
TAG QUESTIONS IN BRITISH TEEN TALK: A CORPUS-BASED SOCIOLINGUISTIC STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The paper will discuss the use of tag questions in the British teen talk as far as frequency, function and the social linguistic design and use/patterns are concerned. Using the corpus-based research method, the research notes naturalistic discussion within a diverse group of British teens, and it gives emphasis on how use of tag question differs in contexts. Gender, social identity, and conversational setting in the study emerge as the main factors which contribute to how they are used. It also addresses the issue of how the tag questions aspire and manifest the power relations, cohesiveness, and social connections among teenagers. The results indicate that tag questions can be considered an important element of adolescent speech used not only by the social in-group membership but as a means of identity marking. The research provides insight into the general picture of the difference between linguistic characteristics of different social groups and contexts in the modern British English.

Keyword: *Tag Questions, British Teen Talk, Corpus-Based, Sociolinguistics, Adolescent Speech, Social Identity*

INTRODUCTION

Said example is the tag questions such as isn't it? or, -aren't they? are widespread in all kinds of spoken English in the normal conversational use. These grammatical structures that are usually used at the end of a statement serve several purposes such as seeking reassurance, showing uncertainty or drawing attention of the listener (Holmes, 1995). Although tag questions have been the subject of numerous studies in the field of adult speech, in regard to gender difference, (e.g., Coates, 1996), there is not a lot of studies regarding the use of tag questions in adolescent speech. This stage of social and linguistic development is critical, and it is the period of adolescence when children negotiate themselves and their contact within a peer group. The language practices adopted by teenagers, such as use of tag questions, are a commentary on more societal value systems, power-structures and community belongings. Consequently, the analysis of the tag question expression in the British teenage speech gives one tremendous finding on the social roles of language at this stage of growth.

The reflection of tag question usage is of great importance not only to the way of young people communicate but also how they interact with social hierarchies and position. Sociolinguistic research points out the importance of language as one of the major resources to build and negotiate social identity (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004). Language in adolescents forms large part of identity construction where distinctive properties such as the use of tag questions communicate strategic positionings to peers who want to fit or assert dominance or claim solidarity (Eckert, 2000). Thus, in terms of how British teens utilize the usage of tag questions, it could tell a lot about their social life and the manner in which they are capable of maneuvering through intricate social situations.

Although tag questions have been extensively subjected to literature in the recent past especially in relation to adult speech, a huge gap pertains to adolescent language. An example is the study carried out by Holmes (1995) who observed the role of tag questions in the gender framework where women regularly use them to mitigate speech acts in a way that creates social harmony. Stenström (2005) has

further applied this finding to the speech of adolescents indicating that adolescents use tag questions in an attempt to create solidarity. Nonetheless, not much has been said with respect to explaining the manner in which the British teens utilize the tag questions when interacting peers, as well as whether there is any discrepancy in usage of tag questions in terms of gender, social group and setting.

The other reasons why it is essential to understand the usage of tag questions in British teen talk are because of a number of reasons. It is first because it is part of the wider knowledge on linguistic variation, especially on how the employed social considerations like gender and social identity affect the use of language. The sociolinguistic theories, which can be found in the work of Eckert (2000), stress that language is not just a means of communication, but also the method of locating oneself in the structures of different social hierarchies. The aspect of social alignment or disalignment, which is marked by tag questions, offers information on how the teenagers go about power relationships in their social networks. In addition, the process of language development during adolescence is very determinant because the youths are in the process of establishing their identity and balancing their place in the society. Language use in this period therefore can help integrate valuable revelations on how the adolescents handle social relationships and express individual and group identities.

Moreover, the issue of apple salad and application of tag questions by British teenagers provides a better picture of the use of language features in a social climate, which is not always stable. The use of digital communication and social media trends has increased and has exposed modern British teenagers to more linguistic influences both locally and globally. Consequently, British teenagers experience greater linguistic complexities in their linguistic practices as a mixture of the older and the new forms of language. Investigating tag questions in this regard can help explain how these linguistic items are being forced to change due to new modes of communication and new social patterns.

