



GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET
INST FÖR SPRÅK OCH LITTERATURER

ENGLISH

The Formal and Functional Features of *Innit*:

A Study on its Use in Online Forums

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BA thesis
Spring 2013

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Abstract: This essay studies the use of *innit* as a Tag Question and a follow-up in four online forums. The aim of the study is to examine how and why *innit* is used, i.e. its formal and functional features. The four forums used were *Grime Forum* (a forum concerning the music genre grime), *We are the Rangers Boys* (a forum about the football team QPR), *British Expats* (a forum for British Expatriates) and *The Student Room* (a forum for students in the UK). The number of *innits* were found as well as the number of invariant and canonical uses. The speech acts, polarities, placements and turn-positions were also examined. Finally the functions were studied using a model inspired by Axelssons (2011: 41-55) overview of the functions of Tag Questions and Andersen's (2001) functions of *innit*. The results showed that *innit* is used both invariantly and canonically and the extent to which either is used depends on the forum (or social group). Turn-final was found to be the most common turn position. The explanation of covert prestige and in-group speech gave some insight into why *innit* is used. It was also found that *innit* is most often used to give emphasis and involve the listener, as these were the most common functions found in the forums used for this study.

Keywords: *innit*, tag questions, follow-ups, functions, formal features, sociolinguistics, covert prestige, linguistics, English

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1. Introduction

Innit is a tag which has become characteristic of London English and has received world-wide interest from linguists. Thus, many studies have been done on this tag. These studies are, however, often done in relation to general studies of Tag Questions, non-standard English in London, or slang. This essay, on the other hand, will focus on the tag *innit* itself and its use in online forums.

1.1 Aim

In general terms, this study aims to examine the formal and functional features of *innit*, or simply how and why *innit* is used, in online forums. In order to achieve this aim the study will attempt to do the following:

- Provide an understanding of the social groups in which *innit* is used and the factors (age, region, context) that facilitates the use of *innit*.
- Suggest the most common form of *innit* (in terms of speech acts, turn-position, polarity etc.) and potential deviations from this form.
- Survey the extent to which *innit* is used invariantly and canonically as well as how this differs in different social groups.
- Investigate the functions of *innit* and to what degree each function is used.

By investigating how *innit* is used in forums, in connection to previous research on *innit*, a broader understanding of how *innit* is used in general may also be achieved.

1.2 Tag Questions

Tag Questions are usually defined by their structure: a declarative anchor sentence with a tag attached at the end. However, there are problems with this definition, since there are Tag Questions that do not fit into this definition. For example, the anchor tag does not have to be declarative, even though that is the most common, it can also be imperative (*Open the door, will you?* Axelsson 2011:31), exclamative (*How nice he is, isn't he?* Axelsson 2011:31) or interrogative (*Are you coming, are you?* Axelsson 2011:31). The placement of the tag also varies, though it is most often placed at the end of the sentence, it can be placed at the beginning (*Wouldn't you though if somebody came up [...]?* Andersen 1998:9) or the middle (*You understood, didn't you, the real point [...]?* Axelsson 2011:31) as well. The tag also usually has reverse polarity i.e. if the anchor sentence is positive the tag is negative and vice

versa. However, Tag Questions can also have constant polarity, where the tag and the anchor are either both positive (*It's interesting, is it?* Axelsson 2011:31), or both negative (*They don't come up cheap don't they?* Tottie and Hoffman 2006:283). It is also often said, for example by Crystal (2003:218), that Tag Questions generally prompt a confirming or rejecting response. However, as research by Andersen (1998:5) confirms, sometimes Tag Questions elicit no response at all. As Axelsson (2011:33) mentions, Tag Questions should also not be defined by their punctuation. While examples of Tag Questions are often written with a comma following the anchor and the entire phrase ending with a question mark, this is not a feature of Tag Questions. This is significant to this study since a majority of the examples studied have odd punctuation or no punctuation at all.

It has already been noted that the tag can be placed in different places within the tag question. A similar topic is the topic of turn-position, which refers to where in the speaker's turn the tag is placed. *Turn-final position* is, according to Andersen (1998:5), the most common position and it refers to a tag being placed when the speaker "leaves the floor" (Axelsson 2011:126) to the listener. *Turn-medial*, or *turn-embedded*, tags are tags placed in the middle of the turn, where "the speaker goes on speaking" (Axelsson 2011:126) and does not let the listener respond. A tag placed in the middle of a tag question (as in the previous example, "You understood, **didn't you**, the real point [...]?" [Axelsson 2011:31]) is a turn-medial tag. However, turn medial-tags can also be placed at the end of a Tag Question but in the middle of a turn (I'm not gonna be here Friday Saturday Sunday or Monday **am I** cos I've got this holiday [Andersen 1998:8]). Thus, there is a distinction between tag placement and turn-position. *Turn-initial* tags are tags placed at the beginning of a turn. This could refer to tags placed at the beginning of a Tag Question or tags used as *follow-ups*, "reduced interrogative form[s]" (Andersen 2001:101) used in response to another speaker's statement (this concept will be revisited in section 1.3.).

Tag Questions are also divided into two categories, *canonical* and *invariant*. The term canonical, sometimes also called *variant tags*, refers to a Tag Question in which the tag changes in relation to the anchor sentence. Thus, the canonical tags follow the inflectional system and changes according to the verb and subject of the anchor sentence. The invariant tags do not change in this way, they are constant and do not depend on the anchor sentence. Examples of invariant tags are *right?*, *okay?* and the topic of this essay, *innit?*. Invariant tags are the preferred tags among

teenagers and Andersen (1998:10-11) has suggested two possible reasons for this. The first reason is that teenagers may want to deviate from the inflectional system of Tag Questions, since it requires extra effort. The second reason is related to social implications, covert prestige and group solidarity; these are important topics that will be given further explanation in section 1.5. Andersen (1998:11) also suggests that, since *innit* has started to be used invariantly so often, there may be a language change in progress, an *invariabilisation* (Andersen 2001:98), meaning that canonical tags will have been replaced by invariant tags in the future. However, at this stage in the process, it is impossible to determine if this change is actually taking place or not.

