SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN THE PRAGMATIC FUNCTIONS OF TAG QUESTION IN ORAL DISCOURSE AND FICTION

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Abstract: *The study focuses on some similarities and differences in the distribution of pragmatic functions of tag questions in two types of discourse – oral face-to-face communication and author-created fictional dialogues. The discussion is based on comparing data from the spoken demographic subpart of the British National Corpus (BNC-SDEM), the Longman Spoken American Corpus (LSAK) with a similar corpus of tag questions in the narrow context of adjacency pairs excerpted from British and American fiction. Data analysis shows that almost all pragmatic functions identified in oral discourse are also widely represented in fiction, with a notable exception of the facilitating one. This difference is deemed indicative of the disparity between real-life oral conversation and its written counterpart represented in fiction. It also throws light on the importance of author's remarks in interpreting pragmatic meaning in fiction. The results bear relevance to the role of positive and negative politeness in facilitating cooperative communication in the two main channels of communication.*

Key words*: tag questions, pragmatic function, oral discourse, fiction, similarities, differences*

Introduction

Tag questions are used much more frequently in spoken English than in written fictional discourse, and, according to research, they comprise one-fourth of all questions asked in oral conversation (Biber et al 1999). What is more, due to genre-specific constraints and requirements inherent in different types of written discourse, they are even less common in academic, journalistic, and literary texts.

In spoken discourse, tag questions, together with other phenomena such as interruptions, false starts, incomplete phrases, typically referred to as 'markers of interpersonal dynamics', are quite common, especially in some local varieties of English. In fiction too, especially in narratives, it is not unusual for authors to include tag questions in different forms of direct or reported oral discourse, such as fictional dialogues between the characters, representations of characters' thoughts, or as the author's way of addressing the audience.

Although tag questions have been studied extensively over the years, there isn't enough research on the differences in the use of tag questions in

real dialogues (spoken data) as compared to fiction dialogue (written data). Fiction dialogue might seem like a source of indirect data, however, it is well worth studying, since it preserves all the main parameters of certain language structures and, what is more important, manifests their perceived discourse functions. Our observations on the pragmatic functions of tag questions in fiction reveal an observable shift in these functions, compared to the general distribution pattern in spoken corpora.

For the purposes of the present discussion it has to be clarified that by a tag question we will mean the whole structure, which includes an anchor (a statement or an imperative) and a tag, either a canonical one, consisting of a finite verb with a reversed polarity and a subject which agrees with the subject of the anchor, or some kind of invariant form, such as *innit, eh, no, right,* or a different subject tag with *you* as a tag subject.

Previous research in the field

Pragmatics of tag questions is an area widely researched over the years from different perspectives and by a number of scholars, such as Holmes (1983, 1995), Algeo (1988, 1990, 2006), Roesle (2001), Kimps (2007), Tottie and Hoffmann (2006, 2009), and Axelsson (2009, 2011).

Determining tag questions' pragmatic roles depends on a number of factors related both to the addressee's culture-specific knowledge and expectations, and the context in which tag questions occur. As Holmes (1995: 113) points out, "interpreting the function of tags is a subjective business", and an appropriate interpretation of their pragmatic functions requires an approach which takes into account their semantics as well. What is particularly important in this respect is their ability to do more than just pose questions, but also to "solicit the addressee's acceptance or rejection of the proposition that is presented to him" (Lyons 1977: 765). Built upon their basic propositional meaning is a whole range of pragmatic functions, which make tag questions multi-functional elements with a high communicative potential in the system of spoken interaction. For this reason, speakers regularly "exploit the polypragmatic nature of linguistic items to say many things at once" (Coates 1987:130).

In a study of the speech functions of tag questions in British English spontaneous dialogue, Kimps et all (2014) emphasise the key features of the commodity being exchanged (information or desired action), the use of tag questions to realise an A-event, B-event or AB-event, and adjacency (A-events have a speaker who already has the information, while in B-events, the one who utters the tag question is a secondary knower seeking information. With AB-events, the speaker projects that s/he finds it relevant that the co-participant also has access to the knowledge territory).

