speakers appear to use *that* as a way of foregrounding a referent – putting it into high focus, as some writers would say (see Cornish, 1988; García, 1977) – relative to the other words that could have been used in its place. These other words are not simply *this* or *the*, which are the items that are usually discussed with reference to the deictic function of *that* (see, for example, Lyons, 1991; Seppänen, 1988), but also *so*, *very*, zero forms and set marking tags such as *and things* or *and them*. Clearly, I am using the term 'referent' to denote a wider range of entities than is conventional, including not only 'real world' entities such as a bag, a throat or rain, but also the attitudes, shared experience and shared background knowledge of speakers – Lyons' earlier term 'application' is perhaps more useful here than 'referent'. Furthermore, not only does *that* put the referent into high focus, but it implies that speakers are aware of the addressee's stance in relation to the referent. Thus my analysis so far supports a view of deixis such as that taken by Ehlich (1982): "To communicate effectively, the hearer's attentiveness needs to be brought into concord with that of the speaker ... the use of a deictic expression can be understood by the hearer as an instrument ... to execute a set of orientation processes which the speaker believes to be necessary for achieving the goal of the communication" (ibid.: 324–325). I should

stress, however, that one of the goals of the communication for which *that* appears to be particularly useful is an interpersonal goal, ensuring that speakers and addressees are aware of their shared attitudinal perspective on what is being said, and jointly participating in the linguistic creation of conversational involvement.

#### 4. Reference to the cotext

In this second group of functions, *that* refers to something which has already been mentioned in the preceding discourse. We are dealing here, then, with what has been referred to as textual anaphora (Lyons, 1977; Ehlich, 1982). A straightforward example is where the referent has been identified by a preceding noun phrase; this is the case in example (17), where *that boat* refers to the same entity as the earlier mention of *the ferry*. Here *that* appears to alert addressees to the fact that the boat has been previously mentioned and instructs them to focus attention on the ferry, about which more information is forthcoming:

(17) all I remember was we'd been out having a good time . a good drink . and . er  
 . we was coming back to the ferry and there was some people running behind  
 us . turned round and it was . er . one cadet and one junior officer and another  
 → officer . he was a radio officer .. now on that boat . the Union Castle .

Another straightforward example, where *that* refers to a longer stretch of the preceding discourse, is example (18), where *that* refers to the preceding description of the atmosphere on the Union Castle:

(18) now on that boat . the Union Castle . they had no time for you like . it was  
 → a snooty type of like . you know . and that suited us didn't bother us in  
 the slightest . but they tried to talk to us . you know. which I found a bit sus-  
 picious

Examples of this type have been analysed by many scholars working on discourse anaphora and deixis (see, for example, Lyons, 1977: 670; Levinson, 1983: 67). It has not previously been noted, however, as far as I am aware, that *that* as a discourse anaphor can play a very important role in signalling affective or interpersonal meaning. For example, when *that* as a predicate anaphor refers to part of the preceding discourse that was modalised, it can ensure that the modalisation remains in high focus. Consider my colleague's response in (19):

(19) Jenny: you look a bit frantic  
 Colleague: I am that .. she wants the student numbers for this afternoon's  
 meeting . it's getting ridiculous

By using the hedge *a bit* I downplay the force of *frantic*. My colleague uses *that* to focus our joint attention on *a bit frantic*, thereby approving my assessment of his

state of mind; he then goes on to give an explanation for it. Here, then, just as in the examples discussed in the previous section, the speaker uses *that* to refer to the attitude, or in this case the personal statement, of the addressee. Unlike the examples in the previous section, however, the addressee's attitude is perfectly explicit, having been expressed in the preceding discourse.

A similar example is provided by (20), below. This occurred during a playground conversation about rats. Jacky had indicated her attitude towards her topic with the intensifier *really*, as well as by her use of stress and intonation (not marked here). By using *that*, I focus our joint attention on the size of the rat, thereby implying that I agreed with Jacky's view of the rat as 'really horrible' (if I agree that a rat the size of a cat is indeed big, I presumably agree that it was horrible); and I then go on to ask for further details:

- (20) Jacky: yeah . it was on the path bit it was like a big cat . really horrible  
 Jenny: That's big . what colour was it .. grey?

