

# LINGUISTICS

## A FUNCTIONAL APPROACH TO ENGLISH TAGS\*

JAN-OLA ÖSTMAN

*Åbo Akademi*

### 0. BACKGROUND

The syntax and semantics of English tags<sup>1</sup> have of late been considered in great detail by linguists of different "schools". Oleksy (1977) includes a thorough overview of this literature, which shall therefore not be repeated in any detail here. Suffice it to say that recent approaches towards English tags have syntactically been a debate as to whether — in transformational-generative (TG) terms — they should be analyzed as formed by a Copying transformation from the Basic Clause, or whether a sentence containing a tag should rather be regarded as two conjoined sentences in the deep structure.

Semantically, tags have been analyzed as expressing certain attitudes of the speaker towards what is being said in the Basic Clause; and, in terms of speech acts and/or performatives. Furthermore, there have been arguments as to whether a tagged sentence is a Question, or a combination of a Statement and a Question. Previous analyses of tags have also to varying degrees dealt with their interaction with intonation in English.

The present analysis of tags will not take a stand in the syntactic TG debate. Furthermore, my views about the English tags will be quite informally presented, though hopefully not lacking in explicitness. Specifically, I suggest that English tags perform various functions, and I want to give a theoretical explanation for this divergence of functions. To facilitate an explanation I will be

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper the term 'tag' will, in English, be restricted to constructions of the form

*S, Aux(n't) Pron, and S, Aux Pron (not),*

which are formed in accordance with the structure of the Basic Clause.

taking into consideration a contrastive aspect of tags, and working within a functional approach towards language in general.

My suggestion will be an alternative to the TG approach in the sense that it will start out from language in communication, from the function of tags, and not from their lexico-syntactic form. This is to say that TG analyses of tags may very well be appropriate as analyses of lexico-syntactic phenomena.

As for the contrastive aspects, I shall compare tags in English to what I regard as similar phenomena in Swedish (especially Finland Swedish), and Finnish. However, the paper will not have as its final output a contrastive analysis of English tags and their equivalents in Finnish and Swedish; rather, the contrastive approach will provide the means towards gaining insight into the function of tags in English.

### 1. THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

I will start by giving a short summary of the general methodological and theoretical issues that lie behind what I call a *functional approach* to language, i.e. the kind of abstract framework through which I feel it might be helpful to view language and, specifically, tags. (For a more detailed exposition of the framework, see Östman 1978.) The present analysis of English tags will consequently be a case study within this general framework.

I see language as a typical social phenomenon, and linguistics therefore as a social science. Furthermore, language is a part of our social environment, and cannot as such exist, nor should it ultimately be analyzed nor described, separated from its natural environment. Connected with this view is a series of implications as regards the qualities of well-definedness and strictly rule-governedness which have so often been attributed to (some underlying form of) language; these issues will not, however, be discussed in this connection. Generally, the most profitable basis from which to start investigating and theorizing about language is to say that it is, in the sense of Hockett (1968), ill-defined, or indeterminate. It follows that, if linguistics is to succeed in mirroring ill-definedness in language, we have to build into our linguistic model a kind of generative mechanism which will allow for a certain amount of *latitude*. Thus, strict 'predictability' will have to suffer at the cost of arriving at a concrete description of language as a part of social "reality".

The linguistic approach presented in Östman (1978) characterizes language as made up of *form* and *function*. The distinction between form and function is basically a theoretical one, an abstraction superimposed on language. That is, any clear-cut distinction between form and function in language as such should a priori not be sought for.

*Form*, or 'structure', is the *means* we have to use if we want to communicate verbally; that is, the phonological and morpho-syntactic aspects of language.

*Function* stands for the way *texts* function in abstracted contexts-of-situation. That is, basically, the communicative use to which we put a form.

