Exoticism in English Tag Questions

Exoticism in English Tag Questions:

Strengthening Arguments and Caressing the Social Wheel

Edited by

Blasius Achiri-Taboh

To my father, Martin, who first taught me to master the sounds of the letters of the English alphabet, my mother, Julie, who was resolute to see me through education, and my stepmother, Winy, who eventually picked up where my mother had abruptly stopped.

To my siblings, Fidel, Edwin, Valentine, Leslie, Paul, Maurine, Nick, Sally, Alfred, and Joel, who have all been my strength.

To my children, Paul, Emma-Julie, Danny Libert, and Naomi, who have been resilient; and to my wife, Carlie – my best friend and inspirer.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Part Three: Exotic Behavior of Tag Questions in Standard Corpora

PREFACE

The short collection of essays in this volume has been put together purely as a response to a call for chapters which I had had put up on Linguist List in July 2018. However, I suppose that, like my personal contribution to the volume, the actual work done by all the other contributors had started some way before then.

   Two hitherto published works helped shape my thinking towards making the call. These are

- A generalized question tag in English
- The discourse particle *nàa* in Cameroonian Colloquial English

In the first, I examine the generalized use of *isn't it?* as a legitimate question tag in different varieties of English around the world that goes on any declarative anchor, though not on exclamatory and imperative ones, on account that, unlike exclamatory and imperative sentences, declaratives sentences are typically embedded inside a truncated assertive matrix (or TAM) clause like *it is true* (*that*) which serves as the base of the general tag. In the second, I look at the discourse particle *nàa* as used in Cameroonian Colloquial English (or CCE), which does not originate as a language-specific marker, but has a broad currency in CCE with a wide usage in different contexts and discourse functions including that of question tags, that is, it does not serve a narrow function to substitute one particular constituent. Although I did not give any account there of the Cameroonian particle as a possible general tag in English, the fact that these two particles can be used in English speaking communities around the world as general tags like the Standard English ones *right?* and *okay?* actually indicated to me that the use of tag questions in English can be quite 'exotic' in nature.

   Martina Wiltschko's (pc.) remark, when I first launched the call for chapters and reached out to her, that "it looks like an interesting proposal" is certainly borne in the idea of "exoticism," and more so than in the idea of literally "caressing the social wheel" as seen in the subtitle and vividly illuminated in her contribution to the volume with Johannes Heim. However the title looks, it certainly appeals to different linguists in different ways around the world, and contributing a chapter to a theme book like this one, especially within a limited period of time, can sometimes be a bit of a challenge, not least because the intriguing title might just have otherwise

caught potential contributors off-guard. I therefore salute the efforts of the successful contributors to the book. I have benefitted from a semestrial research allowance from the Faculty of Arts at the University of Buea (Cameroon) and a quarterly research modernization allowance from the Cameroonian Ministry of Higher Education for which I am grateful. Above all, I am sincerely grateful to the main (anonymized) reviewer of the manuscript, especially for the additional time devoted to doing a check of the revised manuscript; and to a second (anonymized) reviewer who did a separate review of one of the chapters.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION:
ON THE THEORY OF TAG QUESTIONS

BLASIUS ACHIRI-TABOH

How closely integrated into the syntax of their anchors are question tags?

1. Introduction

Within the last sixty years, tag questions (henceforth TQs) have attracted a lot of attention among scholars from a variety of perspectives, especially those concerned with the syntactic-semantic and socio-pragmatic aspects of the English language. As is well known, a TQ is typically made up of two parts, namely, a preceding host clause (or sentence), usually a declarative sentence called "anchor" (following Tottie & Hoffmann, 2006), but can also be an imperative or exclamatory (see, for example, Downing & Locke, 2006, p. 187), followed by an appended question tag (henceforth QT) that usually surfaces in (current) English in the form of a predicate-elliptical *yes*/*no*-question (or YNQ) as shown in (1), but also in other forms though, and formally triggers a response of some sort from the addressee.[1]

(1)   a.   The boat has arrived, hasn't it?
       b.   Be quiet for a moment, will you?
       c.   How quiet it was in the hall, wasn't it?