A topic that has been given significant focus by scholars is the functions of Tag Questions. Tag Questions are used not only to ask questions but for several different reasons. Linguists, such as Algeo (1990), Holmes (1995, cited in Axelsson 2011) and Roesle (2001, cited in Axelsson 2011), have developed many different categories for the different function of Tag Questions. The eight categories used in this study, chosen since they provide a sufficient understanding of common functions of Tag Questions, are presented in Table 1 on the following page. For more detailed explanations and further uses of Tag Questions see Axelsson's (2011:41-55) overview.

In Tottie and Hoffman's (2006) study using similar categories it was found that, in the British data, confirmatory, facilitative and attitudinal tags (here punctuational tags) were used most often whereas informational, aggressive, peremptory and other tags were less common.

It is also important to note that, as Holmes (1982:45 cited in Axelsson 2011) explains, tags are "multifunctional" but tend to have a "primary function", thus a single tag can express several functions simultaneously. There might also be an interesting dynamic between the intended function and the listener's interpretation of the function, as suggested by Andersen (1998:3). Furthermore, it is likely that speakers and hearers are only subconsciously aware of the underlying reasons for using Tag Questions and would perhaps be unable to identify them.

Table 1. Categories of Tag Functions (as noted by Axelsson 2011: 41-55)

Type of tag	Informational (Algeo 1990:445)
Function	Getting information.
Example	You haven't got the ages of these other guys, have you? (Algeo 1990:445)
Type of tag	Confirmatory (Roesle 2001:32)
Function	Getting confirmation.
Example	- Well I think you did see it, didn't you? No? - No, well I can't remember. (Roesle 2001:32)
Type of tag	Involving/Facilitative (Roesle 2001:33)
Function	Involving the listener, typically by them agreeing to a statement.
Example	This is quite nice an anorak isn't it? (Roesle 2001:33)
Type of tag	Punctuational (Algeo 1990:446)
Function	Giving emphasis.
Example	You classicists, you've probably not done Old English, have you? Course you haven't. (Algeo 1990:446)
Type of tag	Softening (Holmes 1995:81)
Function	Being polite or softening harsh statements.
Example	You've got a new job Tom haven't you? (Holmes 1995:81)
Type of tag	Challenging (Holmes 1995:81)
Function	Forcing a response from a "reluctant addressee".
Example	- Now you er fully understand that, don't you? - Yes, Sir, indeed, yeah. (Holmes 1995:81)
Type of tag	Peremptory (Algeo 1990:447)
Function	Undermining the listener by pointing out something they clearly should know.
Example	I wasn't born yesterday, was I? (Algeo 1990:447)
Type of tag	Aggressive (Algeo 1990:447)
Function	Undermining the listener by pointing out something they clearly could not know.
Example	- I rang you up this morning, but you didn't answer. - Well, I was having a bath, wasn't I? (Algeo 1990:447)

1.3 Innit

Innit is an abbreviation of the canonical tag *isn't it* and, as Andersen (1998:4) suggests, perhaps also non-standard *ain't it*. *Innit* originated as a canonical tag but has developed into an invariant tag and is now used both canonically and invariantly. *Innit* has been found to be used extensively by young Londoners and has become characteristic of this social and geographical group (Palacios Martinez 2011:119). While it has achieved popularity in London, it does not seem to have expanded much into other parts of England as suggested in Moore and Podesva's (2009:454) study on the use of Tag Questions among girls in Northwest England where only one use of *innit* was recorded.

As previously mentioned, Tag Questions can have several functions. Andersen (2001:127-134) finds that these functions all apply to the use of *innit*, but also that *innit* has additional uses. He develops three categories of functions specifically related to *innit*, which are ironical tags, imagination-appealing tags and non-turn-yielding tags. *Ironical tags* are tags used after an ironic statement in order to get the interlocutor to pretend to agree (*Oh yeah I forgot you're a homosexual innit Sanjay* Andersen 2001:128). However, as Andersen (2001:128) expresses, this type of tag cannot be said to be a unique feature of *innit*, since any tag can follow an ironic statement. *Imagination-appealing tags* are tags used "to assist the hearer in conjuring up an image of what is being described" (Andersen 2001:132) (*Sam and Fern weren't there innit? I was in the bedroom on my own.* Andersen 2001:129). This tag is similar to facilitative tags but "differs from these in that the imagination-appealing tag raises no expectation that the hearer agrees with" (Andersen 2001:131). Non-turn-yielding tags refer to tags that are used in the middle of a narrative, thus precluding the interlocutor's response (*Look it's their problem innit I mean I just wanna get over these bloody things.* Andersen 2001:133). This tag is used to emphasise a common ground shared with the hearer or to simply acknowledge the hearer's presence. This tag looks similar to facilitative tags, but does not actually facilitate conversation. Arguably, these types of tags can also be compared to punctational tag since, as Erman (1998:97, cited by Axelsson 2011:54) claims, *innit* can be used within narratives as a *discourse marker*¹ (an independent

¹ The idea that all Tag Questions should be seen as discourse markers has been under discussion. For more on this see Axelsson (2011:58).

lexical item with little meaning and no grammatical function [Moder and Martinovic-Zic 2004:117]) to give emphasis, which is the function of a punctuational tag.