In this framework texts are the basic semantico-functional<sup>2</sup> units. Texts are seen as having primarily three aspects associated with them:

- (i) the lexicon, from which the texts get their input as meaning-potentialities of words (or *functemes*, which is the term used for the minimal semantic unit in language);
- (ii) the attitude of the speaker towards what he is saying, and towards his addressee(s) (part of this will be my main concern in this paper);
- (iii) the illocutionary force of the text, as recognized by the addressee. The texts themselves are, roughly, one or more 'speech acts'.

## 2. A LEXICAL MEANING OF TAGS: TAGS AND EPISTEMIC ADVERBIALS

Lakoff (1969) argues that the underlying structure of English tags should be seen as containing the performative predicate *suppose*. Oleksy (1977) shows that *suppose* does not capture all the meaning implicit in a tag, and suggests an analysis in terms of an underlying *I request of you that you confirm 'S'*. Leaving aside matters of detail, the general idea behind these performative analyses is that tags express uncertainty on the part of the speaker as regards what he is saying. This is also in accord with one of the functions that Cattell (1973) ascribes to English tags: that they express the tentative view-point of the speaker.

Given that English tags have an underlying structure of this type, they can be said to be a device for expressing uncertainty in English. This uncertainty-tag can be "translated" e.g. as a superordinate sentence, as in (2), or as an attitudinal adverbial of the epistemic type (cf. Schreiber 1970; Östman 1979a), as in (3).

- (1) It's still raining outside, is it?/isn't it?
- (2) I presume/suppose that it's still raining outside.
- (3) It's presumably still raining outside.

We can also observe that it is precisely this 'uncertainty' meaning of tags which is most often captured in translations into other languages. For instance,

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<sup>2</sup> I consider the functional aspect of language as the proper domain for semantics. The functional aspect includes both 'pragmatics' and parts of what is generally regarded as semantics. The approach could thus be called 'pragmasemantic'. Thus I neither make any a priori distinction between 'meaning' and 'function', since to have semantic meaning will imply having a function in a context-of-situation (cf. also Firth 1935:19).

This paper uses the concept 'sentence' to refer to the examples it contains, whereas the framework of Östman (1978) would prescribe the use of 'text'.

the most obvious translations of an English tag into Swedish would be with *eller hur?*, or with *väl*. *Väl* is an (adverbial) particle (cf. Section 4), quite similar to English tags in that it can have different (contextually governed) meanings, but its most natural "translation" in Swedish (perhaps even more natural than the "translation" of English tags with *presumably*) is *antagligen* (*presumably*). The Swedish "tag" *eller hur?* (cf. Section 3) is considered an attitudinal adverbial (Teleman 1974) of the epistemic type (Östman 1979a) in Swedish grammar, and can only have the meaning of 'the speaker being uncertain and asking for confirmation'. Note the stress on the similarity between epistemic adverbials and what could distributionally be called "tags" in Swedish.

Thus, under such an analysis tags and epistemic adverbials seem to converge as regards their basic semantic structure.

However, a number of problems emerge if we want to argue that tags are similar in function to epistemic adverbials. Perhaps the most important of these is that whereas a tag can change what is formally a Statement into a Question, epistemic adverbials would not intuitively seem to have this power. From a functional point of view, however, it could well be argued that the distinction between a Declarative and an Interrogative expression is not an 'either-or' distinction, but that Declaratives and Interrogatives lie on the same gradience of more and less. That is, starting out from one end of this gradience, the Declarative pole, we can step by step approach the other end of it, the Interrogative pole, by saying that a proposition gradually changes its communicative function when different epistemic adverbials, like *probably*, *presumably*, and *possibly*, are added to it. On this gradience the tags that express uncertainty would lie quite close to the Interrogative pole. And in this sense one could argue that the difference between tags and epistemic adverbials is not one of quality but one in terms of the degree of 'Quizziness' they express.