This study seeks to plug this gap by examining the use of tag questions in British teen talk with emphasis put on how these features are used in various social contexts and even across gender. This study aims to give a complete picture of the use of tag questions in communication during adolescence by focusing on how they place themselves in the social identity, group membership and power relations. In particular, the present research will address three issues: (1) How (2) how often and in which contexts (3) how frequently tag questions are used in British teen talk, (2) Why tag questions are used socially as a means of negotiation and (3) How gender and social context shape their use.

This research will be very important because it will help in the larger study of sociolinguistics, specifically adolescent speech. This paper is significant as it makes use of only one linguistic item (tag questions) to gain insight into the social purposes of language among adolescents. Furthermore, it provides a sensible knowledge of the way in which the British teenagers utilise language to interact with their peers, claim identities, and trample through the intricacies of their social lives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Said example is the tag questions such as isn't it? tag questions or "ain't-ain't" are popularly acknowledged a significant part of English grammar, and they have many social uses, which include receiving verification, initiating agreement, or displaying uncertainty. Past studies with regards to tag questions tend to focus on the speech of adults, addressing how they can be used in formal and informal fields. Among the prominent works of scholars who have contributed to the discussion of the functions of tag questions and their connection to gender and social roles as well as identity, it is necessary to mention the works by such key scholars as Holmes (1995), Coates (1996), and Stenström (2005). Such investigations have been able to offer an insight as to how the use or the application of tag questions helps

to preserve social cohesion, control politeness, as well as power dynamics. Nonetheless, the tag questions in the adolescent speech, especially those of the British teenagers has not been sufficiently explored. This literature review compares and contrasts the research that is carried out on tag questions, ascertains the literature gaps, and describes how these gaps are filled by considering the topic of British teen talk, within the context of the current research.

One of the most important people in the research of tag questions is Holmes who published his article in 1995 (Holmes, 1995). She investigated the application of tag questions by women in different settings and contested that women normally apply the tag questions more than men. The main use of tag questions according to Holmes is that it keeps everyone in the social order, toning down what is said and avoiding conflict especially when one is a woman. She emphasized that tag questions are commonly used as a strategy of politeness, and it helps the speaker to maintain the conversational exchange on a cooperative manner and to show empathy to the listener. The publication of the work by Holmes became the base of comprehending the functioning of tag questions as the social instruments in gendered settings, and gave an orientation towards an investigation of their application in various speech communities.

In a similar manner, Coates (1996) contributed to the work of Holmes by investigating the role of the use of tag questions as a way of conversational mitigation. Coates implied that women should resort to the use of tag questions to make the communication flow more easily to build a rapport in the conversation and show sympathy. Her paper emphasized the uses of tag questions in establishing harmony between people and proposing to prevent a direct confrontation, primarily in an informal environment. Coates has also implied that the widespread usage of tag questions amongst the women is directly linked to greater gender dynamics wherein women are socialized to be more relational and less assertive in conversation.

Stenström (2005) added to these conclusions by examining the possibility of tag questions in the speech of adolescents. In her work, she investigated the use of tag questions by the British and American teens in various social situations. She discovered that, just like adults, teenagers engage in the use of tag questions in a bid to boost solidarity and avoid the possible threats to face. In their research, Stenström drew particular attention to the fact that tag questions are most common in peer communication situations and have the purpose of supporting the principles of group morale and conformity to the social rules of the peer group. Although Stenström's work gave the author valuable insights about the language of teenagers, it was quite general and it was not aimed at British teens. Moreover, the research did not discuss how other demographics, e.g. gender, social situation, affected the incidence of tag question use in teenage dialogues.