Andersen also discusses the function of *innit* as a follow-up. Follow-ups are usually used to express surprise, agreement or simply show that one is paying attention (2011:101-102). Palacios Martinez (2011:120) confirms that *innit* is used in these ways, when he says that *innit* can be used as a “simple response” to express reinforcement or surprise. However, Andersen also finds that *innit* as a follow-up can be used in ways in which other follow-ups are not used. The first function that he discusses is the *imagination-recognition function*, exemplified in (1). This type of follow-up is used in agreement, but to express something along the lines of *I can imagine* rather than *I agree*. Another function, shown in (2), which Andersen refers to as *recognition of contextual alignment*, is used to “endorse an implicature raised by the utterance” (2001:146) rather than to agree with a statement. *Innit* can also be used as a *link between arguments* (148), as in (3), when it is used in an agreeing fashion by the respondent, who then adds another argument to the statement with which they are agreeing.

- (1) Person 1: “I’m all warm in my bedroom!”
Person 2: “Innit” (2001:143)
- (2) Person 1 (to person 3): “What are you saying that for?”
Person 2: “Innit” (2001:146)
- (3) Person 1: Mhm, he’s a dickhead in he?
Person 2: Innit. Dad’s a pig. (2001:147)

Evidently, Andersen’s study shows that there are idiosyncratic functions of *innit* as a tag and also as a follow-up. These functions will be used in this study, in addition to the eight aforementioned categories of Tag Questions, when studying the functions of *innit*.

2. Linguistic Background

This section will give background into some aspects of linguistics, which will aid the understanding of why *innit* is used. This background will be given first by looking at

how language varies and then inspecting how sociolinguistic factors could be affecting the use of *innit*.

2.1 Language Variation

The concept of language variation is simply that each individual has a distinct way of speaking and every person's individual style, or personal variation, is determined by a number of factors. While personal variation is difficult to predict, the different groups to which people belong presents clues about the way that they speak.

Regional variation is variation related to geographical region. *Social variation* involves groups and classifications that people belong to socially. This includes, for instance, age, gender, class and occupation. Regional variation and social variation are linked since people with a more prominent regional accent and dialect are often of lower class. The upper classes, on the other hand, often lean towards speech with few regional connotations such as *Standard English* and *Received Pronunciation* (Trudgill 2002:160). Standard English is perceived as the most prestigious dialect of English and RP is perceived as the most the prestigious accent, or pronunciation, in British English². Finally, *stylistic variation* refers to variation, particularly varying degrees of formality (Spolsky 1998:33), depending on situation and context.

As previously mentioned, *innit* is used as a form of slang in London English. Slang is an aspect of informal language, which is defined by being typical of in-group speech and being neglectful of the rules of the language. As Spolsky (1998:36) reflects, slang is often used by the young and powerless. In order to keep its in-group status, slang needs to be dynamic and open to change in case other groups start to use the same expressions. The need for unique expressions within a specific social group is related to a phenomenon called solidarity, which will be discussed in section 2.2.

One social group in which slang thrives is teenagers. The variety of language that teenagers speak is referred to as a form of social variation, since it is a group defined by age. In this variation non-standard language is plentiful and the rules of the language are often bent or ignored. Because of its innovativeness the language that is used among teenagers is particularly interesting for linguists to study, as linguistic changes are likely to originate from this social group.

² For more information about these terms see Trudgill 2002:160-70

2.2 Sociolinguistics

Non-standard variations of English often have negative connotations and are looked down upon, particularly by Standard English speakers. *Innit*, in particular, seems to carry a stigma, which is perhaps why Andersen mentions that it is “notorious” (1998:4). This is likely to be because it is careless both in its pronunciation, by abbreviating *isn't it*, and in not following the inflectional system, by using it invariantly. Of course, the low status of those who tend to use *innit* is also involved in this. The stigma against *innit* is clear when looking at the user-generated online dictionary *Urban Dictionary*, where users have defined *innit* as, for instance “stupid”, “uneducated” and showing “ignorance towards learning English” (Innit 2013, *Urban Dictionary* [online]).

With such negative connotations associated with *innit* it is perhaps curious that people still use it. However, there are several sociolinguistic phenomena that can explain this. First, consider the previously mentioned concept of *solidarity*. Solidarity, or common group membership, is a social phenomenon, which affects language as well. The language spoken within a group is important to the solidarity and identity of the group. *Group identity*, or group belonging, is related to *social identity*. By choosing to speak a certain way the speaker is identifying or attempting to identify themselves as part of a group. In addition, people tend to adapt their language to the language spoken by their interlocutor. This is a concept called *accommodation* (Spolsky 1998:33), which is of course also present within social groups.

As mentioned previously, Standard English is the perceived prestigious dialect of English, but there is also likely to be a covert, or hidden, prestige in relation to non-standard variants. *Covert prestige* refers to a phenomenon which was suggested by Labov in his well-known New York study where he found that there was prestige associated with the language of the upper classes but also noted that there should be an “equal and opposing prestige for informal, working-class speech” (Labov 1966:108 cited in Trudgill 1972:183), but that this prestige is hidden. In 1972 Trudgill studied prestige in Norwich and found several facts that would suggest that this covert prestige does in fact exist. The first piece of evidence was that informants first stated that they did not speak Standard English although they would like to, but later admitted that if they did so, people would consider it to be “foolish, arrogant

and disloyal” (1972:184). The other piece of evidence was that male informants were likely to under-report their use of the standard form. Thus, Trudgill concluded that the speakers subconsciously or secretly strive toward the non-standard English rather than Standard English and also that this is a phenomenon that seems to concern male speakers specifically, since women tended to over-report their use of standard forms. However, Meyerhoff (2006:38) claims that the term covert prestige is often misused as a term for the local or working class language, it is important to note that covert prestige refers specifically to the hidden prestige that is typically associated with these variations.

Thus, it can be assumed that *innit* is used, despite the *overt prestige* of Standard English, because of the covert prestige of non-standard English. In addition, because of solidarity and group belonging, *innit* is used in specific social groups such as among teenagers, who have been reported to use it excessively.