If, on the basis of the discussions above of potential translations, and the Quizziness gradience, we ascribe some lexical meaning to the English tags, we also ought to be able to indicate how this lexical information is to be rendered in the lexicon. On technical grounds this is somewhat difficult, because of the structural 'instability' of English tags. It is clear, however, that in some (perhaps 'deep') sense, English tags are idiomatic in nature. In the lexicon this idiomatic characteristic will be stated in terms of a set of rules<sup>3</sup> as features, e.g. something like the following (where BC stands for Basic Clause):

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<sup>3</sup> Actually these rules — like most rules in syntax — will have to be made tendentially governed. For examples of the difficulty native speakers occasionally experience when asked to form tags, see Langendoen (1970 :10ff.).

TAG	/BC,-
	STRUCTURE: 1. $\alpha$ Subj.Pron./BC (Subj ( $\alpha$ Pers. & $\alpha$ Number & $\alpha$ Gender))
	2. A. a) $\beta$ Aux/BC ( $\beta$ Aux)
	b) <i>do</i>
	B. $\delta$ Tense & Aspect/BC ( $\delta$ Tense & Aspect)
	3. $\pm\gamma$ Polarity/BC ( $\gamma$ Polarity)
	4. ORDER: 2+1/3 $\rightarrow$ $\emptyset$ Neg
	2+3+1/3 $\rightarrow$ <i>n't</i>
	2+1+3/3 $\rightarrow$ <i>not</i>
	POTENTIAL MEANING: ADVL
	$f_{\text{pert}}[(\text{SUPPOSE}) \& /v (\text{ASK CONFIRMATION})]$
	...

When this bundle of features satisfies its context-of-situation for an idiomatic reading, the tag will qualify as a semantico-functional unit, as a functeme (cf. Östman 1978 for the semantic function of idioms in general).

This section has tried to show that functionally (at least some types of) tags in English behave like epistemic adverbials in English, although they are structurally and distributionally different from these adverbials. Also, I have tried to hint at a lexical meaning of tags by placing them on a Declarative-Interrogative gradience. (The detailed meaning of each particular tag will, as we shall see, depend on the specific context in which it occurs.)

### 3. "TAGS" IN SWEDISH AND FINNISH

In comparison with what could be called "tags" in other languages, English tags are usually considered to be quite special as to their structure. Thus, Finnish and Swedish "tags" (cf. examples below) lack the internal and unstable structure of the English tags: tense and auxiliary specifications, pronoun marking; and the order between the elements in the "tag" is strict in Finnish and Swedish. In one word, Finnish and Swedish "tags" seem to be very idiomatic (morphologically lexical entities) as compared to tags in English.

- (4) Swe. a. Kalle har varit här, *eller hur?*  
 b. Kalle har varit här, *inte sant?*
- (5) Fi. a. Kalle on ollut täällä, *vai mitä?/vai kvinka?*  
 b. Kalle on ollut täällä, *eikö(s) niin?*  
 [Charles has been here, hasn't he?]

A closer look at the examples in (4) and (5) will reveal that the tagged adverbials (in italics) in the a.-examples are to a certain extent different from

those in the b.-examples. Both the Finnish and the Swedish a.-examples could be glossed as *right?*, *O.K.?* [lit. *or how?*, *or what?*], whereas a word-for-word translation of the b.-examples would give [Fi.] *not so?*, [Swe.] *not true?*. From a purely lexical point of view we can here notice that the b.-examples have a negative element in them, whereas the a.-examples do not. Furthermore, whereas the a.-type "tags" can be used just as well with the Basic Clause in the negative, e.g.

(6) Swe. Kalle har inte varit här, eller hur?

(7) Fi. Kalle ei ole ollut täällä, vai mitä?

[Charles hasn't been here, has he?].

the b.-type tags will sound less acceptable if the Basic Clause is negative:

(8) Swe.? Kalle har inte varit här, inte sant?

(9) Fi.? Kalle ei ole ollut täällä, eikös niin?

Notice also that the low acceptability of (8) and (9) is not primarily due to the repetition of two negative particles in one and the same sentence, since it remains if we use an adverb with a negative implication:

(10) Swe. a. Kalle kunde knappast gå, eller hur?

b.? Kalle kunde knappast gå, inte sant?

(11) Fi. a. Kalle pystyi tuskin kävelemään, vai mitä?

b.? Kalle pystyi tuskin kävelemään, eikö niin?