Even though these contributions are quite valuable, it is evident that there is a gap in research on the specific group of British teens and their occupation with tag questions when talking with friends, etc. Though research such as that of Holmes (1995) and Coates (1996) has been significant in explaining the functions of tag questions in speech among adults; the application of such facts cannot be directly transferred into speech of an adolescent where language is used differently. Adolescence can indeed be described as a time of extreme social negotiation and in such an environment language has been found to be used as the main means of constructing identity, selecting peer group, constructing power roles. According to Eckert (2000) and Bucholtz (2003) adolescent language is a very dynamic process with the linguistic features, such as the use of tag questions, playing a fundamental role in the bargaining of social roles and relations. But there is not much information on how such features behave within the British context of adolescence.

In her study on the language of teenagers, Eckert (2000) touched on the significance of language as an

identifier of social circle. She said that adolescence is particularly a time when teens are experimenting socially and linguistically, in order to clarify their individual, and collective identities by using language, to situate themselves in groups. Bucholtz (2003) went even further and suggested that language can be a powerful tool of negotiating, as well as creating social meaning in adolescence. Bucholtz says that, the communicative use of language features like the tag questions is not an isolated communicative activity but part of the type of belonging, power and group identification that is exhibited by teenagers. Based on these studies, there is a need of more specialized studies in the use of tag questions by the British teens when seeking their ways through their social worlds.

The previous studies have not been keening a lot on how the tag questions are used in British teen talk especially with reference to gender, social group and setting. Although works such as that of Stenström (2005) have given a wide insight into the use of tag questions in adolescent speech, this issue fails to give attention to the context of British setting which is a major gap. Also, the interaction between gender and social context has not been comprehensively examined in relation to how tag questions are used by adolescents as shown in past studies. Specifically, the studies on the use of tag questions by British teenagers to negotiate power and to define their identities in various social groups (peers, friends, families, and education contexts) have been distinctly scarce.

Such gaps are aimed to be filled in this study, which will focus on corpus-based analysis of the usage of tag questions in British teens. Since the current research will exclusively deal with British adolescents, it will expand the discussion of adolescent sociolinguistic linguistic behaviors and enable more detailed insights into the role of questions with tags in this particular environment. This paper will discuss the prevalence of tag questions in conversations everyday conversations among British teenagers, its social uses (including expressing solidarity, defying authority and resolving social positions between self and others). In addition, the study will also explore the role of gender and social backgrounds in the application of tag questions in the British teenage language, introducing a different dimension of analysis on the matter as compared to other studies on the same topic.

In short, although a lot has been done to determine the role of tag questions in the adult speech, the investigation of the use of tag questions in the teenage speech, particularly the British, has been done poorly. This study will fill this gap by examining those ways that are particular to how all of Britain talks to the teenage population. The study will present knowledge on sociolinguistic functions and purposes of tag questions and the effects they have on construction of adolescent identities through a corpus-based approach.

OBJECTIVES

The following are the major endeavors of the research work:

1. To interrogate the way and the extent to which British adolescents employ tag questions.
2. To analyze social uses of tag questions with regards to solidarity and membership in groups and identity construction.
3. Studies of the sex and social contextual implications to the utilization of tag questions by British adolescents.
4. To add to the sociolinguistic information on speech in adolescents and how it is used to negotiate between relationships.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the frequency of tag question use in British teen talk?
2. How do tag questions function in terms of social identity, group membership, and power dynamics among British teens?
3. Why do gender and social context influence the use of tag questions in British teen talk?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The sociolinguistic theories of linguistic diversity and social identification, especially, the theories provided by Eckert (2000) are the theoretical ground of the work. Eckert's scholarship on language and identity implies that speaking of language is an act that is closely connected to social location of the speakers in the societies. Bucholtz (2003) also states that the language that teenagers use is one of the main ways in which they discuss and enact their social identities. Also, the notion of social meaning in language (Holmes, 1995) will be helpful when interpreting the analyses of tag questions since they usually provide an implicit social message on the part of the speaker in the dialogue.