As before, this use of *that* can be considered to be positively polite, focusing on the shared attitude of the speaker and the addressee towards what is being discussed.

It is equally polite to indicate not so much agreement with what has been said, but simply acceptance, as Jacky does in (21). Here my own contribution was heavily modalised, with the projecting clause *I think*, contrastive *do*, and the downtoners *just* and *a little bit*. Jacky's use of *that* focuses on my downplaying of Jacky and Cathy's swearing rather than on the fact that they swore, as we see from her explanation that she has been trying to stop swearing. Her use of *that* indicates that she accepts my modalisation, on which she comments (saying *that's good*) and then elaborates, thereby moving the conversation forward:

- (21) Cathy: Did we swear on the other tape?  
 Jenny: I think you did swear just a little bit  
 Jacky: That's good . I've tried to stop swearing.

In other examples in my corpus *that* refers not to a preceding modalisation but to a proposition that has just been asserted. In cases such as these *that* sometimes appears to function as a straightforward sentence anaphor, allowing the conversation to progress by expanding on a previous proposition. Depending on the nature of that proposition, however, there may simultaneously be a clear element of acceptance. Thus my contribution in example (22) can be interpreted as putting Cathy's statement that she does not like her grandmother into higher focus than if I had used the alternant form *it*; *that* signals that I accept the statement. This acceptance is clear from the fact that, having centred our joint attention on Cathy's assertion, I go on to offer an explanation for it:

- (22) Cathy: I've only got one and I don't like her  
 Jenny: That's probably because she lives with you. if you only saw her now and again (inaudible)

Jacky: I likes my nan because ..

In example (23), from the same conversation about grandmothers, *that* proposes as a joint focus of attention Cathy's implied criticism of her grandmother, and asks about the reasons for her grandmother's meanness. Cathy's assertion was accompanied by laughter, indicating her personal involvement in what she is saying; *that* acknowledges this personal involvement as well as the criticism, in a way that would not have been possible if the zero form had been used (I could, in principle, have simply asked *why?* with an appropriate intonation so that the form extended over more than a single syllable – see Bolinger, 1972):

- (23) Jacky: I likes my nan because. my nan lives at Portsmouth and I can only go round the corner to the fair . and she's ever so nice . and once a year she sends us a pound for Christmas and for our birthdays she sends us a pound  
 Cathy: (laughter) we don't . we gets thirty pence for birthdays thirty-five pence for Christmas (laughter)  
 → Jenny: why's that?  
 Cathy: I don't know . she's got about a hundred pound in the bank and then she's got about fifty-six pound in saving stamps

In summary, then, examples (18)–(23) show how speakers and addressees communicate not only by exchanging propositional information but also by constantly acknowledging the affective component of each other's discourse: in other words, using *that* to focus on the affective component of the interlocutor's meaning is one way of creating an intersubjective 'subtext' to the ongoing discourse, whilst simultaneously building on the propositional or ideational component of the discourse.

The importance of creating this subtext can be seen by analysing points where a conversation has temporarily floundered. Example (24) illustrates one such point: it is taken from an analysis of the discourse strategies used by 14-year-old school-children in group discussions (reported in Jenkins and Cheshire, 1991). Here the group had been discussing the topic of being an outsider, and Suzie had offered the example of her experience of being a new girl at school.

- (24) Suzie: And nobody got my name right [(inaudible)  
 Peter: [Where's that?  
 Suzie: In this school . in the first year

Suzie had been discussing her feelings of being an outsider, but Peter interrupted her in mid-flow, to ask a question that raises as the joint focus of attention a matter that was peripheral to Suzie's account of her feelings – the precise location of her experience. Suzie answered him, but she lost her train of thought (or, perhaps, responded to Peter's apparent dismissal of her attitude towards what she was saying) and the conversation floundered for a while, until another speaker introduced a different topic.

In this section, then, we have seen that *that*, relative to the other words that could have been used, puts into high focus – or proposes as a joint centre of attention – a part of the preceding discourse. As in the previous section, this may be a reference to a real world object or event, or a reference to an attitude or shared knowledge. In the examples in section 3, the attitudes and shared knowledge were not explicitly stated. In the examples considered in this section, however, speakers use *that* to acknowledge an attitude or an orientation that has been explicitly expressed.