Talking of a response of some sort implies that there is no fixed response to QTs. As elaborated in this theme book as in previous studies, a response to a QT is pragmatically conditioned, that is, it depends on the

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[1] In this book, as can be understood at this beginning stage, the term "tag question" (or TQ) is used to refer to the entire tag question construction made up of the two parts, thus a type of question, while the term "question tag" (or QT) is used to refer to the tag alone that triggers a response, thus a type of tag.

circumstances upon which the question is built in terms of the discourse context. Thus, QTs are themselves pragmatic items in language, particles that are used purely for pragmatic purposes. As a collection of essays from different authors, this book seeks to explore the evolution of English TQ constructions from the point of view of 'exotic' ways in which they are used in different speech communities of both native and non-native varieties of English around the world with respect to form and function, in a bid to establish how they are used and why.[2]

Specifically, in different varieties of English around the world, the need for the use of QTs has, over time and for a variety of reasons, drawn from different local linguistic experiences and realities, either as a result of deliberate code-switching (CS) for various benefits or sheer language contacts and evolution, or for reasons of i-language deficiency on how English TQ constructions work both from a syntax-semantics point of view and a socio-pragmatics point of view. The latter point is corroborated in a way, as Baker (2015, p. 314) points out that

> Tag questions are covered in many ELT coursebook series and grammar reference and practice books, and are typically introduced in intermediate-level materials. Learners often find the topic problematic, both in terms of their pragmatic meaning and grammatical structure.

The impression Baker leaves here is that the situation is typically the case in the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language (EFL). However, I believe that it is not too different from teaching and learning of English as a second language (ESL), to the extent that, today, the different varieties of English potentially exhibit different corresponding varieties of QTs with different shades of morpho-syntactic forms and semantic and socio-pragmatic functions.

As the examples in (1) demonstrate, QTs are discourse sentence-peripheral elements. Thus, like in all studies of such elements, the main question that presents itself in this volume is how closely integrated into the

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[2] The use here of the term *exotic* is not to be taken literally, as there being something strange or outlandish about English question tags, or the tags themselves being so, as it is actually shown in the research in this volume that they are not. In an ironic sense, therefore, its use is actually meant to be understood to mean that there are no exotic tags in the world's languages, with respect to the notion of language universals (as in Jakobson, 1955, pp. 312-314), irrespective of apparent exceptions, and even when they surface as loan adaptations which the term might just be taken to refer to. It would be understood from the line of research pursued here that English question tags are basically not different in form and function from those of other languages.

syntax of the host construction the tag can be, as opposed to being in a parallel or even autonomous chunk of discourse position. In this introduction, I start by looking at the formal classification of QTs in the literature. I take the reader on a tour of both variant and invariant tags in the world's languages in a bid to give an outline of how the theory of TQ constructions can be pursued, in a way as to demonstrate the presence of the said integration. I then look at the socio-pragmatic behavior of QTs on a par with (other) discourse markers, profiling their various pragmatic functions as have been established in various studies, with a view to questioning what other functions there can be, and how the relevant tags can perform these functions. I end the introduction with an overview of the contributions, attempting to show how empirically and conceptually interconnected they can be.

2. Variant and invariant tags: Formal classification

From a formal point of view, QTs can be classified into two main types across languages, namely, variant (or so-called "canonical") tags and invariant tags. A variant QT displays polarity. In a typical situation, a positive anchor is followed by a negative tag (e.g., "It's ready, isn't it?") or a negative anchor is followed by a positive tag (e.g., "It isn't ready, is it?"). As shown in McGregor (1995, p. 94), there are also instances of positive-positive TQ forms, especially with imperatives (e.g., "You're going, are you?" and "Make a cup of tea, would you?") (also see Holmes, 1995), and even negative-negative ones (e.g., "You're not going, aren't you?" and "They don't come cheap, don't they?") (see Tottie & Hoffmann, 2006, p. 284), although the latter are rare, and as Baker (2015, p. 314) points out, these are very much exceptions. Reversed-polarity tags are, however, the most frequent as in English (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002).

As Huddleston (1988) observes, the form of the QT is largely predictable from that of the anchor. Thus, as Tomaselli & Gatt (2015, p. 54) also state, "in variant systems, the tag displays some degree of grammatical dependency on the anchor, so that it changes as a function of the anchor's features, for example, its polarity and/or number." On the contrary, invariant tags surface the same everywhere as a word or group of words irrespective of the syntax of the anchor (e.g., "You've met him before, right?", "You're coming home tonight, okay?").

Variant tags are typically found in English. They typically consist of an operator, followed by a pronoun (Quirk & Greenbaum, 1973; Biber et al., 1999). The term "operator" refers to an auxiliary verb (in any form) with or without a (contracted) negative particle that may mark a contrast in polarity

with the anchor clause. In other words, the auxiliary verb used in the QT corresponds to the one used in the anchor. It is called an operator because it literally undergoes an inversion with the subject pronoun, that is, as in the so-called T-to-C movement (Pesetsky & Torrego, 2001) in which it syntactically repositions itself from its canonical position after the subject (pronoun) to the front of the latter. As Rezac (2013, p. 10) points out, the subject of a QT clause must be a pronoun (i.e., definite pronouns like *I*, *he*, or *it*, or indefinite ones: the expletive *it* or existential *there*) with an unambiguous antecedent. As a finite pronoun, the subject in question is a personal pronoun, and following Huddleston (1988), personal pronouns are distinguished from many other pronouns by their ability to occur as the subject in a QT. It is obligatorily co-referential with the subject of the anchor (i.e., it must agree with the verb and subject of the host clause (Kimps, 2007)), while the tense and choice of tense of the operator depend on the tense in the anchor (be it on the lexical or grammatical verb). If no auxiliary is used in the anchor, the dummy auxiliary verb *do* is introduced (see Peters, 2004), and this too has to agree in various ways with the anchor. Consider the following paradigm:

(2)   a.   He went, didn't he?
         b.   He didn't go, did he?
         c.   They will stay, won't they?
         d.   Be quiet for a moment, will you?
         e.   What a cold night it's been, hasn't it?