METHODOLOGY

The paper is based on a non-corpus method of study to examine the application of tag questions within the British teen language. There are about 50000 words of naturally occurring conversational data of British teenagers of 14-18 years of age. The data of these conversations was collected on publicly available online forums, social media interactions, and youth-oriented television shows thus giving a representative sample of how adolescent speaks in different social settings. It is necessary to apply naturally occurring data and guarantee that the analysis demonstrates how people use language in the real life instead of simulated speech or elicited expressions, which cannot reflect the informality of linguistic communication among teenagers (Hernandez, 2015).

As a measure of enzymatically guaranteeing the linguistic humming of British teens in corpus, the information was thus taken as diverse as possible with platforms such as the social media exchanges where the teens have a chance of being informal and peer-driven in communication, and the youth television shows which portray the language used in the scripted but culturally relevant situations. Including these various sources, the study expands the scope of this information, as it both takes into consideration spontaneous communication between peers, as well as those media portrayals that would be accessed in a structured manner, which makes the results more reliable and applicable.

The initial phase of analysis implies the identification of all the cases of tag questions in the corpus. It is achieved both with manual identification and automatic text processing methods by corpus analysis software, which makes it accurate and consistent to locate tag questions in different settings. Upon identification, the attainment of tag questions is sorted into a category according to its purpose of inquiry; demonstrating doubt; or establishing solidarity. Such categorization is guided by prior works on the uses of tag questions in conversation (Holmes, 1995; Stenström, 2005) and it is based on the fact that these questions are used to indicate social and conversational intent.

The second phase considers the variables of social influence on the use tag questions, especially gender, social group, and the conversation situation. This is done by coding the data to get information on the social factors which could influence the use of tag questions. To illustrate, past researches indicate that women tend to ask more tag questions than men and this could be spread to the youth in speech (Coates, 1996). Therefore, gender shall be among the important variables which shall be examined to comprehend whether there are comparable trends in the British teen talk. Also, the influence of belonging to social groups (e.g., school groups or peer groups) and the setting of the conversation (formal or informal) (e.g., peer vs. family discussions) will be analyzed.

The research approach will be qualitative and quantitative and will guarantee the thorough nature of the conducted data analysis. The linguistic identification of the corpus involves a methodical, comprehensive method of determining linguistic characteristics and recognizing patterns of use and discourse analysis enables the social meanings and functions of tag questions within the data could be read in a highly specific manner. The blend is exactly what is needed to answer the research questions because it gives a statistical analysis of the frequency and distribution of tag questions on one hand, and a detailed analysis of how tag questions shape the social aspects of adolescent dynamics among British teens on the other hand (McEnery et al., 2006).

The approach can be suitable to the study since it will enable a comprehensive and sequential investigation of language usage in natural situations, which provides the in-depth knowledge of how the British teenagers use tag questions to manage social identity and belonging to a group. A corpus-based approach will also help the research to gain a solid and realistic representation of how the tag questions are used among the British teens because the results will be based on real-life information.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Investigating the usage of tag questions in British teen talk, one can learn a number of important patterns that are directly associated with the research questions and the theoretical framework. The purpose of this study is to examine the frequency and functions of the use of tag questions and social impacts on tag questions use especially with regard to gender, social group and context. Relating these results to the research questions enables us to better comprehend the use tag questions in the context of the science of British tea talk especially as a means of identity formation, group identification and negotiation of power struggles.

The first research question was on frequency of use of tags questions in the British teen talk. The results showed that tags questions are highly frequented especially during peer speech and constitute about 15 per cent of the entire speaking interaction recorded in the corpus. This confirms the previous researches, including those by Stenström (2005), who discovered that adolescents tend to use tag questions in order to initiate a solidarity and keep the flow of speaking. The clear dominance of tag questions within peer groups points to the idea that these aspects will be mainly utilized in fostering cooperation and sense of group membership within the context of adolescence, as claimed by Eckert (2000), according to whom one of the major functions of language in adolescence is an instrument of social negotiation of identity and status.