3. Materials

3.1 Forums

This study is based on how *innit* is used in online forums. An online forum is a message board that typically requires a membership to write messages but no membership to read these messages. The messages in the forum are stored and can be responded to at any time. Note that this system differs from, for example, chat rooms, in which so called instant messaging occurs. To an extent, this leads to messages in forums being more thoughtfully written than those in instant messaging, which is much more fast-paced. For instance, abbreviations that are characteristic of “text speak” would be more common in chat rooms than in forums. However, that is not to say that these abbreviations do not occur in forums, especially those that are immersed in a culture in which “text speak” is used on any platform and even in spoken language. Informal speech can certainly be found in forums, although the degree to which it is used varies between different forums and even within forums, a notion that is important in relation to this study. Furthermore, the messages in forums are sorted into threads and each thread is meant to contain a certain topic. It could be said that, in most cases, a single thread represents a single conversation. Thus, the style might differ from one thread to another but it is unlikely to change drastically

throughout a single thread. Finally, threads are sorted into categories, called sub-forums or boards, for ease of navigation.

3.2 Choice of Forums

Several factors were considered when finding the forums to use for this study. These factors were used with two aims in mind. The first aim was to find forums which would yield sufficient results to study, i.e. the forums would have to contain a significant number of uses of *innit*. The other was to find forums in which *innit* is used to varying degrees in order to make interesting comparisons, mainly in relation to the style used in each forum. These factors will also be discussed further in the descriptions of each individual forum in section 3.3.

The first factor involved in the choice of forums focuses on the geographical area in which *innit* is used. As stated in the introduction, London is the centre of the usage of *innit*. Thus, the forums chosen all have some relation to London, England, Great Britain or the UK. For means of comparison, the use of *innit* is likely to vary depending on how focused the forum is on the London area. It is important to note that, even though these forums were chosen specifically for their connection to London in order to ensure a large sample to study, not all members of these forums are from London and it would be incorrect to assume that all samples of *innit* are written by people from London.

Since Stenström et al. (2002:165-66) claim that *innit* is used to a great extent by **young** Londoners, age is also important to consider when choosing which forums to use for the study. While most forums are not directed towards people of a specific age, informed assumptions (which will be presented in section 3.3.) about the average age of the users is helpful both when choosing the forums and when comparing them.

A third important factor is the topic of the forums. Some forums are very broad in their subject matter and are used to bring people with something in common together to talk about whatever they please. Others, however, are specifically used to discuss a common interest among the users. The subject matter of the forums is important for determining both geographical location and social groups.

3.3 Forum descriptions

The first forum used in this study is called *Grime Forum*. This is a forum centring on the music genre *Grime*, which originated in London and is a type of rap music. Even though *Grime* has become increasingly popular worldwide it is most known in London. Therefore, it is likely that most members using this forum are from London as well. Since this style of music is often associated with people who are quite young, it is probable that the members in this forum belong to a younger age group. These two factors contribute to the assumption that the language used in this form is informal and non-standard. Finally, the subject matter also contributes to this idea, as the informal lyrics used in *Grime* music should affect the language of the culture surrounding the music. Keeping the informal style of language used in this forum and the sociolinguistic factors in mind, it is expected that *innit* is used often both canonically and invariantly.

We are the Rangers Boys is a forum for supporters of the football club Queens Park Rangers, or QPR. This London club is currently playing in the Premier League. However, they are not as successful as their fellow London clubs in the League, such as Chelsea F.C. and Tottenham Hotspur F.C. Thus, they are less likely to have international supporters than the more famous teams, and for this reason most of the members of this forum are thought to be British and a significant percentage of these are likely to be from London. Just as with *Grime Forum* the language is assumed to be quite informal and non-standard.

British Expats is a forum for British Expatriates in which members can talk about life abroad and other topics of interest. Clearly, this forum is for all British people, not only people from London. There is no reason to believe that Londoners should be more common or active than others in the forum. In addition, the members of this forum are probably older than in the other forums, since this is a forum for people working and living abroad and not, for instance, students. With this in mind, the style should not be expected to be as informal as in the other forums and therefore *innit* will probably not be used as often. What is also interesting about this forum is that these people identify with British culture while perhaps not being directly involved in it, since they are living abroad. If they still use, for instance, *innit*, one could say that it is very rooted in their language.

The final forum is called *The Student Room* and is part of a website on which students in the UK can find articles on topics relating to student life. As with *British Expats* this forum is not focused specifically on people from London or topics that Londoners would be more interested in than other people. However, unlike *British Expats* this forum is directed towards young people specifically. Thus, the language should be less formal than in *British Expats*. On the other hand, teachers and alumni can also be members of this forum and when students interact with them it is likely that the level of formality rises.

4. Method

Using the program *SiteSucker*, which is used to download .html files for offline view, 20,000 thread pages from each forum were downloaded. These threads were then put into the concordance program *AntConc*. Since *innit* is primarily used in speech it is likely to be written in many different ways. Thus, it was important to first discover which variations in spelling had been used in these forums. To do this all forums were processed through *AntConc* and this program was used to generate a word list sorted by word. By perusing words with an initial “in” the following variations of *innit* were found: *innit*, *init*, *innnit*, *innnnnit*, *initt*, *inittt*, *initttt*, *inittttt*, *inittttttt*. Of course, there could also be other versions of *innit* that do not start with “in”, but for expedience only these variations were used. Furthermore, note that any mention of *innit* from now on refers to all of these variations combined. Additionally, certain parts of the coding of the websites, such as *vBulletin_init* and *FB.init*, were considered as uses of *innit* by *AntConc*, as this was undesirable all of these examples were excluded. Frequently occurring members’ names and signatures including *innit*, such as *Scotophobic! Innit!* and *MILWARTtheGRATE, innit* were also removed.

