Back and forth with classes and that kind of thing: A panel study of general extender use in Philadelphia

Suzanne Evans Wagner, Kali Bybel & Kathryn VerPlanck

Michigan State University
General Extenders (GEs)

1. I’ll actually find out where I’m living AND THAT KIND OF STUFF at the end of May. (Joanna, 001)

2. At the Crown office we were doing layout OR SOMETHING. (Melissa, 007)

3. We would have like quizzes AND THINGS that we had to take home. (Hayley, 008)

- Discourse particles that typically occur clause-finally.
- Prototypically used to “evoke some larger set” (Dubois, 1992:198) but have multiple functions.
- As a sociolinguistic variable, usually circumscribed by form.
## The GE template

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>connector</th>
<th>quantifier</th>
<th>generic</th>
<th>comparative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>and</td>
<td>some</td>
<td>thing</td>
<td>like that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>stuff</td>
<td>this/that kind of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>whole</td>
<td>where</td>
<td>this/that type of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>every</td>
<td>people</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>any</td>
<td>crap</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>no</td>
<td>shit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- connector + generic \(\rightarrow\) AND STUFF
- quantifier + generic + comparative \(\rightarrow\) SOME SHIT LIKE THAT
- comparative + generic \(\rightarrow\) THIS KIND OF THING
- fixed expressions: e.g. ETCETERA, AND SO ON
GEs in quantitative sociolinguistics

- Montréal French (Dubois, 1992)
- Canadian English (Tagliamonte & Denis, 2010; Denis, 2010)
- British English (Cheshire, 2007; Denis, 2010; Levey, 2008; Pichler & Levey 2010, f.c.)
- American English
  - pragmatics (Ball & Ariel, 1978; Ward & Birner, xxxx)
  - discourse analysis (Overstreet, 1999; Overstreet & Yule, 1997)
- no quantitative sociolinguistic work on GEs in American English
Social distribution of GEs

- Gender and social class have little effect on overall frequency of use.
- Rate of GE use is mainly conditioned by age of speaker.
- GEs most frequent in the speech of young people (Cheshire 2007, Dubois 1992, Stubbe & Holmes 1995, Tagliamonte & Denis 2010, Pichler & Levey f.c.)
- Dubois (1992): real-time evidence of age-grading?
  - panel study of 72 speakers aged 15-84
  - in 1971, teenagers used highest frequency of GEs, but this age effect disappeared in 1984
  - Dubois concluded that GEs are age-graded, and most strongly associated with pre-adult life stage
Cross-varietal support for age-grading
(Tagliamonte & Denis, 2010)
GE lexical forms

- Wide range of GE forms
  - e.g. 44+ in Toronto; 95 in Berwick-upon-Tweed
- Social factors influence repertoire
  - **Region**
    - AND THAT is most frequent in British, NZ varieties
    - but not in Canadian and US varieties
  - **Social class**
    - AND THAT associated with British working class
    - GEs containing the generic AFFAIRE associated with Montréal working class;
      generic CHOSE and TRUC with middle class
  - **Age**
    - STUFF variants favored by young in Canada and Britain, though Canadians are ahead
    - STUFF forms appear to be replacing THING forms (Denis f.c.)
GE grammaticalization

1. reduction in syntagmatic length
   - AND STUFF LIKE THAT $>$ AND STUFF
   - OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT $>$ OR SOMETHING
   - no evidence in Toronto or Berwick-upon-Tweed that short forms are replacing long forms within each GE lexical category
GE grammaticalization

2. grammatical decategorization
   - matching GE and nominal referent
     - we would have like quizzes AND THINGS (Hayley 008)
   - non-matching GE and nominal referent
     - especially about money AND THINGS like we don't care (Amanda 042)
   - non-nominal referent
     - he would just throw eggs at people AND STUFF (Alison 027)
   - Toronto, Berwick-upon-Tweed: most GEs co-occur with unexpected referent
     - No evidence in apparent time for ongoing decategorization
     - American English?
3. **shift of pragmatic function**

- She’s really grumpy anymore. We don’t know what’s wrong with her. She’s like always like in a bad mood AND STUFF. She’s just like my dad. (Stacey 047)
- we call it Chenglish because we just mix it up AND EVERYTHING. (Jeanne, 010)
- **GEs can also** (e.g. Pichler & Levey f.c.; Dines 1980; Cheshire, 2007):
  - organize discourse e.g. turn-signalling, foregrounding
  - provide frames e.g. for preceding reported speech
  - reinforce intersubjectivity e.g. presentation of self as in-group
  - be used for negative politeness
  - facilitate hedging, saving face
- **but this is very difficult to operationalize**
Research questions

- Do American teenagers decrease their use of GEs as they exit adolescence?
- What is their repertoire of GE variants?
- Is there any evidence of grammaticalization?
The data

- 13 female high school students in Philadelphia
  - 11 hs seniors in 2005 > college freshmen in 2006
  - 2 hs juniors in 2005 > hs seniors in 2006

- Group sociolinguistic interviews
  - 5 pairs, 1 triad

- Style-shifting
  - same interview partners
  - same interviewer
  - similar topics
  - different setting (high school, interviewer's apartment)

- N tokens = 605. Interrater reliability = 96% wrt Grammatical Category of referent
Overall distribution

- Overall frequency = 36.32 (per 10,000 words)
  - 40.2 in New Zealand (Stubbe & Holmes 1995)
  - 123.5 in Berwick-upon-Tweed (Pichler & Levey f.c.; average of male and female)
  - 15.80 in London (Stenström 1996)

- Frequency 2005 = 43.06 (per 10,000 words)
- Frequency 2006 = 33.41 (per 10,000 words)
  - a small decline, but not statistically significant ($t = 1.02, df = 12, p = 0.33$)
  - panelists may be adjusting GE frequency in the expected direction
  - but no strong evidence for early adult decrease in GE use
  - speakers may be too young
Lexical repertoire

**Toronto** (N = 87)
(Tagliamonte & Denis, 2010)

1. and stuff
2. or something
3. or whatever
4. and stuff like that

**Philadelphia teenagers** (N = 13)

1. and everything
2. and things like that
3. or something
4. or whatever

**Philadelphia teenagers** (N = 11)

1. or something
2. and everything
3. and stuff like that
4. and stuff
Short vs long forms

- GE short forms (≤ 2 lexemes) more frequent than GE long forms (≥ 3 lexemes), but this difference not significant
  - 23.65 short form GEs per 10,000 words
  - 12.67 long form GEs per 10,000 words
  - $t = 1.70, df = 12, p = 0.11$

- short STUFF forms and short THING forms not significantly more frequent than their long counterparts

- But for OR SOMETHING, short forms significantly more frequent than long forms
  - 4.86 short OR SOMETHING forms per 10,000 words
  - 1.02 long OR SOMETHING forms per 10,000 words
  - $t = 4.38, df = 12, p < 0.001$
Nominal vs non-nominal referents

- or something
- stuff
- things

nominal
non-nominal
ambiguous
Expected vs unexpected referents

![Bar chart showing expected vs unexpected referents for 'or something', 'stuff', and 'things'.]
Concluding remarks

- No evidence for age-grading in frequency of GE use:
  - dataset is small and timeframe compressed
  - stabilization of GE rate has perhaps already occurred
  - problem of individual variation
- No evidence for short forms replacing long forms
  - except for OR SOMETHING
- Philadelphia more lexically conservative than Toronto:
  - STUFF is not most frequently occurring GE type
  - STUFF hasn’t extended far to non-NP referents
- Next step: a large-scale trend study of GEs in US English
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References