In fiction, tag questions' communicative potential is usually made explicit as a reference to the expectations they signal regarding the verbal or non-verbal behaviour of the addressee. However, assessing speaker's intentions in any particular moment of interaction is a very complicated task for both the addressee and the potential third party – usually the analyst, who is deprived of the immediacy of face-to-face communication.

Although tag questions are most frequently used in written conversation in works of fiction, they can also appear in narrative and descriptive passages, when the author addresses the reader or wishes to emphasize a point with a rhetorical question or an exclamation. One of the problems arising in studying tag questions in fiction results from the fact that, in corpus linguistics, fiction is often treated as if it were a homogeneous genre, although the direct speech parts and the narrative parts have very different purpose, as only the former try to mimic spoken language (Axelsson 2009). This might limit the study of tag questions in fiction to direct speech only, where by direct speech one should understand a verbatim representation of what a character is claimed to have said in the fictional world (Semino and Short 2004). However, in order to get a better idea of the distribution of the pragmatic functions of tags in spoken and written data (fiction), I would also comment on their use by the authors outside of direct characters' speech representation in fiction dialogue.

The transfer of linguistic elements from speech to writing and vice versa relies on the communication channel. Compared to the written channel, the spoken channel is generally thought to have a higher potential for immediate response by the interlocutors, but it is also characterised by specific grammatical, lexical, and discourse features, some of which can be interpreted as products of the pressure of the channel (Hughes 1996). Other phenomena, such as topic changes and misunderstandings, reflect the interpersonal dynamics between participants in communication. In spoken discourse which is presented in real dialogues, the speakers can really see one another and can understand immediately if their message is comprehended by the other person. This understanding and collaboration between the participants in communication is demonstrated in turn-taking, partial overlaps, eye-contact, voiced agreement, reassurance and other linguistic and non-linguistic means.

When expressing actual speech in writing, authors must arrange the frequently disorganized and jumbled dialogue into a fluid, logically structured, and explicit written text. Real speech differs from fictional speech in that the dynamics of communication is sustained by the participants themselves in the former, whilst the latter is created by the author with the potential target reader in mind. Fictional dialogues are invariably altered by the author to accomplish various aesthetic effects, to emphasize certain

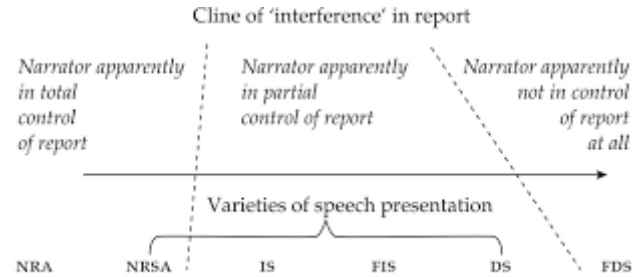
points, and provide the reader with additional context and insights about the characters or the situation, or just to make the plot flow easier.

As Widdowson points out, one of the major problems for writers is that they have to convey their propositions "without the benefit of overt interaction which enables conversationalists to negotiate meanings by direct confrontation" (Widdowson 1984:74). The researcher compares the writer's recording of discourse as a text and the reader's derivation of discourse from the text to the process of expansion, on the one hand, and to the process of reduction, on the other. Making some of the participants' common knowledge explicit is one of the methods involved in expansion. The process of discourse enactment by expansion is recorded as a textual product, which the reader then reconverts into a process and thus derives a discourse from the text (ibid:77-79).

In this regard, it is significant to note that the analyst should adopt the role of the reader and engage in the same meaning-deriving processes when evaluating and interpreting instances from a written corpus. The reader's perception of the characters' speech, the author's comments, and the reader's familiarity with the characters all play a role in how the functions of tag questions in fictional dialogues are interpreted.