After this, each forum was analysed separately using these variations. First, the number of *innits* used in each forum was recorded. Note that these are not just individual uses, since some might be repeated in replies (as quotes of what was previously written) and in names and signatures (if these were not frequent enough to be excluded from the search). The option to disregard capitals was used, and thus words with the same spelling were considered to be the same word regardless of the capitalisation of the word.

Next, 40 examples from each forum, i.e. a total of 160 examples, were used for further analysis. This number was chosen, as it was the total number of individual uses (excluding one use in which *innit* was not used as a tag) found in *The Student Room*, which had the lowest number of uses. The 40 examples in the remaining forums were selected by dividing the 20,000 threads into 20 groups with 1000 threads in each. The first two examples, as displayed in AntConc, in each group were used to gather 40 examples from each forum. This process was used to ensure that the examples were spread across the forums.

Using these 160 examples, the uses of *innit* were examined. It was determined whether *innit* was used invariantly or canonically in these 160 examples. The number of invariant uses and the number of canonical uses were calculated and recorded. These recordings were separated by forums in order for comparisons between the forums to be made. In addition, other interesting examples found in the forums were noted.

The 160 examples taken from the forums were analyzed in terms of the speech act used in the anchor sentence, i.e. whether its structure was declarative, imperative, interrogative or exclamative. The polarity, placement and turn-positions of these examples were also examined. Since Axelsson mentioned that turn positions are important in relation to the functions of tags (2011:126), the turn positions were also looked at in comparison to the functions of *innit*.

When studying the functions of *innit* the previously mentioned categories for the functions of Tag Questions were used in combination with Andersen's categories for the functions of *innit*. This combination is presented in figure 1 on the following page. Since many of these categories are quite similar and may to some extent overlap, six larger categories were used first and then divided into smaller and more precise categories. As can be seen in figure 1 the category "non-turn-yielding" is connected to both involving tags and punctuational tags. The distinction between involving non-turn-yielding tags and punctuational non-turn-yielding tags is whether the primary function of the non-turn-yielding tag is to acknowledge the listener (or in forums, the reader) or to give emphasis to what has just been said (or written). Clearly, this distinction is small and the primary function is not always apparent, but this is a guideline for the categorization of non-turn-yielding tags.

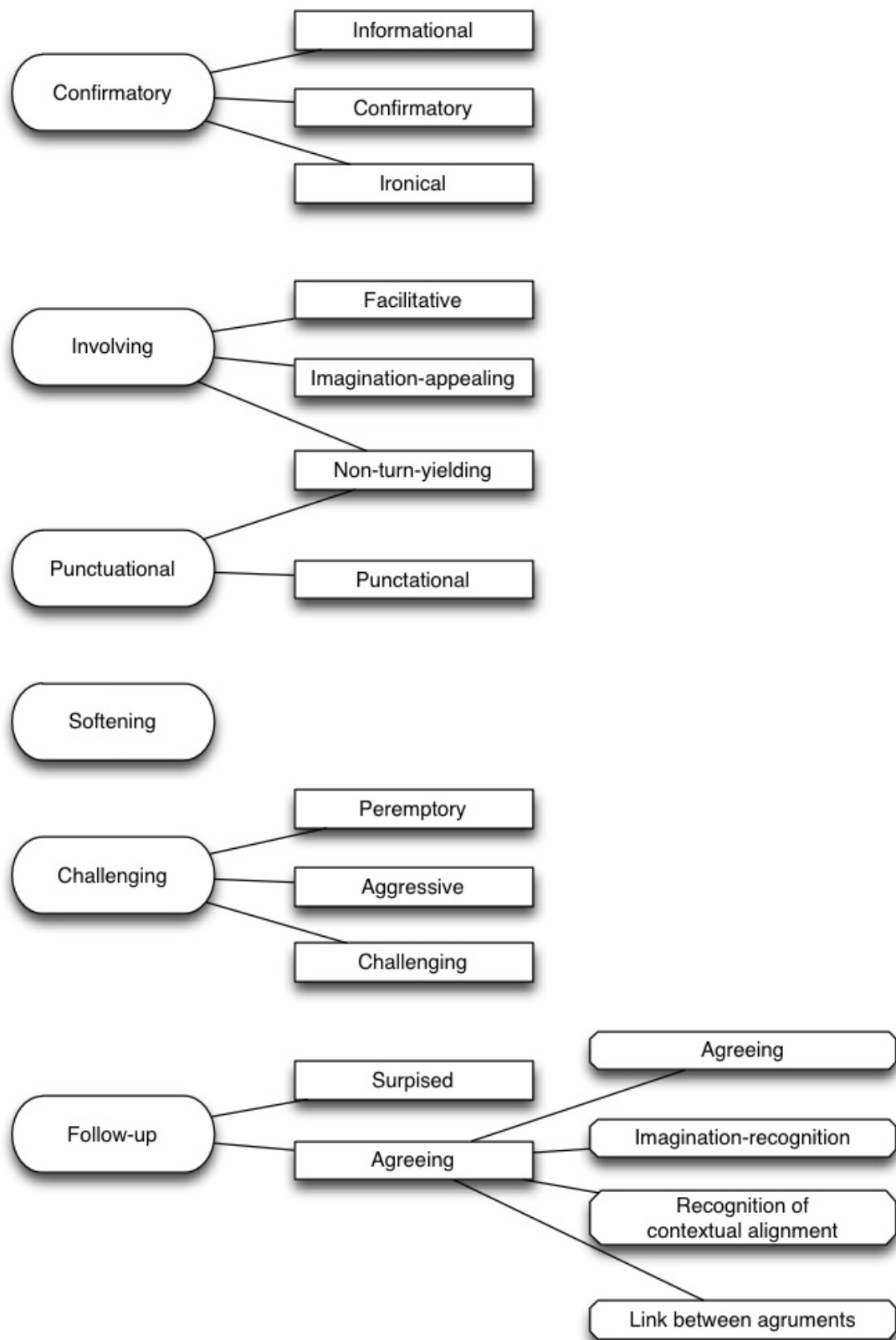


Figure 1: Categories of Functions

While, some scholars choose to focus on only the tag when examining the function (Axelsson 2011:57), this study takes the whole tag question (anchor and tag) into account. As previously mentioned, it is likely that Tag Questions are used for several different functions simultaneously, however for the purpose of this study the most appropriate category, or the tag's expected **primary** use, has been chosen and any underlying use has not been taken into account. Note that, as has also been expressed by Axelsson (2011:9), this type of analysis is highly subjective as it is merely an interpretation of the context in which *innit* was used.