[Charles could hardly walk, could he?]

In markedness terminology we can then say that the 'right?/O.K.?' gloss is unmarked with respect to whether the Basic Clause is positive or negative, whereas the 'not so?/not true?' gloss has special co-occurrence restrictions with respect to this dichotomy.

In my dialect of Finland Swedish (the Solf dialect) this distributional split between the negative and the positive "tag" is — in the light of what has been said above — even more conspicuous. Its "tag" of the 'right?' category, *elå va?*, seems to have developed an aversion towards occurring after a *positive* Basic Clause:

(12) Fi-Swe. a.? Kalle a vari jier elå va? [cf. (4a)]

b. Kalle a int vari jier elå va? [(6)]

c. Kalle kuna no knaffast gaa elå va? [(10a)]

Example (12a) will improve, however, if the Basic Clause is turned into a Question (!):

(12) Fi-Swe. d. A Kalle vari jier elå va?

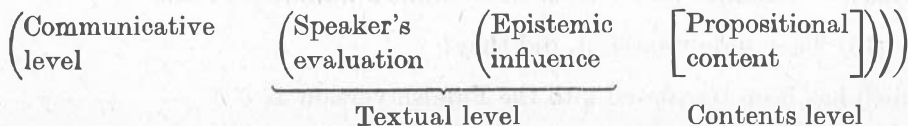
[Has Charles been here, TAG?]

The implication of the discussion in this section is that there seem to be dynamic, 'non-idiomatic' tendencies as regards tags in general, and not only in English. The instability of structure in Swedish and Finnish "tags", however, is far less prominent than that of the English tags.

#### 4. THE PRAGMATIC MEANING OF TAGS: TAGS AND PARTICLES

"Tags" in Finnish and Swedish differ from English tags not only in terms of their structural instability, but also functionally. Whereas the Swedish and Finnish "tags" have only a lexical meaning, like other epistemic adverbials, expressing some restricting attitude of the speaker towards what he is saying, English tags also have what I shall call a *pragmatic* function.

In Östman (1977; 1979a; 1979c) I have shown that (some of the) clitics and particles in Finnish and Swedish have basically two different functions: one lexical or implicative, and another function which is to a large extent contextually governed, and thus more dynamic in nature. The distinction between these two functions is to be taken as both theoretical and gradient: we cannot, from the occurrence of a particle in an isolated sentence a priori and without context decide whether the particle has one function or the other, nor always whether it has one function more than another. In Östman (1979a) I explained this by saying that elements of language that belong to the category of *functional utterance particles* function on a (functionally, not structurally) different level, the *communicative* level in language (perhaps even as some kind of mediators between competence and performance, if such a distinction is to be upheld). Generally, I argue that the attitudinal aspect (cf. Section 1: (ii)) of texts has the following internal structure (where different languages use different verbal or non-verbal means to realize elements on the different levels; the levels in turn are theoretical and gradient abstractions):



For the functional utterance particles in Swedish I have argued and shown that they differ in morphological and distributional respects from other attitudinal and epistemic adverbials, that they are unstressed but can have stressed homonyms functioning as adverbials, and finally, that they function on the communicative level of language (for specific arguments, see Östman 1979a).

In this section I want to suggest that in some of their functions English tags come very close to being what I have called functional utterance particles. However, the arguments that can be given in favour of such an analysis will have to be functional ones since, because of the form of the English tags,



these do not fall under any of the structural criteria mentioned for functional utterance particles in Swedish.

It might seem somewhat far-fetched to try to stipulate a class of functional utterance particles for English, since there are so few of them in the language. English does seem to have quite a small inventory of what I would call functional utterance particles, but tags are by no means the only verbal elements that would be classed thus. One other example will have to suffice: consider the function of *too* in (13).

(13) (A: John isn't working today.)

B: He is *too*!