A similar approach to analysing interactions in fiction holds that, unlike real interactions, they are artificially created and presented in a context constructed by the writer, who acts as a narrator of the story. In their study of fictional prose Leech and Short (2007) outline a cline of interference to measure the degree of narrator's control of speech and thought report in fiction. The cline is marked, on the one side, by the narrative report of action (NRA), representing the narrator's total control of report, and, on the other side, by the free direct speech (FDS), in which the narrator is not in control of the report at all. Between these two extremes are the varieties of speech presentation demonstrating the narrator's partial control. These varieties include four report modes varying from total narrator control to lack of such whatsoever. The four report modes are: 1. narrative report of speech acts (NRSA) which is realized in sentences merely reporting speech acts, without the author committing him/herself to the sense and form of what was said; 2. indirect speech (IS), 3. free indirect speech (FIS), which is more indirect than indirect speech (IS), and 4. direct speech (DS). The difference between DS and FDS is manifested in two features which show evidence of the narrator's presence as an intermediary – the quotation marks and the introductory reporting clause (see Fig.1).

Fig.1. Leech and Short's (2007) cline of interference



(NRA = Narrative report of action, FIS = Free indirect speech (see below))

The corpus collected for the purposes of the present study consists exclusively of samples of DS and less often – of FDS. Even when intonation and the immediate context are taken into consideration, it is clear that tag questions do not lend themselves to clear interpretation by means of NRSA alone since they reflect a complex speech act.

In a corpus-based study of tag questions in fiction versus spoken dialogue, Axelsson (2009) outlined some important findings as regards the form of tag questions, without though extending her interest to linking the form of the tags to their pragmatic functions. Thus, for example, she stated that tag questions with declarative anchors are about three times as frequent in fiction dialogue, and those with imperative anchors are infrequent in spoken conversation, and twice as frequent in fiction dialogue. In tags with declarative anchors she found similar proportions for features like reversed/ constant polarity, tense of the tag operator and modal/ non-modal tag operator. Non-standard tags and ellipsis in the anchor were found in both samples, but to a higher degree in the spoken data. These findings are very important, since the form is always interrelated with the meaning and the function of any linguistic item, and they might serve as a basis for further research, and later, Axelsson (2011) analysed the pragmatic functions of more than 600 tag questions using a hierarchical functional model. Her model refers mainly to declarative tag questions for exchanging information, which are divided into response-eliciting (confirmation-eliciting and conversation-initiating) and rhetorical (speaker-centered and addressee-oriented). She discovered that most declarative tag questions are used rhetorically, with only a minority being response-eliciting. An interesting finding is that rhetorical tag questions are addressee-oriented in fiction dialogue, whereas in spoken conversation they are mainly speaker-centred. Other important findings are that in fiction dialogue, there are proportionately more confirmation-demanding tags, and fewer conversation-initiating ones. As for imperative tags, she claims that in fiction dialogue they are used mostly as commands, and less frequently for providing advice. The researcher explains the distinctive functional patterns of tag questions in fiction dialogue with the

depiction of problems, conflicts and confrontations and an avoidance of conversations on trivial matters.

Corpus and methodology

The present study of the pragmatic functions of tag questions in fiction is based on a written fiction corpus (WFC), excerpted from contemporary British and American fiction of different genres. The sample used amounts to 900 examples of tag questions, most of which occur in the narrow context of adjacency pairs. For the purposes of the comparison, the analysed examples are almost similar to those reported by Tottie and Hoffman (2006) in their study of tag questions in British and American English, excerpted from the British National Corpus (its spoken demographic subpart – BNC-SDEM) and the Longman Spoken American Corpus – LSAK. The classification used in their study summarizes some earlier classifications of tag questions' pragmatic functions, mainly by Algeo (1988, 1990) and Holmes (1983, 1995). Their classification is applied to the data they excerpted from the spoken component of the British National Corpus and the Longman Spoken American corpus, and it will be used in the present discussion of the pragmatic functions of tag questions in spoken dialogue versus fiction as well. It is important to mention that the two spoken corpora have no indications of intonation and only contain written transcripts of actual speech. For this reason Tottie and Hoffmann admitted that they had to rely exclusively on linguistic content for their interpretations, which is the case with the written data used in the present study as well. In a later study, Tottie and Hoffmann (2009) analysed a smaller corpus of written data, and found that the major role of tag questions in fiction is to express the writer's attitude of stance. However, since their data are related mainly to 18th century drama, they will not be taken into consideration in the classification of the pragmatic functions in the present study.