The dummy auxiliary *do* is normally used in English to form interrogative or negative sentences that would otherwise not contain any auxiliary verb, a process that has thus come to be known as Do-Support as in Halle & Marantz (1993), Lasnik (1995), and Bobaljik (2002). Thus, the anchor sentence in (2a), for example, a declarative, has no auxiliary but takes *do* in its QT or negative counterpart. Specifically, it can be said that the requirement to use *do* is for an abstract tense affix that precedes Neg,P with the negative adverb specifier *not* or with an attached clitic negative adverb *n't*, or one already attached to a Q morpheme in Head C (potentially with the attached clitic negative adverb *n't*) to have an appropriate host – a free overt verbal morpheme.[3] However, another instance where *do* is used is where the speaker wishes to emphasize the (truth of the proposition of the) sentence. Thus, the affixal emphatic morpheme can also be said to be

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[3] As opposed to DO-Support as is well known, in the absence of question formation or negation, an abstract tense affix simply undergoes Affix Hopping, by being lowered (to attach) onto an overt verbal stem, that is, a verb.

hosted by the auxiliary. In other words, auxiliariless declaratives would take *do* to mark emphasis as shown in the following fairytale paradigm:

(3)   a.   Neil Armstrong landed on the moon, and the moon
                eclipsed the sun.
        b.   Neil Armstrong **did** land on the moon, and the moon **did**
                eclipse the sun.

   With the assumption that *do* is used in the QT because the anchor actually lacks a concrete auxiliary, an intriguing question arises on the use of QTs on imperative anchors that seem to lack a concrete auxiliary, namely, where does *will* (for instance rather than *do*) come from? In spite of appearances, however, an imperative anchor actually contains an auxiliary which, following Katz & Postal (1964), Arbini (1969), among others, is deleted (together with the subject) at surface level and given a null spell-out in the PF component. I return to this a little later below, but one thing that stands out clear from this complexity of variant tags is that they exhibit a grammatical dependency on their anchors. In other words, they are integrated in the syntactic derivation of the anchor as I demonstrate here.[4]
   Recall my earlier assertion that variant QTs are typically found in English. What this implies is that English also exhibits invariant QTs. In fact, variant QTs are a property of Standard English (SE) which, following Kolln & Funk (1998), includes the dialects of the majority—those that are used in newscasts on the international media space (on BBC, CNN, etc), in formal business transactions, classrooms and courtrooms, and in wider/international public discourse. In contrast to English, nevertheless, in many languages, QTs are mainly or exclusively invariant in nature, not being derived from their anchors. In such cases, Tomaselli & Gatt (2015, p. 55), for example, note that a set of words or phrases are used as QTs without exhibiting grammatical dependencies on their anchors. They cite examples from Italian, French, Polish, and German as follows:

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[4] Variant QTs are also exhibited in other languages. Thus, as noted by Axelsson (2011a) (also see Tomaselli & Gatt, 2015, p. 54), claims like those of Ultan (1969) to the effect that English variant tags have "unique" formal properties are arguably incorrect, insofar as several languages exhibit TQ constructions in which the tag displays grammatical dependencies on its anchor. An example is Meiteilon (Manipuri) that has variant QTs with reversed-polarity that are formally very similar to the English case (Singh, 1996).

(4)   Italian:
          Ci sono otto finestre, giusto?
          There are eight windows, aren't there?

(5)   French:
          II est nerveux ce matin, non? (Morin, 1973)
          He is nervous this morning, isn't he?

(6)   Polish:
          Zamknij drzwi, dobrze? (Wierzbicka, 2003)
          Close the door, would you?

(7)   German:
          Wir gehen heute abend, nicht (wahr)? (Rottet & Sprouse, 2008)
          We are leaving tonight, aren't we?