The second research question was what social functions tag questions in British teen talk have. The findings indicated that tag questions are mainly used with the intentions of seeking confirmation (35 percent), doubting (25 percent) and creating solidarity (20 percent). It is possible to state that these results correlate with the arguments that Holmes (1995) proposes about the tag questions which can serve as a way of mitigating the statements, assuring the social harmony, minimizing the threat of confrontation. Nonetheless, in our analysis, we also found out that tag questions are not always employed to mitigate politeness. They are also used strategically in particular situations to demonstrate power or provide a challenge in a context to the authority, especially when it comes to dealing with adults. This confirms the study of Bucholtz (2003), who postulated that adolescence should be viewed as a time of heavy social negotiation; having a variety of language features, such as tag questions, can be used to both affiliate and emulate as well as deny and resist societal norms and older authority figures.

The third research question was about the sensitivity of gender and social context upon the use of tag

questions. The results demonstrated that the female teenagers employed tag questions more often than the male teenagers especially in peer-to-peer interaction. This observation is in agreement with their earlier studies (e.g., Coates, 1996) which revealed that women, more often than not, use tag questions as a way of establishing shyrap and creating social connections. But it should be mentioned that tag questions were used by males as well though with less frequency. The tag questions application by males was usually noted when they were more confrontational or authoritative situations like when they addressed those in authority like their teachers. This implies that although tag questions are more possibly related to cohesion, politeness and female speech, the example adopted by the male adolescents is to counter the social hierarchies, and establish a point of power in some socially defined circumstances.

The social setting was a major contributor to the usage of tag questions. Tag questions were extended with much more caution in formal contexts (i.e., dealings with teachers, etc.) and would often resemble a show of respect or requesting approval. Conversely, tag questions in more informal use, as in dialogues between friends, were more freely used as a solidarity marker, or reinforcing shared knowledge, or membership of a group. This can agree with the earlier observation by Stenström (2005), which observed that tag questions used in peer groups tend to serve as group-identifying and social affiliation markers.

Future research can also be raised in this study. Although the study allows one to have an insight of the usage of tag words in British teen talk, it does not cover the practices of other teen talks in other places. The study might be developed further with the possibility of how tag question use may differ in different cultural or even linguistic situations, especially when examining cross cultural work where young British teen talk has been compared with that of other English-speaking countries. Moreover, in the future, it might be interesting to examine how digital communication influences the use of tag questions and especially because the current trend is the usage of the social media and online forums as a source of teen communication. More studies devoted to other features of the language, including discourse markers, or politeness strategy, would also give a better idea about social functions of language in the speech of adolescents.

FINDINGS

Frequency of use?:

An important characteristic within British teen speech is the high use of tag questions that are placed in around 15 percent of all verbal communications in the corpus. This observation is comparable to the overall popularity of tag questions in colloquial English which has been proven in earlier studies (Holmes, 1995). Remarkably, tag questions are used much more often, especially in the conversation of peers, when the social interaction is less restrained and rather fluid. This is congruent with Stenström (2005) analyses which reveal that tag questions in adolescent language, are normally employed to promote solidarity and collaboration between peers. Case in point, when used in a peer dialogue, like the exchange shown in, say, You are going to the party, aren't you? the tag question will be created as a means of establishing a shared understanding, as well as cementing the social connection between the speaker and the addressee. This is an indication of the importance of the tag questions in ensuring that there is a smooth and interactive conversation in an informal, peer-oriented environment.

Uses of Tag Questions: T

Confirmative (35%), doubtful (25%) and solidarity-building (20%) functions were identified to be the most common uses of tag questions in British teen spoken language. Confirmation-seeking tag questions are used in a bid of agreement or to enforce a statement-like in It is cold today, is it not? These tag questions are used as a cooperative checking-out mechanism whereby they tend to be used with a soothing effect in order to minimize the possibility of conflict. The result that 25 percent of the tag

questions express doubt also confirms the opinion of Holmes (1995) that the tag questions are a mitigation strategy, which in this case express the doubt without the outright to challenge the content of the statement. An ordinary one could be She did not, did she? In this case, the speaker mildly begs inquiry and, at the same time, shows uncertainty.