The excerpted examples of tag questions in the written fiction corpus are analysed in the narrow context of the adjacency pairs, especially when they are part of a dialogue among fictional characters, and in the wider context of the situation. As a rule, in a question-response adjacency pair, the speaker seeks information from the addressee in the first pair-part and this knowledge imbalance is redressed in the second pair-part (Kimps 2014). However, in some cases, tag questions in the first pair-part do not expect an answer or response, as in Algeo's (1990) peremptory tags. It should be noted that, in this function, tag questions can come as a second pair-part, serving the role of response, which is not however an answer to the question in the first pair-part.

Conversation analysis, discourse and pragmatic analysis were used for processing data from the written fiction corpus, as it is indeed difficult to

define what exactly the presumed function of a tag question in a dialogue exchange is by strictly adhering to the prescribed procedures of only one method of analysis. A necessary stipulation in this case is that the processes of expansion and reduction, involved in the interpretation of fictional dialogues inevitably lead to some ambiguity and even arbitrariness of interpretation. This fact, though, did not prevent us from identifying some patterns in the data, which might be indicative of typological differences in the interpretation of spoken and written discourse.

Analysis and discussion

In terms of tag questions' functions in maintaining communication, Axelsson (2009) claims that, in her spoken data, about a quarter of all tag questions are turn-holding, and, by comparison, they are turn-holding to an even higher degree in fiction dialogue: in about 45% of the instances, the same speaker goes on talking after the tag question. This finding is supported by the data from the written fiction corpus collected for the purposes of the present study. More than 60% of all 900 examples are, in fact, turn-holding, or at least the addressee's turn is delayed by a speaker's elaboration on his/her idea. Very often, in rendering a longer turn aimed at explaining or clarifying the speaker's idea, the writer uses a tag question of this nature to mark a certain stage in developing the point of the speaker through **elaboration on the proposition**. This is usually done to merely register the presence of the speaker's interlocutor/s without expecting them to verbally voice agreement or disagreement with what was said, as it is in the following excerpts in which we see examples of:

- elaboration by providing a counterargument to what the speaker himself said:

(1) "Why should he not go to the home of his fathers? It seems natural, doesn't it? And yet, consider that every Baskerville who goes there meets with an evil fate". /A.C. Doyle/;

- elaboration by providing the answer in advance:

(2) "Are you English?" I asked, perhaps tactlessly.
"Rather. You don't think I look American, do you? British to the backbone, that's what I am". /S. Maugham/.

Turn-holding and turn-yielding tag questions can serve different pragmatic functions, depending on the context of the situation. The table below presents the comparative results for the distribution of the types of pragmatic functions of tag questions in spoken dialogue and fiction. We have adopted a

classification of the pragmatic functions of tag questions based on Tottie and Hoffmann's (2006) classification, as it is comprehensive, yet simple and straightforward for the purposes of our analysis. According to Tottie and Hoffmann (2006), there are two major categories of tag questions depending on their pragmatic functions – epistemic-modal and affective. Within the epistemic-modal type they differentiate between informational and confirmatory tag questions, and the four sub-types of the affective type are facilitating, attitudinal, peremptory and aggressive, respectively. To make the comparison easier, the figures from Tottie and Hoffman's study are presented as a total sum, which is compared to a similar number of examples from the written fiction corpus (WFC). The results are given in both numbers and percentages.