Languages of India (Nair, 1991) and indeed of many different parts of the world typically exhibit invariant tags, characterized in similar ways. The number of words or phrases which can be used as QTs varies from one language to the other. For example, Italian appears to have no predefined set. Also, Polish has a close set of six forms (Wierzbicka, 2003) and Mohawk has only one (Mithun, 2012). However, a few other languages actually exhibit both variant and invariant QTs. An example is Welsh, although it places restrictions on what type of QT form can be used with different sentence types. For a typical example, we have to return to English. In fact, the complex nature of English variant QTs as illustrated above implies that the use of invariant tags as a less cumbersome easy-to-apply strategy is inevitable. Thus, as indicated earlier, English also exhibits invariant QTs, standard forms including *right?* and *okay?* (Downing & Locke, 2006) as illustrated in (8), although, as pointed out in Achiri-Taboh (2015a, p. 52), a restriction is placed on what type of anchor can host them.

(8)   a.   It's getting warmer, isn't it/right/okay?
          b.   Leave the cat alone, will you/okay/*right?
          c.   Let's go home now, shall we/okay/*right?
          d.   How quiet it was in there, wasn't it/right/*okay?

With many languages exhibiting invariant QTs exclusively, one thing that seems clear is that QTs are basically invariant across languages, including those like English that also exhibit variant ones. Corroboration for the suggestion that English variant QTs are a property of SE is found in the

very nature of such QTs, the fact that they exhibit contractions, a feature that only came into the language as recently as the beginning of the 17th century (Stevens, 1954).[5] If this reasoning is correct, how then do we understand the use of English QTs from the perspective of different varieties of the language? Specifically, the main aim of this theme book is to show that English question tags are basically invariant as is the case in the rest of the world's languages.
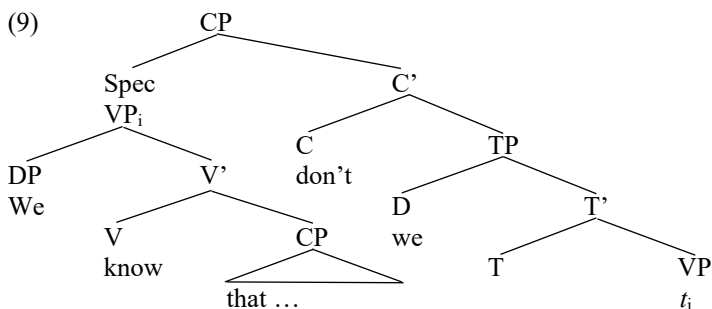
Variant QTs in English typically indicate that QTs are integrated morpho-syntactically and semantically into their anchors as they overtly show a parallelism with the latter. Thus, at the beginning, studies on QTs dealt primarily with aspects of their syntax and semantics. These include works by O'Connor (1955), Bolinger (1957), Klima (1964), Katz & Postal (1964), Palmer (1965), Arbini (1969), Palmer & Blandford (1969), Huddleston (1970), Langendoen (1970), Armagost (1972), Quirk et al. (1972), Quirk & Greenbaum (1973), Cattell (1973), Hudson (1975), Oleksy (1977), Knowles (1980), Hintikka (1982), Culicover (1992), den Dikken 1995), Kolln & Funk (1998), Huddleston & Pullum (2002), Downing & Locke (2006), Sailor (2009, 2011), Tabua (2014), Achiri-Taboh (2015a, 2016), and Criado-Peña (2016). These works have largely been concerned with the study of QTs within descriptive and transformational generative grammars from the perspective of rules of formation and response for the purposes of either seeking information or having information confirmed. As recently shown in, for example, Bongsinori (2013), they have actually constituted burning interactive debates. An early example is the one between Katz & Postal (1964) and Arbini (1969) on whether *will*, assumed in both studies to be the only auxiliary available in the formation of QTs with imperative anchors, undergoes deletion (together with the subject) or not, with Huddleston (1970) stepping in, following ideas from Bolinger

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[5] Following Eabwheeler (2017), the Online Etymology Dictionary gives dates for when some of the negative contractions came into use as:
- (i)   don't—1630
- (ii)   won't—1660
- (iii)   couldn't—1670
- (iv)   hadn't—1705
- (v)   can't—1706
- (vi)   ain't—1706
- (vii)   aren't—1709
- (viii) didn't—1775

(1957) and later to be seen in Quirk et al. (1985) and McGregor (1995) among others, to contradict the view.[6]

However, the question of integration has, indeed, been the major concern of syntacticians since Klima (1964) and Huddleston (1970) (also see Culicover 1992, and den Dikken 1995). Thus, the traditional analyses of the 1960s and 1970s can be broken down into two main structurally contrasting schools of thought. To start with, Klima (1964) and den Dikken (1995) project a kind of local A-bar movement (or copy-based) (CP) analysis—largely a formalism of den Dikken from earlier ideas of Klima. Let us call this the KD model. In the basic framework, materials for the TQ including the subject and an optionally negated auxiliary are copied up into the T layer and (the auxiliary) further up into C; at this point, the whole VP with all its material being in-situ is fronted into Spec,CP as illustrated in (9) below.