5. Results

Throughout the 80.000 forum threads studied, 5665 uses of *innit* were found. As can be seen in Table 2, 5117 of these were found in *Grime Forum*, *We are the Rangers Boys* had 302 uses, 66 belonged to *The Student Room* and finally in *British Expats* there were 180 uses of *innit*. For a clearer representation of how *innit* is used across the forums table 3 shows how often *innit* occurred per 100 000 words in the forums.

Table 2: The Number of *Innits*

	Grime	QPR	Expat	Student
Innit	1906	225	174	46
Init	3170	70	6	20
Other variations ³	41	0	0	0
TOTAL:	5117	295	180	66

Table 3: Occurrences of *Innit* per 100 000 words (rounded off to three decimals)

	Grime	QPR	Expat	Student
Innit	5.419	1.034	0.058	0.013
Init	9.013	0.322	0.002	0.006
Other variations ⁴	0.117	0	0	0
TOTAL:	14.55	1.356	0.060	0.019

Out of the 160 examples of *innit* used for further study 91 invariant uses were found and 69 of them were found to be invariant. *British Expats* had 11 invariant uses and 29 canonical uses. *We are the Rangers Boys* had 23 invariant uses and 17 canonical uses. *The Student Room* had 26 invariant uses and 14 canonical uses.

³ Innit, Inittt, Initttt, Inittttt, Inittttttt, Innnit, Innnnnnit

⁴ Initt, Inittt, Initttt, Inittttt, Inittttttt, Innnit, Innnnnnit

Grime forum had 31 invariant uses and 9 canonical uses. This data is presented in Figure 2.

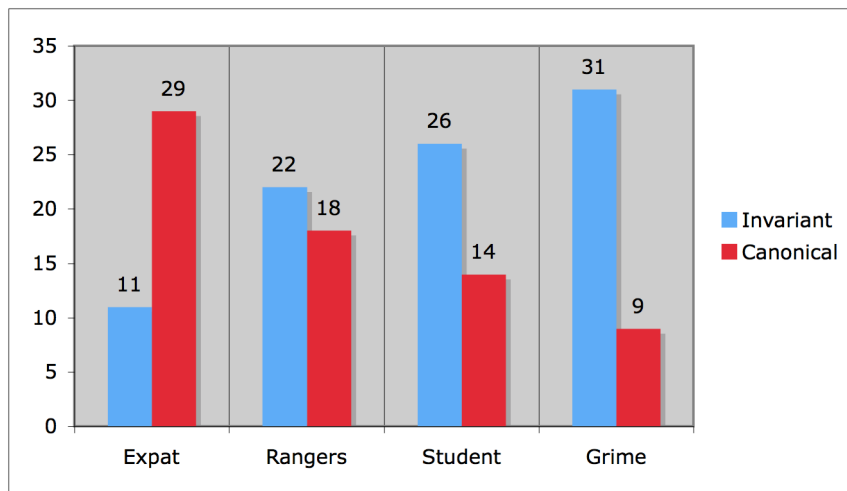


Figure 2: Invariant and Canonical Use

When examining the structure of the anchor sentence in these 160 examples, 142 declarative anchor sentences were discovered. 38 out of these were from *British Expats*, 39 from *The Student Room*, 35 from *We are the Rangers Boys* and 31 from *Grime Forum*. In (1a) an example of one declarative sentence that was found is shown. In addition, 15 imperative sentences were found, one from *British Expats*, one from *The Student Room*, four from *We are the Rangers Boys* and nine from *Grime Forum*. One example of an imperative anchor is presented in (1b). Finally, one interrogative anchor, shown in (1c), was found in *We are the Rangers Boys*. This data is presented in Table 4.

1.

- a. It's just life, innit? (*British Expats*)
- b. SHOW SOME RESPEC INIT!! (*We are the Rangers Boys*)
- c. Iz it cause he iz a gangsta innit! (*We are the Rangers Boys*)

Table 4: Structure of Anchor Sentences

	Declarative	Imperative	Interrogative	Exclamative
Expat	38	1	0	0
Student	39	1	0	0
QPR	35	4	1	0
Grime	31	9	0	0
TOTAL	142	15	1	0

Upon looking at the structure of the examples some interesting cases were found. There were four examples (one in each forum) of a vocative being used after *innit*, one of these examples is shown in (2a). Furthermore, one instance, see (2b), of constant polarity was discovered.

2.

- a. its murder innit mate (Grime Forum)
- b. its not rocket science init (The Student Room)

In terms of tag-placement, there were no examples found of *innit* being placed in the middle of a tag question. In addition, there were no examples of *innit* being placed in the beginning of a tag question, as all of the examples of turn-initial *innits* were follow-ups and these should not be considered tags in Tag Questions.

The study of turn position yielded three instances of turn-initial position. *Innit* was turn-embedded 62 of the examples. Finally, the most common turn position is turn-final, as this was the case in 95 examples. How turn position was separated by forum, as well as the total, is shown in table 5.