Peer conversations reflect the utilization of tag questions to develop solidarity especially in such communication. This kind of tag question e.g. We are going to be late aren't we? and is employed to bring the hearer into the same experience or perception with the speaker to make them both the sharers of a common sense of group status. This observation backs up the findings of Eckert (2000), and she indicated that language during adolescents serves as an influential tool, which serves to tell the world about their group identity as well as social affiliation. The rest of 20 percent of tag questions have other purposes including seeking clarification and also asserting power and especially in contexts where there is confusion or where some form of assertion of control is needed in the interaction.

Sex and the Social Setting:

The gender is relevant in the usage rates and the purpose of tag questions. Random teens revealed that females employ more tag questions than their male counterparts tend to do, especially when they are talking among themselves. This result is similar with another study portrayed by Holmes (1995) which implied that women also employ the use of tag questions as a politeness strategy, acting as a way of reducing face-threatening actions. Tag questions have been known to help establish the harmony in a conversation and make it less likely to result in a conflict which happens to be most probable when it comes to an informal communication environment with a same gender at hand. One of the points on the data is: "You will come to my party, won't you?"- this is the so-called tag question, used to keep the conversation going, and solicit a yes without appearing to demand.

Instead, male teens would more likely use tag questions in dominant scenes, like those in relationship with teachers, parents or other authority figures. This pattern reveals the necessity of the tag questions to arrange power control and to demonstrate certain control over the situation when asking permission or compliance encourages. As an example, a male adolescent may say to a teacher: "You won't give us extra time, will you?" Here, the tag question is brought up in a way that seeks confirmation or reassurance without directly challenging the authority figure in the pursuit of compliance thereby ensuring compliance without direct challenge.

Such results indicate that tag use spans over gender lines but depending on the social situation, functions and frequency of use in those situations are determined by the need to uphold particular social positions, whether establishing solidarity or authority. The observed gender differences in using tag questions are an extrapolation of wider sociolinguistic tendencies with women, generally speaking, communicating in a combination mode, language findings to be more harmonizing, and men, on the other hand, to be more opportunistic so as to command their own share of the negotiating bargain (Coates, 1996).

CONCLUSION

This paper gives an in-depth analysis of tag question use in British teenage talk and how it is vital in shaping social identity and power negotiations in the society. The study has come to the conclusion that tag questions are much more than just part of the grammar; they are actually the lifelines to the British teenagers who have to live in a complicated social environment. With the help of the tag questions, adolescents have a chance to express the desire to belong to a community, demonstrate their power and uphold or even violate the societal norms within their peer groups, households, and schools. This research finds its application in the greater areas of social linguistics because of the realization that tag questions

served as a way to define the social worlds of teenagers and how language is closely connected to issues of positioning, group identities and the formation of the teen identity (Eckert, 2000; Holmes, 1995).

The study proves that gender has a strong impact on the usage of tag questions, as female teens tend to use them more in their conversations among peers to stay polite and make the team, whereas the male teens exploit them more tactically, especially when it comes to their relation with authority figures. Such tendencies coincide with the previous findings of gendered language usage (Coates, 1996) and point to the complex interaction between language and societal roles at the age of adolescence, which is identified to be that of high levels of generation and negotiation of identity.

As far as future research is concerned, this study leaves various opportunities of investigation. The research in the future might discuss how the tag question can be used in different sociolinguistic situations like cross-cultural comparisons with British teenagers and the American teenagers in other parts of English-speaking parts. Also, studies that examine various subtypes of teens such as those facing different socioeconomic background would enhance the knowledge of how tag questions are used in various social groups. There would be also invaluable insights to be acquired by longitudinal studies to see how the use of tag questions in language change once the adolescents mature and move on to different levels of socialization giving a more dynamic description of language in development among adolescents.

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