(9)

In other words, this theoretical speculation with a look of architectural aggrandisement crucially assumes that TQs are generated by means of blind syntactic copying of material from TP into CP. Although I do not cite with this theory of TQs, it holds a high ground for the assumption that the QT strongly matches its anchor without any flexibility in form at least at the deep structure level.

Following ideas from Huddleston (1970) and McCawley (1988), Culicover (1992) develops a different theory of TQs (call it the HMC

[6] Huddleston specifically argues that spoken English is characterized by the use of a wide range of auxiliaries in QTs with imperative anchors depending on the various functions and illocutionary force of the utterance as in examples like the following:

i.   Open the door, *will* you?
ii.   Open the door, *can* you?
iii.   Open the door, *could you*?
iv.   Open the door, *would* you?

model) by which he postulates the existence of a kind of "prosentential" clause—a pro-TP—that generates the tag and receives, for each of its nodes, a reference that binds it to a corresponding node in the anchor TP. In other words, this theory is a claim that TQs are built from an anaphoric relation that maps the tag onto the anchor.

Without going into other details of the problems with these early theories (see Sailor, 2009 for a detail discussion of the weaknesses), the KD and the HMC models can straightforwardly be ruled out for basic conceptual and structural reasons. For example, in the KD model, if T-to-C movement (or auxiliary inversion) takes place for purposes of "checking" Q-features and (literally) turning/transforming the original construction—TP—into a (*yes*/*no*) question, what purpose does a "VP-to-Spec,CP movement" serve? In other words, there seems to be no motivation for such a movement. Structurally speaking, this architecture is reminiscent of earlier assumptions that a QT functions to turn a statement into a question; but what motivates this kind of question formation when the underlying construction that gave rise to the statement could give rise to a question directly (for example, the appended QT), assuming that there is parallelism between the tag and the anchor? Besides, a theory of TQs that requires a VP-to-Spec,CP movement seriously undermines the presence of a pause (= comma) between the tag and the anchor. Finally, examples like (10) below where a punctuational use of the QT positions the latter in the middle of the anchor (Algeo, 1990, p. 446) clearly demotivates the KD model.

(10)   We have known for a while, haven't we, that chimps use tools?

Specifically, how does the CP complement of the verb *know*, as imagined in (11) get stranded in the fronting of the VP?

(11)   [$_{CP}$ We$_k$ have [$_{VP}$ ~~we~~$_k$ known for a while]$_j$, [$_C$ haven't$_i$ [$_{TP}$ we ~~haven't~~$_i$, [$_{VP}$ …]$_j$ [$_{CP}$ that chimps use tools]]]]?

Regarding the HMC model, if the tag is a bound anaphor of an antecedent anchor, it is not clear what then accounts for (1) the apparent absence (or compulsory ellipsis) of the VP (or predicate) (and everything within it) which receives reference, and (2) the T-to-C movement which does not form part of the characteristic features of the anchor? Besides, a theory that assumes the existence of a one-to-one binding relation would not require such arbitrary operations that would lead to the absence of corresponding nodes or the presence of non-corresponding ones. In the overall, even if we take for granted that these early frameworks are

essentially an account of TQs, they are each simply too cumbersome and
evasive a machinery for a phenomenon that would otherwise require a
simpler straightforward explanation; for example, the KD model embodies
a special arbitrary requirement for there to be a VP-to-Spec,CP movement.

The need for a more explanatorily adequate theory then saw the
emergence of Sailor's (2009) VP-ellipsis model. Arguing against the
intuition that QTs are parallel in form to their anchors (cf. the copy idea of
the KMC model) on grounds of explanatory inadequacy, Sailor proposes a
theory on the assumption that TQs can and do differ from their anchors in
form. Specifically, he suggests that QTs be thought of as regular YNQs that
have undergone ellipsis of material that is e-given (in terms of Merchant,
2001) from their antecedent clauses such that the content of the tag clause
is dictated entirely by discourse as a necessary result of the pragmatics of
QTs. To support his objection to a parallelism approach, Sailor appeals to
seemingly non-corresponding TQ constructions, including existential *there*
tags whose existential *there* subjects normally do not correspond to the
logical subjects of their anchors, which I believe actually follow from
various grammatical operations and semantic paraphrasing that take place
to render the anchors different, at surface level, from the underlying forms
as revealed by the QTs themselves.[7] Specifically, in the case of English
variant QTs, we simply have to reverse the QT, that is, literally undo the
auxiliary inversion—return auxiliary to the extraction site within the
framework of syntactic reconstruction (see Chomsky, 1977, 1993, 1995,
and Van Riemsdijk & Williams, 1986), and then figure out, by means of the
surface anchor, the predicate material that was affected by ellipsis leading
up to the tag, to have the underlying form of the anchor, and then look for
ways to account for the surface change.