Again, this function can be identified across a range of different syntactic categories in which *that* occurs. In structural terms, *that* contrasts with *the*, and perhaps *this*, in (17), with *this* or *it* in (18), with *it* in (22) and *that's* contrasts with zero in (19), (20), (21), (23) and (24). In each case, however, the important point is that *that* has a specifically interactive function, sometimes simply ensuring that the speaker's and addressee's attention is effectively coordinated, but at other times ensuring that their personal orientation to what is being expressed is also effectively coordinated.

### 5. Connective *that*

The third group of occurrences of *that* in the material that I analysed is rather different, for here *that* functions as a coordinator, linking what has already been said to what is about to be said. Again, its function is to coordinate the attention of speaker and addressee, but this time it is structural connections within the discourse that are highlighted. The stretches of discourse that are connected in this way are of different types and of different lengths, as we will see. In these connective functions *that* is frequently unstressed, occurring in a phonetically reduced form, with a schwa vowel. This is not always the case, however, especially with speakers of American English.

In examples (25) and (26), *that* connects an object clause to its matrix verb:

- (25) Jacky: But she keeps on talking about people and I said that if she talked anything about me . I wouldn't care if she didn't even hit me back I would hit her and I couldn't care less
- (26) Client: It is like I put myself in a box (3 secs) that (3 secs) mmm .. I do feel the resentment but I don't want to because (5 secs) how do you get rid of feelings like that (5 secs) and I don't want to live with those feelings
- Counsellor: But it is safer to keep it in a box and yet you know very well that you do feel it

In these examples the object clauses could have occurred without a preceding *that*, with no explicit mark of connection to the matrix clause. There seems to be general agreement in the research literature that *that* occurs in contexts such as these when its absence would pose problems of interpretation for the addressee. Thus *that* is more likely to be used as a clause marker when the following clause is separated from the matrix clause by some intervening material, or when it is necessary to clarify whether an adverbial should be interpreted as part of the matrix clause or as part



of the *that*-clause (Quirk et al., 1985: 15.4b; Rissanen, 1991: 286). In examples (25) and (26) *that* does indeed appear to serve this function: thus in (25), the presence of *that* makes it clear that the *if*-clause is the object of *said*, rather than an adverbial element of the matrix clause; and in (25) there is an intervening adverbial (*very well*) between the object clause and the matrix verb. Here, then, we can say that *that* simply marks structural connections.

By using *that* to signal clause boundaries in this way, speakers limit the cognitive burden that they impose on their addressees. Using *that* can therefore be seen as a marker not of positive politeness (as it was in the examples given in sections 3 and 4) but instead as a marker of negative politeness. Like other features typical of spoken discourse, then (see Coates, 1987), *that* can mark either positive politeness or negative politeness, depending on the circumstances. As would be expected, *that* before a following complement occurs more frequently in formal, less intimate styles of discourse (Quirk et al., *ibid.*; Rissanen, *ibid.*), where speakers and addressees may not know each other well and where it is appropriate, therefore, for speakers to attend to the needs of their addressees (Dressler and Wodak, 1972). By highlighting structural connections in this way, *that* in its connective function can again be seen to orient the discourse towards the addressee, this time ensuring that the attention of speaker and addressee are coordinated at potentially tricky processing points. The speaker ‘signposts’ these points to the addressee by the judicious placement of *that*.

When *that* occurs in relative clauses it also has a ‘signalling’ function, alerting the addressee to the need to keep in mind the immediately preceding stretch of discourse in order to relate it to the discourse that is forthcoming. Examples (27)–(29), from the playground recordings, illustrate relative *that*:

- (27) Alec: You know the river that runs through there?  
 (28) Cathy: That’s one of the boys that gangs up on us  
 (29) Debbie: I like that record that’s called Heartbreak Hotel

Scholars disagree about the syntactic category to which *that* should be assigned in examples such as these. Stahlke (1976), for example, gives some structural reasons for considering relative *that* to be a conjunction, whilst van der Auwera (1989) sees it as a pronoun, though not a ‘fully fledged’ pronoun. Convincing structural arguments can be put forward for both points of view, as the papers by Stahlke and van der Auwera illustrate. The more important issue, however, from the point of view of the discourse function of *that*, is that speakers use *that* in the same way in examples (27)–(29) as they do in examples (25) and (26): to alert the addressee to the need to relate what comes before *that* to the subordinate clause that comes after it, in order to make sense of the emerging discourse.