Table 1. Types of tag questions in spoken dialogue vs fiction

Tag question type	BNC-SDEM + LSAC	WFC
Informational	34 (4%)	96 (11%)
Confirmatory	287 (33%)	380 (42%)
Facilitating	381 (44%)	140 (16%)
Attitudinal	123 (14%)	209 (23%)
Peremptory	8 (1%)	20 (2%)
Aggressive	4 (0%)	35 (4%)
Other	34 (4%)	20 (2%)
Totals	871 (100%)	900 (100%)

Informational tag questions are characterized by final rising intonation and are considered genuine requests for information, expressing the speaker's uncertainty and need for response. This question type accounts for only 4% of all tag questions in Tottie and Hoffmann, which is the smallest proportion reported, compared to that given by Coates (1996) – roughly 16%, and Holmes (1995) – close to 50%. In WFK they amount to 11%, which can be considered a significant increase compared to 4%, having in mind the fact that both Coates' and Holmes' corpora are spoken, with clearly indicated intonation patterns. When this major indicator cannot be used for analysis, the only possible clue to the pragmatic function of a tag question is the presence or absence of a response, which can be interpreted as an answer to the question, and which marks a new turn in the conversation. What counts as an answer can be a repetition of either full or partial propositions, a minimal yes-no response confirming or rejecting the proposition, or a reply by which the addressee changes the focus of the question, either playing for time, inviting clarification, or simply adding new information. Sometimes the lack of an expected answer is indicated in the

author's remarks. The following examples from the written corpus illustrate different possible types of responses:

- rejection of the proposition plus clarification:

(3) "You had no money, did you?"
"I had a few dollars" /J. Heller/;

- avoidance of a direct answer by a request for clarification:

(4) "You didn't know it was Oldfield selling you tips, did you?" I asked.
"It depends what you mean by 'know', he said. /D. Francis/;

- assumed positive answer plus new information added:

(5) "I'm not expected to do anything about that, am I?" asked Henrieta, alarmed.
"And you're to be kind to Gerda". /A. Christie/;

- lack of the expected answer indicated by author's remarks.

(6) "What on earth's the matter, Susie?" asked Mother looking right into my face, which only made matters worse. "You've gone bright red…you haven't been up to anything, have you?" I didn't answer./J. Murphy/

The major difficulty when analysing written data is differentiating between the informational and the confirmatory functions of the tag question, the reason for this being the lack of intonation. The most obvious indicator which helps interpret the meaning is the presence of the author's remarks. Thus, the verb "asked", for example, clearly points to a question which needs to be answered.

In **confirmatory** tag questions, which, unlike informational ones, are marked in most cases by falling intonation, the speaker is not sure of what s/he says, but expects confirmation, rather than rejection of the proposition. This means that, in the absence of intonation, the most explicit indicator of this type in writing will be the presence of a minimal response, confirming the proposition, full or partial repetition of the previous proposition, or elaboration on the topic. Very often, though, these tag questions do not signal the end of the speaker's turn, but only register the addressee's presence and his/her assumed agreement with the main proposition. Being in fact turn-holding devices, they can function as meaningful pauses, often emphasising a

point, after which the same turn is resumed by the speaker, as can be seen in the following examples:

- repetition of the proposition with an adverb and changed word order for emphasis:

(7) "That is just what I thought. And that is why I came. It is the truth you want, isn't it?"
"Certainly I want the truth". /A. Christie/

- omitted confirmation with an elaboration on the same idea:

(8) "I guess that makes me a great man with middle-aged sexual attitudes, doesn't it?"
"I can't help boasting about you" /J. Heller/;

- assumed agreement, followed by an elaboration; turn-holding:

(9) Maria laughed and ran a hand over the astonishing mane. "I had it done for the party", she explained. "It does look a bit mad, doesn't it? I nearly died of fright when I saw it in the mirror just now. Anyhow, it's good to see you, Susie. Come on in." /J. Murphy/

The percentage of confirmatory tag questions in WFC is again higher than that in the spoken data – 42% compared to 33%. The reason for this may be the fact that in direct face-to-face communication interlocutors can see one another and get immediate verbal (usually minimal – *yes* or *no*) or non-verbal response, which reduces the need of an explicitly stated reaction. In fiction, however, writers often prefer to indicate the addressee's reaction by either providing an overt response, or by using remarks to do so.