Recent work, nevertheless, essentially still lends support to the
parallelism approach—see, for example, Achiri-Taboh (2015a), with an
overview in his contribution to the present volume (Chapter 3). Parallelism
is also shown in the reading of Achiri-Taboh's (2016, p. 49) Adjacency
Condition on Question Tags (ACQT) that nothing can intervene between
the QT and its anchor as demonstrated in the underlined compound-complex
sentence in (12), the original sentence in (12a) drawn from the British
National Corpus (BNC) (see Tottie & Hoffmann 2006, p. 285).

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[7] Sailor seems to combine aspects of the Generative Semantics approach of Austin
(1962), Ross (1970), and Searle (1989), where a richer, more abstract underlying
form is posited following McCawley (1988) as opposed to a richer post-derivational
component, following Merchant (2001). Either way, the outcome is the same,
namely, that a stronger set of tag data would require a richer structural representation
or interpretive apparatus.

(12)   a.   And right on the almost on the final whistle just before
               United scored in injury time, I *think mid-fielder Martin
               Cool got in a very good volley didn't he from some
               distance*, but it really was whistling towards goal?
       b.   I think mid-fielder Martin Cool got in a very good volley
               from some distance, *didn't he*, but it really was whistling
               towards goal?
       c.   *I think mid-fielder Martin Cool got in a very good volley
               from some distance, but it really was whistling towards
               goal, *didn't he*?

Specifically, motivation for the condition is e-givenness for the elliptical
nature of the tag which is provided by the anchor. E-givenness is lacking in
(12c) with an intervening independent clause between tag and anchor.[8] This,
in itself, shows that the tag is structurally dependent upon its anchor.

   If we agree that we can best consider the structure of the TQ construction
by means of the parallelism approach, then, looking at the sheer weaknesses
of major parallelism approaches so far, and taking into account the
correspondence between the tag and the anchor, we have to assume that the
TQ construction is the result of a twin derivation where both the tag and its
anchor surface from one and the same underlying form as represented
schematically in Figure 1—1 below.

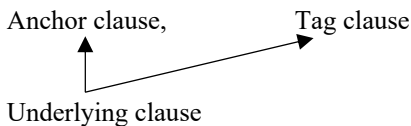Anchor clause,   Tag clause

Underlying clause
Figure 1—1: The TQ as a twin derivation

What this means is that, as the reader will see generally demonstrated in this
volume, the QT, as considered to surface from the same underlying form as
the anchor, then immediately follows the latter (in a form of a double

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[8] Notice that (12b) is just as grammatical as (12a), since the PP *from a distance* only
forms part of the anchor as an adjunct—compare (i).
       i.   *I think mid-fielder Martin Cool got in, didn't he, a very good volley
               from some distance, but …?
Also notice that, although the anchor here is a complex sentence, there is no
intervening clause, since one is embedded in the other. Thus, the tag can either be
based on the embedded clause as in (12a/b) or indeed the matrix clause—consider
(ii) where two different tags are possible, depending on which clause is the base.
       ii.   It is true that many books don't get to their buyers, *isn't it*/*do they*?

conjunct compound sentence) purely for pragmatic reasons—see Chapters 3 and 4 of the volume for suggestions on how the two then syntactically end up together as one single compound sentence. Thus, it is possible to see a TQ as a compound sentence of two similar conjuncts that only generally differ in polarity, with the second one—the QT—characterized by a wide range of morpho-syntactic operations that give it its varying surface form across languages and language varieties like those of English.

3. The socio-pragmatics of question tags

I have pointed out that, at the beginning, studies on TQs dealt primarily with aspects of their syntax and semantics. Looking at their pragmatics, however, other studies soon emerged of QTs after the 1960s and early 70s from the point of view of socio-linguistic variations, as the tags have since started behaving more and more as discourse pragmatic markers. In fact, the different possibilities in the paradigm of canonical TQs with respect to polarity (pointed out at the beginning of the previous section) are a typical pointer to the versatility of QTs as discourse pragmatic markers. Works in this direction include those of Lakoff (1972; 1975), Dubois & Crouch (1975), Crosby & Nyquist (1977), Lapadat & Seesahai (1977), McMillan et al. (1977), Dines (1980), O'Barr & Atkins (1980), Cheshire (1981; 1982), Faerch & Kasper (1982), Holmes (1984; 1995), Schiffrin (1987), Algeo (1988), Cameron et al. (1989), Coates (1989), Winefield et al. (1989), Stenstrom (1994), Traugott (1995; 2012), Fraser (1996), Andersen (2001), Cheng & Warren (2001), Tottie & Hoffman (2006), Pichler (2010; 2013), Kimps et al. (2014), and Achiri-Taboh (2015b). Most of these have been concerned with the differences between men and women in the use of TQs, and with the use of TQs as discourse pragmatic markers on a par with particles like *eh?*, *right?*, and *okay?*, or to serve a variety of discourse pragmatic functions, which include attitudinal, epistemic, and politeness functions. Notice that these aspects of the QT are actually foregrounded in the title of this volume with a picture painted of them literally caressing the social wheel, with the certain recognition of their ever increasing adaptation to function in similar roles as (ordinary) discourse pragmatic markers as is typically shown in Chapter 2, though also in the other five chapters at varying degrees. In this section, I focus on the extent to which QTs have been shown to function as discourse markers. But, prior to this, however, let us first take a cursory look at the literature on ordinary discourse markers for perspective.