The work of Beal (1988) reveals a similar signposting function for *that*, this time in a different syntactic context. Beal analyses sequences where a subordinating conjunction is followed by *that*, as in *such that*, *except that*, *so that*, or *seeing that*. She shows that throughout the history of English, new subordinating conjunctions have been followed by *that* for an initial period, and sometimes for many centuries. Whilst a word is undergoing a syntactic change from one syntactic category to the

category of subordinating conjunction, then, *that* signals unambiguously to the addressee that a new subordinate clause is beginning. Once the word has become fully established in the language as a subordinating conjunction, ‘signalling’ *that* becomes unnecessary and disappears from use. As examples, consider *before* and *lest* in (30) and (31), which are the latest attested occurrences given by the *OED* of each of these conjunctions with *that* (from Beal, *ibid.*: 52). Now that *before* and *lest* are firmly established as subordinators in present-day English, these conjunctions occur without a following *that*:

(30) Before that Philip called thee, I saw thee (1611, *King James’ Bible*, John 1,48)

(31) Hence,

Least that th’ infection of his fortune take

Like hold on thee (1606, *Lear*, 4.vi.234–236)

Beal’s research provides further evidence that *that* is a resource which speakers can use to signal clause boundaries whenever they judge it necessary, in order to help their addressees with sentence processing. Presumably *that* served a similar function when it was used with the *wh*-pronouns when they were first introduced into English, and stopped being used with these pronouns once they became fully established as relativizers.

Examples (32) and (33), from my notebook collection, provide further illustrations of *that* used to signal unambiguously to the addressee the beginning of a new clause in a complex construction (32) or, perhaps, a construction that has strayed from its intended course (33):

(32) What I want to explain is this .. that as many as 30 million job losses would have occurred if we had done nothing (spokesperson for ASTRA, BBC Radio 4, 27.7.93.)

(33) I’m sure I represent the views of the other senators is that we cannot go into Bosnia now (American Defense Secretary, ITN news, 17.6.93)

Example (34), from a counselling session, illustrates a somewhat different use of *that*. Here it does not signal a forthcoming subordinate clause, but nevertheless the following clause is one that could be difficult for the addressee to process. It is what Montgomery (1989) terms a fused sentence:

(34) Client: I feel like I have to protect her somehow

Counsellor: mmhmmm .. and be careful of her

Client: and so every day I push down the anger and I push down the resentment .. and I just am somebody else

→ Counsellor: that’s your daily task is to push ’em down push ’em down push ’em down .. and be somebody who isn’t quite real.

Fused sentences of this type occur in the counselling sessions at moments when the counsellor offers an interpretation of what the client has been saying: *that* not only

signals, therefore, that a complex syntactic construction is forthcoming, but also that an attempt is to be made to summarise succinctly what has been said on the topic up to that point. Example (35) is similar, with *that* introducing a final summation of the counsellor's previous attempts at interpreting his client's feelings. The clause structure is not typical of English clause structure as it is conventionally described; but the speaker clearly signals the beginning of a new clause by means of *that*, and the syntactic structure poses no problems for the addressee, as we see from the client's response:

- (35) Counsellor: you know it's your mother mostly .. and you know the feelings  
 that were stirred up were stirred up a long time ago .. but how you  
 → can work through those .. that you are not quite clear  
 Client: mmm . (3 secs) and in a way that causes me not to be me