Table 5: Turn positions

	QPR	Expat	Grime	Student	Total
Turn-initial	0	1	0	2	3
Turn-embedded	14	15	18	15	62
Turn-final	26	24	22	23	95

Some other interesting examples showed the previously mentioned stigma against *innit* such as in (3a) which seems to satirically comment on incorrect language use, (3b) and (3c) make fun of the way ‘chavs’ (a derogatory slang word

for lower class people, who are known to use *innit* often) speak. In (3d) the poster expresses a desire to not be grouped with those who use *innit*. Advice is given in (3e), seemingly in a mocking way, on how to speak when moving to London. (3c), (3d) and (3e) were not included in the Invariant/Canonical count, since they quote *innit* and therefore do not use it as a tag.

3

- a. Cuz dey tuk ar jubz nd ar bene fits. Innit. (The Student Room)
- b. Nah, chavs are not scruffy! they wear burberry “innit” (British Expats)
- c. What do you call a chav in a box? “Innit” (forum)
- d. I am born in the UK but I don’t like saying i’m British Asian as I don’t drink or smoke or go around saying ‘innit blud’. (The Student Room)
- e. When planning your trip from Oz to London start greeting everyone with “Alright?[]” instead of Hello, how are you? And adding “innit” at least once into any sentence that is at least 2 words long... eg. “Alright? Lovely day, innit? 12 celsius innit? Bloody heatwave, innit?[]” (British Expats)

Finally, the results for the functions of *innit* are displayed in Table 6. These are the functions divided into the six general categories presented in figure 1. In total, across the forums, there were 61 instances of punctuational tags. 53 of the examples were involving tags. 18 of them were confirmatory tags and 16 were challenging tags. There were also six examples of softening tags. Finally, six of the examples were follow-ups.

Table 6: Functions of Innit

	QPR	Expat	Grime	Student	Total
Confirmatory	3	4	5	6	18
Involving	11	20	11	11	53
Punctuational	16	13	17	15	61
Softening	1	1	4	0	6
Challenging	9	1	1	5	16
Follow-up	0	1	2	3	6

Next, looking at the subcategories of the confirmatory category, these including informational, conformatory and ironical tags, it was found that 16 of the confirmatory tags were indeed seeking confirmation. This type of confirmatory tag is exemplified in (4a). Two examples were ironical tags, one of these shown in (4b), and no examples of informational tags were found.

4.

- a. It's past Watford, innit? (British Expats)
- b. 12? Bit adult innit? (British Expats)

Table 7: Fuctions of Innit – Confirmatory Subcategories

	QPR	Expat	Grime	Student	Total
Informational	0	0	0	0	0
Confirmatory	3	3	4	6	16
Ironical	0	1	1	0	2

When examining the subcategories of the involving tags it was found that 37 were facilitative tags, 14 were non-turn yielding tags and two were imagination-appealing tags. An example of a facilitative tag is presented in (5a) and (5b) is an example of a non-turn yielding tag. Finally, an example of an imagination-appealing tag is presented in (5c).

5.

- a. nice selection quite eclectic init?! (Grime Forum)
- b. Horses for courses, innit? Read the [...] (The Student Room)
- c. Fingers crossed, innit? (British Expats)

Table 8: Fuctions of Innit – Involving Subcategories

	QPR	Expat	Grime	Student	Total
Facilitative	6	18	8	5	37
Imagination appealing	0	2	0	0	2
Non-turn yielding	5	0	3	6	14

In the the punctuational subcategories 36 punctuational tags and 25 non-turn-yielding tags were found. In (6a) a punctuational tag is shown and (6b) is a non-turn-yielding tag.

6.

- a. It's all about what you aren't used to innit (British Expats)
- b. Historical innit, no scales for them pioneers (British Expats)

Table 9: Fuctions of Innit – Punctuational Subcategories

	QPR	Expat	Grime	Student	Total
Non-turn yielding	2	11	10	2	25
Punctuational	14	2	7	13	36

In terms of the challenging subcategories it was found that eight were peremptory tags and seven were aggressive tags. A peremptory tag is presented in (7a) and an aggressive tag in (7b). There was also one challenging tag that was found which is shown in (7c).

7.

- a. he's english innit (The Student Room)
- b. I'm not getting grumpy innit? (British Expats)
- c. You chat like an innit now then innit (We are the Rangers Boys)

Table 10: Fuctions of Innit – Challenging Subcategories

	QPR	Expat	Grime	Student	Total
Peremptory	4	0	1	3	8
Aggressive	4	1	0	2	7
Challenging	1	0	0	0	1

It was also established that *innit* can be used as different types of follow-ups. In this study five link-between-arguments follow-ups were found. An example of this type of follow-up can be seen in (8a). There was also one agreeing follow-up found in expat forum, which is shown in (8b).

8.

- a. Person 1: christ guys it's just a thread
Person 2: Init, I can just imagine Jingers' satisfied face when he made that thread like (The Student Room)
- b. Person 1: That's cos I is Satan's bitch
Person 2: Innit (Britsh Expats)

Table 11: Fuctions of Innit – Follow-up Subcategories

	QPR	Expat	Grime	Student	Total
Agreeing	0	1	0	0	1
Imagination-recognition	0	0	0	0	0
Contextual-alignment	0	0	0	0	0
Link-between arguments	0	0	2	3	5

6. Discussion

Grime forum had an overwhelmingly high number of uses of *innit* in comparison to the other forums. Thus, it can be said that *innit* is very much part of the in-group speech within this social group. This is likely to be because, as previously mentioned, the people on this forum are likely to be young and from London. Similarly, *We are the Rangers Boys* also had many uses. One explanation to why *The Student Room* and *British Expats* had fewer uses of *innit* is that these are less concentrated on the London area. This supports the idea that the use of *innit* has not spread much to other parts of the UK. Age does not seem to be as important a factor, as *British Expat* had more uses than *The Student Room*, even though *The Student Room* is likely to have younger members.