To start with, Fraser (1999, p. 931) identifies discourse markers (DMs) as expressions such as those bold-printed in the following sequences:

(13) a.   A: I like him.
              B: **So**, you think you'll ask him out then.
      b.   John can't go. **And** Mary can't go either.
      c.   Will you go? **Furthermore**, will you represent the class
              there?
      d.   Sue left very late. **But** she arrived on time.
      e.   I think it will fly. **After all**, we built it right.

In other words, he sees DMs as lexical expressions (i.e., functional expressions in my view) drawn primarily from the syntactic class of conjunctions, adverbs, and prepositional phrases and used to relate discourse segments. Fraser specifically points out that DMs signal a relationship between the segment they introduce and the preceding one.

Although the concept of DM as a linguistic entity had already been in existence before the 1980s, it is Levinson, in his (1983) book, *Pragmatics*, who first considered it as a class of linguistic items worthy of being studied on their own merits.[9] Specifically, he suggested (pp. 87-88) that

> … there are many words and phrases in English, and no doubt most languages, that indicate the relationship between and utterance and prior discourse. Examples and utterance-initial usages of *but*, *there*, *in conclusion*, *to the contrary*, *still*, *however*, *anyway*, *well*, *besides*, *actually*, *all in all*, *so*, *after all*, and so on. It is generally conceded that such words have at least a component of meaning that resists truth-conditional treatment … what they seem to do is indicate, often in very complex ways, just how the utterance that contains them is a response to, or a continuation of, some portion of the prior discourse.

The rest of that decade and the following ones then saw a proliferation in research works on the topic of discourse markers, although there has since neither been an agreement on how the concept should be named nor defined.

Looking at the labeling, although the term "discourse marker" is [probably] the most commonly used name for the category (see Brinton, 1996) and has, indeed, been so since Fraser (1999), different studies have labeled it differently over the years since Levinson (1983). They include, but are not limited to pragmatic connectives (Stubbs, 1983; van Dijk, 1997), discourse signaling devices (Polanyi & Scha, 1983), semantic conjuncts

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[9] Labove & Fanshel (1977, p. 156), for example, had made reference to DMs in discussing a question that was asked beginning with *well* (also see Halliday & Hasan, 1976, and van Dijk, 1997 who had named them differently as sentence connectives and pragmatic connectives, respectively). See Fraser (1999, p. 932) for details on this.

(Quirk et al., 1985), discourse particles (Schourup, 1985), pragmatic formatives (Fraser, 1987), discourse connectives (Blakemore, 1987, 1992), pragmatic markers (Schiffrin, 1987, Fraser, 1988; 1990), phatic connectives (Bazanella, 1990), discourse operators (Redeker, 1990, 1991), pragmatic expressions (Erman, 1992), pragmatic operators (Ariel, 1994), cue phrases (Knott & Dale, 1994), and pragmatic particles (Ostman, 1995). Although Brinton (1996) indicates that the term "discourse marker" had been the most suggested name for the concept, she rather preferred the term "pragmatic marker," pointing out that *pragmatic* "better captures the range of functions filled by these items." Thus, in a recent study, Achiri-Taboh (2015b) combines the two as in "discourse pragmatic particle."

Besides the basic definition of DMs as used to relate discourse segments, various others have been proposed, each one almost in disagreement with the others. Thus, Schiffrin (1987, p. 31) sees DMs as "sequentially dependent elements that bracket units of talk." Redeker (1991, p. 1168) sees them as expressions equipped "with the primary function of bringing to the listener's attention a particular kind of linkage of the upcoming utterance with the immediately preceding discourse context." Interesting here is the qualification of "linkage" with "a particular kind," which is not defined. Then, Maschler (1994, p. 325) defines the term as "a subcategory of metalingual expressions: those used to mark boundaries of continuous discourse."[10] However, it is generally accepted that DMs are optional connecting devices from a heterogeneous source of linguistic features.