The occurrence of *that* in the last of a series of clauses on a given topic was suggested by Bolinger (1972) and has been confirmed, for some speakers of English at least, by Montgomery's quantitative analysis of variation between *that* and *it* in the interviews that he conducted in East Tennessee (Montgomery, 1989). In Montgomery's interviews speakers used *that* to 'announce' a fused sentence, as in example (31) above, particularly when they were making a 'climactic' point, or "pulling out and condensing the most important information ... from the entire foregoing explanation" (ibid.: 251). Here, then, *that* acts as a bridge between long stretches of the preceding discourse and a forthcoming summation, signalling not simply structural relations between clauses but also semantic relations within an entire 'episode' of the discourse. Montgomery concludes that *that* is an important device used by speakers to impose hierarchical organization on the necessarily linear development of discourse (ibid.: 253). Once more we see that speakers use *that* in order to make the structure of their discourse intelligible to their addressees. Although this time it is longer stretches of discourse whose connections are marked, the function of *that* is still primarily interactive, ensuring that speakers and addressees coordinate their attention in order that the production and processing of the emerging discourse can proceed effectively and that there is mutual agreement about what has been said so far.

Finally, examples (36)–(38) show *that* functioning as a discourse bridge, in a way that as far as I am aware has not been reported before. Unlike the previous examples, *that* occurs at points in the discourse where the speaker is hesitating and, presumably, planning what is to be said next.<sup>2</sup> Thus, in (36), Charlie introduces the topic of wild camels, and then goes on to explain how wild camels have come to exist in America. Before giving his explanation, he hesitates and makes a false start, using *that*, it seems, to indicate to his addressees that he has not yet finished his turn, and that he is about to say more on the same topic.

<sup>2</sup> I must thank one of the anonymous referees for the observation that in Finnish the corresponding form to English *that*, *tuo* – or rather, the partitive form *tuota*, is also used as a hesitation device.

- (36) Charlie: there are wild camels in America .. in Arizona ..  
                   [New Mexico . that still  
                   Steve: [are there really?  
                   Charlie: survive . yeah  
                   Jenny: in the desert?  
 → Charlie: yeah .. and .. that .. er (3 secs) . the .. 'cos they were introduced after  
                   the Civil War in the 1870s as a military beast of burden and it sort of  
                   never .. didn't really work out or anything .. but some number of  
                   them were free .. they do exist .. I don't think it's common

There are, of course, other discourse markers which speakers use when they are hesitating and planning the next stretch of discourse, and these discourse markers have clear interactional functions. *You know*, for example, has several potential meanings, one of which is to involve the addressee in the construction of the discourse meaning; *I mean* can express the speaker's personal involvement in what is being said (Holmes, 1986; Schiffrin, 1987). It seems that the function of *that* as a way of coordinating the speaker's and addressee's attention on the structure of the emerging discourse, allows *that* to function in a similar way to other discourse markers, allowing speakers to keep the floor without being interrupted, whilst planning their next stretch of discourse.

An earlier example from the counselling sessions, example (26) (reproduced here as (37)), also contains *that* with this function:

- (37) Client: It is like I put myself in a box (3 secs) that (3 secs) mmm .. I do feel  
                   the resentment but I don't want to because (5 secs) how do you get rid  
                   of feelings like that (5 secs) and I don't want to live with those feelings

Speakers sometimes use *that* in this way when they are about to make a concluding point: its function here, therefore, is related to the 'oral paragraphing' mentioned above, where *that* signals that a summation clause will follow. In (38), *that* relates the preceding discourse to two clauses that give the punch line of Anita's story:

- (38) Anita: my brother made a living will . in the hospital . and I went there with  
 → a lawyer .. he's a friend of mine .. and he signed and that I said can  
                   I sign? . and he said no I couldn't

Anita's contribution was in answer to the previous speaker's objection to the idea of making a living will, which was that a relative might decide to turn off your life support machine even though you personally might have preferred to remain connected to the machine. She explains that the lawyer signed her brother's living will and goes on, after using *that*, to illustrate the impossibility of anyone other than an authorised signatory signing such a will. Similarly, in (39) *that* introduces a final phrase which sums up in a single word Charlie's description of some 'Englishmen' he had met on a recent trip to India:

- (39) Charlie: many of them had never been to England .. they'd stand in the bar .  
 → go ho ho ho ha ha ha (mimics upper-class English laughter) .. that ..  
 Anglo-Indians