It is clear that *too* here does not have much of an 'and something else' meaning or presupposition in it. Rather, it is used as something of an emphatic marker, instead of *But he is!*, where a simple *He is!* would perhaps not be enough. Compare the corresponding negative form, where we could not use *too*, but would have to use something like *certainly*:

(14) (A: John is working today.)

B: He is (certainly) not!

Appropriate translations of (13) and (14) into Finnish and Swedish would be (functional utterance particles in italics):

(13') Fi. *Onpas!*

(13'') Swe. Det är han *visst!*/*Nog* är han (*ju*) det!

(14') Fi. *Eipäs* (ole)!

(14'') Swe. Det är han *visst* inte!/*Inte* är han *ju* det!

Some support for ascribing a 'particle' function to tags can be acquired from translations. Here it will be found that tags are very often translated into Swedish and Finnish not by epistemic adverbials, but by functional utterance particles.<sup>4</sup> Example (15) is from A. A. Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh*:

(15) They didn't catch it, did they?

which has been translated into the Finnish version as

(16) *Eiväthän* he saaneet?

[Neg. verb + *-han* they get? — ellipsis of object]

One argument in favour of an analysis of English tags as being able to perform basically different functions is that a sentence cannot contain two clausal adverbials with more or less the same meaning, as in

<sup>4</sup> Cf. also the translations in Oleksy (1977: 106).



(17)? John presumably probably bought a car,

without it sounding disturbingly redundant, whereas an epistemic adverbial can co-occur with a tag in English:

(18) John presumably bought a car, didn't he?

Regarding the tag as in this case functioning on a different level from the adverbial would give a reasonable explanation to why (18) is more acceptable than (17): in (17) both adverbials function on the same level, the textual level of language, and this consequently creates explicit redundancy; in (18), however, the tag and the adverbial might function on different levels, and the potential redundancy is not so conspicuous, not even when the sentence is regarded in isolation.

Saying that English tags have a pragmatic function is to imply, in short, that the detailed meaning or function a particular tag has in a specific occurrence cannot be determined except with reference to the particular and relevant context-of-situation in which that tag is used; the meaning of a pragmatic tag is as such not predictable.

It is important to note, however, that if the English tags are to be seen as having two qualitatively different functions, then one of the sub-functions of the pragmatic function (that is, part of the domain covered by a tag's (pragmatic) function; cf. Section 6) is bound to be close to the tag's lexical meaning (and this is also why I regard the distinction between the two functions of tags as forming a gradience). But, this would only be *one* particular function of a pragmatic tag. In its pragmatic function a tag can also have a host of other meanings.

The different meanings that tags can have in their pragmatic function form a scale with their lexical 'information-requiring' meaning as one pole, and which step by step goes towards the other pole through functions of 'requesting-information', 'expressing-uncertainty', 'neutral: habit-of-speech',<sup>5</sup> and 'expressing-certainty'. This is only a rough indication of the different functions tags can have; the scale is supposed to have an indefinite number of points, thus being capable of expressing the most detailed attitudes of the speaker.

An example of the 'expressing-certainty' function of tags would be — in its particular context-of-situation:

(19) You didn't know that, did you!!

The meaning of this exclamation is not that the speaker presumes or supposes that the addressee does not know X, and that he allows for the possibility of

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Sinclair (1972:82-3): "Tags are an important feature of speech, but are not written down very often. They vary from time to time and from place to place and from person to person. Some persons use vocatives a lot, ... or tags, as unconscious habits of speech".

the listener to correct the proposition. The exclamation is a very strong accusation against the addressee, and could be glossed as

- (19') I'm sure/certain you didn't know that!, or  
That is one thing you never thought of!  
[perhaps with the implication that the addressee should have thought of it].

Another example:<sup>6</sup>

- (20) a. You've got no feelings, have you!?  
b. You've got no feelings, you have!

In (20b) even the word order in the tag is reversed so as to exclude also structurally any Interrogative element from the analysis of the utterance. Admittedly, (20b) is very close to being a right dislocation, but this only shows the unfruitfulness of making abstract and theoretical decisions on the basis of form (as I have done in this paper, by starting the analysis from a structural definition of tags; cf. fn. 1) for a socially and dynamically governed phenomenon like language.