The second major group – the so-called **affective** tag questions - comprises four sub-types: facilitating, attitudinal, peremptory and aggressive. By using **facilitating** tag questions, the speaker is sure of the truth of what s/he says but wants to involve their interlocutor. Holmes (1995) differentiates further between facilitative tags and softening tags, where the first are perceived as positive politeness devices, inviting listener's contribution to the discourse, and the latter generally soften directives and criticisms, serving as negative politeness devices. In WFC these tag questions can be recognized mainly by their semantic content, expressing the speaker's willingness and desire to facilitate an interlocutor's contribution. In Roesle's (2001) classification these tag questions are called 'involving', as they are meant to involve the listener in the conversation. As such, they are most often marked

by an indication of the addressee's verbal or non-verbal reaction in compliance with the speaker's intention, as in the following examples:

(10) "That's all right," mumbled Zoe. "You will tell me soon though, won't you?"
"As soon as I can," I said. /J. Murphy/
(11) "If you don't want ice-cream, Dallow," the Boy said, "you go to Snow's and get that card. You've got guts, haven't you?"
"I thought we was done with it all, "Dallow said. "I've done enough." /G. Greene/

There is a significant difference between the spoken and the written data for this particular type – 44% in the spoken versus only 16% in the written corpus. One possible explanation for this difference is the nature of dialogue in fiction, which serves additional functions (to do with the plot and the characters' development), compared to real-life conversation, in which facilitation is achieved through co-operation and as a result of negotiation of meaning among interlocutors, deemed equally responsible for its success.

It should be noted that in WFC the pronoun *you* was registered as a more common tag subject than the normally occurring in this position *it*. What is more, writers tend to use *you* as a tag subject, even in the cases when the anchor subject has a different referent, as in the following examples of different-subject tags:

(12) "Gloves are rather stupid, don't you think so?"
"The only use is to avoid fingerprints in crimes," said Edward smiling. /A. Christie/
(13) "I think I trust men as much as I trust women, don't you?" /M. Drabble/.

Axelsson (2011) calls structures like these tag-like additions used for representing new truncated questions which cannot ask for the confirmation of the proposition in the preceding clause. In my opinion, they are used for making the speaker's desire to actively engage the addressee more explicitly in fiction, and are indicative of the emphasis the writer puts on the turn-taking nature of the conversation.

Attitudinal tag questions emphasize what the speaker says, and do not expect the addressee's involvement or reply. In WFC these are easily recognized by the lack of response or reaction on the part of the addressee. Although they create a meaningful pause, it does not signal a turn shift, since the same turn is resumed by the speaker, often with the aim of further elaboration on the same idea or topic. In this respect, they are similar to the

confirmatory tags, but what distinguishes them is their function as rhetorical questions, or, when their main clause is exclamatory, as rhetorical exclamations. Algeo calls this sub-type "punctuational", with the function of a "vocal equivalent of an exclamation point or of underlining for emphasis" (1990:446). The following example demonstrates different ways of expressing the speaker's attitude function:

(14) Gold's father turned to Gold as though daring opposition. "No, siree. He said he was a cowboy, didn't he? A lonesome cowboy riding into town to get the bad guys, didn't he? All by himself. Well, no cowboy was ever a Jew". /J. Heller/

In this case the effect is amplified by partial repetition of the same proposition and repetition of the tag; no response or reaction is expected. In the following example it is obvious from the preceding context that no response is expected:

(15) "Oh, Bruce, what a mind you have, what a mind – boggling mind!" cried Ralph looking absolutely astonished. "You know all you need to know, don't you?" /J. Heller/.