Thus *that* alerts the addressee to several different types of textual connection, whilst speakers construct the emerging discourse. At a local level, it can mark a connection between a noun phrase and the forthcoming relative clause, as well as the connection between a matrix verb and a following subordinate clause (a *that*-clause); at a global level, it can mark a connection between a preceding set of clauses on a given topic to a forthcoming summary statement of what has been said so far (functioning, in other words, as a 'herald' of a summary statement); it also functions, in its role as a discourse marker, as a general discourse bridge between sections of discourse. In somewhat similar ways to those discussed in the previous two sections, then, speakers use *that* to orient their discourse towards their addressees, proposing stretches of discourse as candidates for their joint attention; this time, however, attention is necessary in order to facilitate language processing.

In the previous two sections I emphasised the fact that *that* can focus on the affective meaning of the interaction. When *that* functions as a connector this does not appear to be the principal aspect of its function, but it is noteworthy that several writers have drawn attention to the contribution that *that* makes to the expression of affective meaning.<sup>3</sup> In *that* clauses, for example, it is conventionally assumed that *that* is more likely to be present when the following clause contains information that the speaker considers to be particularly significant, or that the speaker considers the addressee will find significant. Dixon (1991: 37) discusses the following sentences, reproduced here as (40) and (41); it would be unusual, he claims, for *that* to be omitted in (41):

- (40) He announced (that) it was eggs for breakfast  
 (41) He announced that Thatcher had won another election.

Biber's (1988) corpus-based analysis identified the primary use of *that* complements (with adjectives as well as with verbs) as the elaboration of information under real-time production constraints; in other words, speakers tended not to omit *that* before a following complement when they were producing relatively unplanned discourse that attempted to convey factual information, typically in interviews and speeches. This is to be expected, of course, given what was said above about the use of *that* as a marker of negative politeness, as a way of reducing the cognitive processing burden for the addressee. However, Biber also identified an 'important secondary use' of *that* before a complement, which was the explicit marking of a person's stance. *That*, he found, was frequently used to mark the expression of opinions, attitudes and the personal statements of individuals. To some extent, this secondary use must be

<sup>3</sup> It is relevant, too, that Montgomery (1989) reports that *that* with a connective function frequently co-occurs with expressions of intensity such as superlatives, intensifiers, and marked word-order constructions. Linde (1979) makes a similar point.

related to the fact that *that* complements typically follow verbs whose lexical meaning is the expression of beliefs, attitudes or feelings, such as THINK, BELIEVE, FEEL or WISH. Bolinger (1972) was presumably thinking of this when he claimed that the presence of *that* allowed speakers to express their feelings or attitudes about the information conveyed in the *that* clause, so that the more attitudinal the verb in the matrix clause, the less necessary *that* becomes. In fact, Thompson and Mulac's (1991) analysis of complementizer *that* suggests that certain combinations of main clause subjects and verbs, such as *I think*, are currently being reanalysed in spoken English, acquiring the status of a fixed epistemic expression and therefore requiring no explicit marking of a following object clause.

## 6. Conclusions

Leech (1983: 7) argues that any account of meaning in language must be both true to the facts as we observe them and as simple and generalisable as possible. A simple generalisation that is true to the facts of my corpus is that *that* has a basic interactive function in discourse, coordinating the attention of speakers and addressees at a number of different points in the emerging discourse. Sometimes coordination may be necessary in order to avoid a potential processing difficulty, or simply to draw attention to the global structure of the discourse in order to ensure that it is intelligible to the addressee. The examples of connective *that* in section 5 illustrate this. At other times, coordination may be necessary to create an intersubjective subtext, ensuring that speakers and addressees agree on the interpersonal, affective component of the meaning of the discourse. At still other times it appears that coordination is necessary simply to ensure that addressees can identify a referent, as is the case with the simple demonstrative use of *that* in example (3,) or the anaphoric use in examples (17) and (18). Sometimes several of these functions are fulfilled simultaneously.

This interactive function is easier to identify in spontaneous, informal speech and it includes uses that are said to be either nonstandard or colloquial, or both. Thus by adopting a different starting point from the traditional one – in other words, by purposely mixing a range of discourses, as well as by focusing on all the occurrences of *that* in the corpus, rather than just those occurrences of a particular syntactic category – it has been possible to see a common, unifying factor. The extreme multifunctionality of *that*, in terms of its membership in different syntactic categories, presumably reflects its importance as an all-purpose linguistic 'signpost' in communication.