Furthermore, the spelling variations in the different forums are interesting. *Innit* and *init* both occurred in all forums. However, *Grime Forum* was the only forum in which other variations were used. This suggests a looser, less ‘correct’ use of language occurs here. In *Grime Forum* *init* is also the preferred spelling, whereas in the other forums *innit* is the predominant spelling. Since *innit* is the official spelling, used in dictionaries etc., it should be seen as the correct spelling and thus the language in *Grime Forum* is again not as ‘correct’ as in other forums. This is also related to sociolinguistics, as there is a covert prestige in this rejection of the ‘proper’ language as well as a sense of creating a distinct in-group speech.

The most interesting observation to be made about the examination of invariant and canonical use is that the forum with the most uses of *innit*, *Grime Forum*, also had the fewest canonical uses. However, this does not mean that *innit* is now an invariant tag. The results from *British Expats* suggest that *innit* is still often used canonically. The conclusion that can be made from this is that as *innit* is used more often and is more integrated into the language it also begins to become primarily used as an invariant tag, but in certain groups it is still often used as a canonical tag. One can also observe that age may be a factor here, as *The Student*

Room also has more invariant uses than canonical. This would confirm Andersen's notion that *innit* is used invariantly by young people, as a rejection of the inflectional system. If the use of *innit* spreads and continues to increase in the future it can perhaps be expected that *innit* would eventually transition completely into an invariant tag.

In the structure of the anchor it can be seen that the most common speech act is the declarative. The examples of imperative and interrogative anchor sentences were few and no uses of exclamative anchor sentences were found. The low number of interrogative and exclamative anchors corresponds to Axelssons (2011:201-205) findings these anchors are rare. Here, no major differences between the forums were found, which suggests that this does not change depending on social group or number of uses of *innit*. Examples (2a) and (2b) show that even though Tag Questions with constant-polarity and vocatives are rare, they are possible.

The reason that no examples with alternative tag placement, i.e. tags placed in the beginning or middle, were found might be because of the differences between spoken and written speech. Spoken speech can be more jumbled up and sporadic, while written speech is more structured especially in environments like this where the messaging is not instant. While turn-final was the most common turn position, there were also quite a few examples of turn-embedded uses. Again, the medium used in the study might have affected this, since turns do not work quite the same in forums as face-to-face conversation, for instance, the 'speaker' does not search for an immediate response from the 'listener'. Something that was often found in turn-embedded uses was that the 'speaker' would break off into a new paragraph after the tag question, but continue writing. This break in writing, rather than a turn switch, would probably be used to signal that a response was wanted. In addition, some instances of turn-embedded follow-ups were found since members can respond to several different things in one message, again usually separated by paragraphs. These types of instances are examples of times when the conversations in forums do not correspond to real life conversation, and therefore data, if analysed as a replication of conversational speech, will be faulty. Just as with the speech acts, the data for the tag placement and turn position showed no differences between forums.

The examples of people being prejudiced about the use of *innit* confirm the stigma of *innit*. These examples are interesting in terms of in-group speech, since it is clear that other people in these forums, supposedly in the same social group, do use

innit. It seems that these people do not identify themselves as people who use *innit* even though they belong to groups in which other people use *innit*. An explanation for this is that these examples were found in *British Expats* and *The Student Room*, the forums with the fewest uses of *innit*.

When it comes to the functions, we can see that *innit* functions both as a tag and as a follow-up. There is no clear pattern in the differences of the functions between the different forums. Thus, it can be said that these differences are likely to be coincidental and therefore it is of more interest to compare the totals. As punctuational and involving tags account for 71% of the examples, they can be said to be the primary uses of *innit*. It is then clear that even though the function of asking questions was “probably the original purpose of Tag Questions” (Algeo 1990:445), that does not seem to be the case anymore. Algeo’s notion that informational tags are now the “least important” (Algeo 1990:445), is confirmed by there not being any informational tags in the 160 examples studied. Also, Tag Questions are not being used, in these results, too seek confirmation as often as one would expect when looking at other studies, such as Tottie and Hoffman’s (2006). Perhaps, *innit* has become to be used more as discourse marker than to actually ask questions. This idea is supported by the relatively high number of non-turn-yielding punctuational and involving tags. The difference between the softening and the challenging uses suggest that *innit* is used more often to be impolite than to be polite, which would refute the idea, that Algeo (1990) also opposes, that Tag Questions are used for politeness.

Aside from the non-turn-yielding tags, Andersen’s idiosyncratic functions for *innit* were not found to be very common. Thus, it can be said that *innit* is not being used as an idiosyncratic expression more often than it is used as a general tag question.

When comparing to Tottie and Hoffman’s (2006) data we find that they are quite similar, the top three functions (confirmatory, involving and punctuational) were the same in both studies. It can then be concluded that, because of this and the relatively low number of Andersen’s idiosyncratic uses, in most cases *innit* is used quite similarly to how other Tag Questions are used.

7. Conclusion

The primary aim of this study was to examine the form and function of *innit*. Beginning with the form of *innit*, or how it is used, results have shown that it can be used both canonically and invariantly. However, the extent to which it is used invariantly/canonically depends on the forum. It was found that forums in which members are expected to be younger, the invariant use is more frequent. This suggests that, as Andersen has said, younger people prefer the invariant tags. It was also found that the most common turn-position was turn-final, turn-medial was also used quite often and turn-initial tags were the least common. The turn-initial use of *innit* tends to be when *innit* is used as a follow-up, which *innit* was found to be used as as well as a tag. Finally, this study has also given insight to the functions of *innit*, or why it is used. First, since it has been found that *innit* is used differently in different social groups the use of *innit* can be connected to in-group speech and covert prestige, thus it functions as a way of projecting in-group membership, identity and status. In addition to this general function, more specific functions of *innit* were also examined, the most common being, according to the results of this study, to emphasize and to involve the listener.

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