In the last example the immediate explanation of why the situation is considered fair preempts an answer:

(16) "The boy is to be with you for six months in the year, and with me for the other six. That is perfectly fair, is it not? You can have whatever allowance you like, and live where you choose. As for your past, no one knows anything about it except myself and Gerald." /O. Wilde/

Comparative data from the spoken and the written corpus reveal a considerable difference in the figures for these tag questions – 14% in the spoken versus 23% in the written data. Writers seem to prefer to use this type of tag questions for conveying the speaker's attitude. Moreover, they consider it powerful enough, since in the majority of the examples there are no remarks or other comments to strengthen the effect of the utterance, as is the case with most of the other types of questions.

Peremptory tag questions usually follow statements of generally acknowledged truth with which it is practically impossible to disagree. The speaker considers the conversation about it at an end and uses a tag like this to close off the debate. The intonation is always falling, and the tag is often a put-down of the addressee (Algeo 1988). In the written fiction corpus, these questions are recognized by their semantic content, and also by the lack of

response (in most cases). Their meaning can be facilitated by the presence of the writer's remarks, usually verbs providing some comment on the speaker's manner of speaking, intonation, attitude, etc. The peremptory use carries the idea of a shared truth not worth discussing. As Algeo (1990: 446) states, "everyone knows the truth of the preceding statement, and therefore even someone of the limited intelligence of the addressee must be presumed to recognize it". In the following two examples, additional emphasis is created by repetition in the first case, and by excessive argumentation in the second:

(17) "Oh yes, you really ought to go. It would be much better for you to go. So let's have no more nonsense, shall we?" /M. Drabble/
(18) "Where do you find a crowd like that? Brighton's big enough, isn't it? It's not a tube lift. I was here. I know." /G. Greene/

A comparison of the data in the spoken and written corpora indicates a slight increase in the number of these questions in fiction – 1% to 2%, although their percentage is relatively low in both spoken and written English.

Aggressive or antagonistic tag questions function as an insult or provocation to the addressee by implying that s/he ought to know what they actually cannot know, which itself is insulting and provocative. Tottie and Hoffmann (2006) claim that these tag questions only occur in British English, and account for a very low proportion of all tags. In the written fiction corpus it is indeed very difficult to differentiate between peremptory and aggressive tags, as it is practically impossible to measure the level of verbal aggression, so only the broader context and the knowledge of the interlocutors' background can provide a clue for a precise interpretation. In the following examples it is the writer's remarks containing vocabulary such as 'suddenly', 'shrilly', 'squealed', ferocious surprise', 'annoyance' that suggest a higher level of aggressiveness, rather than the tag question itself:

(19) "Be quiet, can't you," the Boy suddenly and shrilly squealed at him. /G. Greene/;
(20) "What are you doing here with me?" he demanded suddenly with eyes screwed up into an expression of ferocious surprise and annoyance. "We don't have to talk to each other much, dowe? What the devil do you want from me anyway?" /J. Heller/

Empirical data show that there are more aggressive tag questions in fictional dialogues – 4% compared to 0% in the spoken corpus, which means that their potential to convey speaker's verbal aggression is well understood and exploited by the writers. The virtual lack of this type in spoken corpora can

be explained by the interlocutors' considerations of politeness and co-operation, which generally tend to dominate in oral communication.

There is a small number of tag questions in both spoken and written corpora whose pragmatic functions are not defined, and which are entered in the table as "other". These examples are indicative of the difficulties in defining the exact function of some utterances; even within a certain context it is sometimes practically impossible to decide on one function only, or it is obvious that the question can be interpreted in more than one way. There are also pairs of pragmatic functions, which are not always easy to distinguish from one another (especially without accounting for their intonation). Among the functions that can be paired are the informational and the confirmatory ones in the cases with a positive confirmatory reply, or the peremptory and the aggressive ones, since they do not expect a reply. Another pair of functions which are not always easy to differentiate is formed by the confirmatory and the attitudinal tags, when both of them are used as turn-holding devices in conversation, as in the following example:

(21) "It could be our Mr Glass, couldn't it?" Holmes said now, pausing again to slurp coffee. "We expected him to stick around the city, but he could as easily have headed north." /I. Rankin/

In the majority of cases, however, the knowledge of both immediate and broader context can help the analyst decide on one or another pragmatic function of a particular tag question.