Those uses that previous writers have considered to be problematic appear quite regular when seen from this more holistic viewpoint – in fact, they seem to be the more fundamental uses, reflecting the basic function of language as a means of face-to-face communication. In face-to-face interaction speakers and addressees are forced to attend to the cognitive pressures of producing unplanned speech as they go along, as well as to be actively involved in the joint creation of meaning. At the same time they must attend to each other's face needs, and create interpersonal affective

meanings as well as referential meanings. *That* has a role to play in all these processes, as we have seen, and it is hardly surprising that it occurs so frequently in spoken English, and as a member of so many different syntactic categories.

It remains to be explained why so many scholars have assumed that the fundamental meaning of *that* is spatial rather than interpersonal or interactive. We could, of course, argue that the function of addressee-orientation is a metaphorical extension of a spatial meaning, with the non-proximal member of the pair *this* and *that* used by speakers to orient the discourse away from themselves, towards their addressee, and the proximal term *this* used to orient the discourse towards themselves, thereby expressing speaker-involvement (as we saw with example (7) in section 3). But this does not account for those uses of *that* where it is not in a structural relationship with *this*, yet where it still has the interpersonal function of addressee-orientation. The reasons for the preoccupation with the spatial meaning of *that* lie, it seems to me, in the methodology adopted by previous scholars. Partly it is the result of consulting intuitions rather than working with real language: as Lyons (1975) concludes in his discussion of the relationship between *this*, *that* and *the*, the spatial interpretation of *that* comes into play only when *that* is in explicit or implicit contrast with *this*. I have carried out some informal tests with native speakers of English, asking them about the meaning of *that*: it seems that an intuitive reaction when faced with an utterance out of context is to contrast *that* with *this*. When analysing naturally occurring discourse, on the other hand, it becomes clear that a spatial meaning is irrelevant for the majority of occurrences of *that*, as we have seen. Working from intuitions is not the only reason, however. The preoccupation with the spatial meaning of *that* is also the result of focusing on one syntactic category at a time rather than taking a more comprehensive approach: when *that* is an intensifier or a complementizer, for example, a spatial interpretation is completely irrelevant.

There may also be a historical dimension to the question of the spatial meaning of *that*, for its spatial meaning when in opposition with *this* appears to have weakened over the centuries. Strang (1968: 129) comments on this with reference to standard English: “in recent years, in some styles, *this* has been encroaching on *that* territory”. In many English dialects *this* and *that* as spatial demonstratives have been strengthened by the addition of *here* and *there*, respectively, so that the demonstrative forms are *this here* and *that there*; this appears to confirm that the strictly spatial meanings have weakened. By contrast, the interactive function of *that* seems to be on the increase, as the apparently new use of *that* as a discourse marker illustrates. Furthermore, *this* has also acquired a new function in discourse, as a presentative marker: I argue in Cheshire (1989) that the use of *this* in narratives (as in *there was this woman .. and she said ..*) expresses interpersonal involvement, metaphorically inviting the addressee to adopt the same perspective as the speaker (see further Wald, 1983; Wright and Givón, 1987). It seems, then, that as both *this* and *that* acquire an increasing number of interactive functions, so their spatial meaning is weakening.

It has, perhaps, been an attractive line of argument to propose that *that* has a basic spatial meaning, for the principles of space and time are basic coordinates of the situation of utterance and, indeed, of the human condition. It is reasonable to assume

that natural languages encode these basic coordinates in their grammars. It is important to remember, however, that an equally basic coordinate of the situation of utterance is the joint work that needs to be done by speakers and addressees, which can be seen most clearly in informal spontaneous face-to-face communication. This basic aspect of communication is equally likely to be encoded in the grammar of a language. I would argue that the functions of *that* that I have identified reflect general social principles of cooperative activity between individuals, to do both with attention to cognitive factors in language production and processing and with the creation of interpersonal involvement. Without these general principles of human communication no natural language would exist.

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