This heterogeneity in the syntactic classes from which they are drawn is, of course, significant for the present volume where it is generally shown that DMs have also been surfacing in the form of QTs. Fraser (2009) points out that DMs are principally contrastive, elaborative, and inferential in function. As DMs, QTs have been found to exhibit a plethora of discourse functions as we see later in this section. In this respect, part of the task of this book, therefore, is to try to show how exotic such functions of the QT in English can be. For example, while, as is well known, DMs may appear in the sentence initial, medial, or final positions (see, for example, Achiri-Taboh, 2015b), with the sentence-initial position being the most preferred (see Schourup, 1999, Fraser, 1999, Fung, 2003, and Muller, 2005), Ali & Mahadin (2016, p. 31) have demonstrated the tendency for EFL learners to use them more in the medial position than either initial or final; naturally, this leaves one wondering in what specific ways such learners (or speakers) might use QTs as DMs—see, for example, the contribution in Chapter 5

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[10] See Brinton (1996, pp. 30-31) for a detailed examination of various definitions of the DM with respect to its main functions.

where the authors survey a list of discourse particles in the form of QTs used by a speech community that can be described as Cameroonian Francophones who have acquired English.

In terms of their actual discourse functions, QTs have been shown to be extremely versatile. Thus, attested examples of QT go beyond the traditional function of seeking confirmation (or clarification) of what the user says in the anchor, with several classifications of tag discourse functions being in place, notably those of Holmes (1995) and Algeo (1990, 2006) with much overlapping though. Consider the following table of classifications adapted from Tomaselli & Gatt (2015, p. 58): [11]

Table 1—1: Functions of QTs in classifications by various authors

Algeo (1990)	Holmes (1995)	Roesle (2001)	Tottie & Hoffmann (2006)
Informational Confirmatory Punctuational Peremptory Aggressive	Epistemic modal Facilitative Challenging Softening	Confirmatory Involving Punctuational Peremptory Aggressive Informational Hopeful/fearful Conspiracy	Confirmatory Facilitating Attitudinal Peremptory Aggressive Informational

These functions are discussed in the various chapters of this volume with respect to the various authors from the perspective of different varieties of tag forms used in English around the world. More specifically, in looking at various forms of QT that are used in English speaking communities around the world, a particular interest in point is what other functions there can be, besides how some exotic tag forms in English can perform them.

In spite of these many different classifications of the discourse functions of QTs, the range of their use remains difficult to pin down because, following Tomaselli & Gatt (2015, p. 55), a number of difficulties are in place. For example, they point out that their form under-determines the range of functions they exhibit. Thus, most pragmatic classifications of QTs

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[11] Baker (2015), however, estimates the core pragmatic uses of QTs to be placed in three categories. They include (1) informational tags to check whether something is true or to seek for agreement on an opinion (as in "You're getting paid for this, are you?"), (2) confirmatory tags where the speaker is not sure of the truth of the proposition of the anchor and wants confirmation (as in "I don't need a jacket, do I?"), and (3) attitudinal tags which emphasize what the speaker says in the anchor without any reply required (as in "Yeah, she'll be in trouble, won't she?").

that rely on significant samples of empirical data have focused on English, with the majority of such classifications focused on variant QTs (except for a few like Cuenca, 1997, Stenström et al., 2002, Columbus, 2010, and Mithun, 2012).

Tomaselli & Gatt also point to the relative paucity of cross-linguistic research that investigates the generalizability of the functions of QTs that have been posited in the literature. More significantly, they point out that the reason why delimiting the range of uses of QTs is challenging is that the extent to which their pragmatic functions correlate with socio-linguistic variables remains understudied. A typical example is the fact that QTs have been claimed to be associated with asymmetries in the conversational/social status of interlocutors, in particular, the notion that speakers in a position of "low power" tend to be more likely to use QTs. According to Tomaselli & Gatt, this position which was advanced by Lakoff (1973, 1975) on theoretical grounds, was primarily concerned with its implications for the possible status of women as "low-powered" individuals. However, as they point out, the claims have since been challenged, with empirical research presenting a more nuanced picture (e.g., Cameron et al., 1989), especially in relation to the interaction of such socio-linguistic variables as age, gender and speakers' interactional roles (e.g., Stenström et al., 2002, and Tottie & Hoffmann, 2006).

By calling for additional cross-linguistic research on QTs and their functions, this point relates to the present volume in that the latter is a book on non-standard invariant tags. But it is also a challenge to the entire endeavor, as the meager six-chapter volume is based on QTs in varieties of English alone. In other words, extensive, more grounded studies on the typology of QTs across language varieties are required if we have to capture a fuller range of their functions. In this introduction, I have looked at the formal classification of QTs in the literature, taking the reader on a tour of both variant and invariant tags in the world's languages in a bid to give an outline of how the theory of TQ constructions can be pursued in an integrative fashion, and considering the socio-pragmatic behavior of QTs more generally.

4. An overview of the chapters

In this volume, as indicated already, a plethora of exotic tag particles in different varieties of English is studied for how they function as sentence-peripheral discourse markers, with the central question being how integrated they can be into the syntax of their anchors. Doubling as the editor of the volume, I can say, from the point of view of an anonymous reviewer, that it