An interesting finding in the written fiction corpus is that the pronoun *you* was registered as a more common tag subject than *it* in fiction dialogue. It could be connected with making the speaker's desire to actively engage the addressee more explicitly. Although this prevailing use of *you* in fiction dialogue is not directly linked to any pragmatic function in particular, it is indicative of the emphasis the writer puts on the turn-taking nature of conversation:

(22) "You don't always spend them (evenings) at home either, do you? Sometimes you have a night out with friends."

"Do I?" /I. Rankin/

What is more, writers tend to use *you* as a tag subject, even in the cases when the anchor subject has a different referent, as in the following examples of different-subject tags (Stamenov 1987):

(23) "Gloves are rather stupid, don't you think so?"

"The only use is to avoid fingerprints in crimes," said Edward smiling. /A. Christie/

(24) "I think I trust men as much as I trust women, don't you?" /M. Drabble/.

Axelson (2011) confirms that the tag subject *you* is predominant among the tag subjects in the addressee-oriented category; however, it is used in just above half of the tags in this category. She also adds that the tag subject *we* may also refer to the addressee, both in its inclusive use, i.e. referring to both the speaker and the addressee, and in its use as addressee-only subject:

(25) "We hadn't thought of that, had we, Ian? Better put it in the garage. We don't want everyone who reads a newspaper to know what kind of car I drive" /I. Rankin/

The typology of tag questions based on their pragmatic functions discussed above is made on the basis of so-called "canonical tag questions", i.e. those characterized by different polarity of the anchor and the tag: positive anchor + negative tag or negative anchor + positive tag. Opinions differ as to whether polarity correlates with pragmatic functions or not. For the lack of convincing empirical proof Tottie and Hoffmann (2006) avoided making any categorical claims, whereas other scholars (see Quirk et al 1985; McGregor 1995 Huddleston 1970, Hudson 1975 and Kimps 2005) characterize constant-polarity tag questions as potentially scolding, sarcastic, or sarcastically contradictory. Some of them are thought to convey irony, sarcasm, mockery or contempt, surprise, disbelief or disapproval, or simply to be used for verification. When studying a written corpus, it is the broader context and the knowledge of the situation and the interlocutors' relationships that can give us a clue to the meaning. In my opinion, same polarity tag questions can be subsumed and discussed under the same pragmatic categories as different polarity tags, and the difference between them is more a matter of degree of emphasis, than meaning, with the same-polarity tags being more emphatic than their different-polarity counterparts, as in the following example:

(26) "Hello", she said. "Come in. Gregor's in the living room. You know the way"

"Indeed I do. Keeping you busy, is he?" He laid a finger on the face of his wristwatch." /I. Rankin/

This also confirms that, in fiction, it is usually the author's remarks that convey the clue for the interpretation of the speaker's attitude, as in the following example:

(27) "I wouldn't know, "Gold said tersely. "I don't pray".
"You're praying today, though, aren't you?" Conover retorted in mockery. /J. Heller/

Conclusion

In conclusion, the results of the comparative study show that there is an observable difference in the distribution of the pragmatic functions of tag questions in fiction, compared to real-life oral communication. The figures show that all but one of the pragmatic functions are more often observed in fiction, with the most obvious ones being the confirmatory and the attitudinal tags, which have both increased in use by 9%. Informational tag questions have increased by 7%, aggressive and peremptory ones by 4% and 1%, respectively. The only pragmatic function which is less frequently detected in the fiction corpus is the facilitating one. The figures indicate a decrease of 28% in its use – from 44% in the spoken corpus to only 16% in the written one. This difference is indicative of the disparity between real-life oral conversation and its written counterpart represented in fiction, on the one hand, and of the role of politeness – both positive and negative - in facilitating discourse or interpersonal relationships in the two main channels of communication. Further research based on a larger and more diverse corpus or based on different classification criteria might yield results which can confirm or refute our observations, since, especially in fiction, authors' representations of speech offer a great variety due to individual writing styles and preferences.

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