## 5. TAGS AND INTONATION

When trying to account for the relationship between intonation and particles in general, two matters have to be kept separate: the interrelation between particles and intonation in one and the same language on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the relationship between particles (verbal material) in one language, and intonation (prosody) in another.

5.1. In Östman (1977; 1979a; 1979c) I have argued that functional utterance particles both in Finnish and in Swedish have functions which are manifested by prosodic means like intonation in a language like English.

The function, or functions, of intonation in Finnish, and especially in Finland Swedish, is as yet a very neglected area of research. Generally speaking, intonation in these languages is used with a very narrow pitch-range, so that although the languages do have rising and falling contours, these are not as easily recognized nor as explicitly made use of as the different contours in a language like English. Intonation certainly has an emotive function in Finnish and Finland Swedish, but whether it can be said to have an 'inherent' syntactic function is still a debated matter. They can sometimes use intonation for syntactic purposes also (though the intended meaning will remain to a certain extent ambiguous), but in so doing (e.g. using merely intonation to indicate that something which is structurally a Statement should be taken as an

<sup>6</sup> Examples (19) and (20b) were taken from a TV show.

Interrogative expression) an 'over-wide' pitch-range has to be used. This difference between the intonation systems of English on the one hand, and Finnish and Finland Swedish on the other, does not necessarily imply that intonation works in a qualitatively different way in these languages: Finnish and Finland Swedish certainly use intonation to express attitudes of the speaker, and if, as I suggested in Section 2, we can view tags and other epistemic adverbials as lying on a functional scale from Declarative expressions to Interrogative ones, the similarity between English and Finnish/Finland Swedish intonation becomes obvious.

This short presentation will have to suffice as a background against which my analysis of functional utterance particles in Finnish and Swedish should be seen. I have suggested that *because* intonation does not play a great role in Finnish and Finland Swedish, grammatically that is, these languages use segmental means in expressing the same types of functions as English would express with non-segmental, prosodic means.<sup>7</sup> Expressed somewhat differently: in English — as opposed to Finnish and Finland Swedish — we do not need tags or any other kinds of particles to express a pragmatic function; we can just as well use an appropriate intonation-contour.

The fact that we do make use of particles, and especially tags in English, raises a more theoretical issue. The finding that languages seem to make use of either particles or prosody (intonation) in expressing the pragmatic phenomenon discussed in this paper, led Weydt (1969:114) to suggest that this could be taken as a language typological distinction. If projected upon the ordinary inflectional-agglutinating-isolating typology of language, this would, roughly, set the isolating type apart from the other two, as a "prosodic" type of languages. However, natural languages do not fall neatly into such language typologies: even a fairly typical "prosodic" language like English has been found to make use of an inventory of functional utterance particles beside its intonation patterns.

5.2. "The tag clearly indicates that the speaker is conceding to the addressee the option of refusal. But, ... this concession may be contradicted or cancelled by the prosodic or paralinguistic component of the utterance" (Lyons 1977:749).

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<sup>7</sup> This observation points to the important fact that different languages use different means to express the "same" basic notions. Languages as social phenomena do not know of levels and components like phonology, syntax, semantics, prosody, and pragmatics; for that reason contrastive language studies should not be restricted *within* such levels.

It also raises a pedagogical question: if the aim of foreign language teaching is to be communicative skill for the pupils, then intonation and various kinds of particles in different languages should be seen as similar phenomena, and as necessary ingredients in adequate foreign (communicative) language learning (for a concrete suggestion in this vein, see Östman 1979b).

As for the relation between tags and intonation in English, it can first of all be stated that since these two phenomena in no way need to be in complementary distribution, there is no restriction on the ways they can override one another. (Usually it is intonation that is "stronger" and overrides the lexical meaning of a verbal message, but this is not necessarily so in the present case, since both the verbal (the tag) and the non-verbal (intonation) are supposed to have pragmatic functions.)

Thus, the general (English-specific) functions of intonation always have to be taken into account. What is said below merely indicates some typical co-occurrences of tags and intonation.

Some tags seem to have quite fixed intonation contours: for instance, a positive tag following a positive Basic Clause is (according to Quirk and Greenbaum 1973:7.49) always rising:

(21) Your car is outSIDE, IS it?

(22) So THAT'S your little game, IS it?<sup>8</sup>

In the case of contrastive-polarity tags, a rising intonation on the tag is one of the characteristics that makes that tag an epistemic adverbial. In other words, a rising intonation expresses the lexical meaning (uncertainty on the part of the speaker as to the reliability of the contents of his proposition) for these tags. If, on the other hand, a contrastive-polarity tag is pronounced with a falling tone, grammarians are of the opinions that there the speaker is sure about what he is saying; that he is only requesting the speaker to agree with him; that he is expressing an exclamation; that he is expressing a rhetorical question, etc. (cf. Quirk and Greenbaum 1973:7.48; Palmer et al. 1969:226; Jackendoff 1972:85).

Clearly, if said with a falling tone, the tag seems to be able to have a range of meanings which cannot be determined without the context-of-situation to which the utterance belongs. In some of its occurrences it has its lexical meaning, in others it is close to being devoid of lexical meaning, and has what I have referred to as pragmatic meaning or function.

The interrelationship between particles and intonation is of course also of importance in other languages. However, such interrelations in Finnish, Swedish, and German are of a somewhat different nature (possibly because intonations in these languages do not have to the same extent as English *both* syntactic, semantic, *and* emotive functions).

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<sup>8</sup> However, a situation where a falling intonation would be used on these tags is by no means unimaginable, nor would the falling intonation itself in any way be unacceptable here; the meaning differences between a falling and a rising tag then fall under the general suggestion as discussed for contrastive-polarity tags below.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In the discussion above I have stipulated two meanings or functions of the English tags:

(a) a lexical or implicative meaning, which is translatable into a superordinate clause, e.g. of the form *I presume*, or *I suppose*. In this meaning the tag primarily gives the speaker's epistemic restrictions as regards the truth of the propositional content of the Basic Clause.

(b) a pragmatic meaning, which is not always translatable into a specific superordinate clause, and whose specific meaning cannot be fully realized without a specific context-of-situation.

In the terminology of Östman (1970c) this could be stated as follows: English tags cover, or have as their *domain*, the whole of the 'uncertainty-certainty' scale, or *spectrum* (cf. Section 4). This domain has its *peak* (i.e. in effect, part<sup>9</sup> of what has been called its lexical meaning; Section 2) quite close to the 'uncertainty' pole of the scale. Schematically, this can be rendered as follows:

The 'uncertainty-certainty' scale/spectrum:

Speaker expressing certainty as to	§	Speaker expressing uncertainty as to
what his proposition	X % % % % % % % % % % % X	what his proposition
says		says

% % % % % % — domain of TAG  
§ — peak of TAG

Put in this way we also see more clearly why it does not make sense to talk about these functions of tags (the lexical and the pragmatic) in 'either-or' terms. What was referred to in Section 2 as the lexical meaning of tags is simply their most frequently (and "in-isolation") occurring meaning, and from this frequency of occurrence tags have received their idiomatic status in English.

<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that the 'uncertainty-certainty' spectrum is only *one* — though undoubtedly the most important — of the variables influencing the function of tags. Other scales that will influence the meaning of tags are 'presupposition-of-addressee's-knowledge', 'conforming-to-accepted-social-behaviour', etc. Perhaps also the degree to which a tag asks for confirmation should be thought of as a different scale altogether. E.g. the addressee is not asking for confirmation in the following dialogue:

A: What's George doing nowadays?

B: He's working in X's garage, isn't he?

From a functional point of view, however (that is, not asking about the speaker's intentions), I take it that the 'ask-for-confirmation' scale is part of the 'uncertainty-certainty' scale. For a more detailed discussion of pragmatic function, see Östman (1979c).

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