

UNPACKING TAG QUESTIONS IN 'THE OFFICE': FREQUENCY, FUNCTIONALITY, AND COMEDIC FLAIR

Fatima Ghaffar^{*1}, Muhammad Farukh Arslan², Muhammad Usman Bin Tariq³

^{*1}MPhil English Scholar, NUML Faisalabad campus;

²Lecturer Department of English, NUML Faisalabad campus;

³MPhil Applied Linguistics, Dept. Of Applied Linguistics GCUF

^{*1}fatimaghaffar066gmail.com; ²farukh.arslan@numl.edu.pk; ³usmanbintariq75@gmail.com

Corresponding Author: *

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ABSTRACT

This study looks at the incidence and importance of tag questions in the dialogue of "The Office," a popular American comedy. Tag questions, which are short linguistic features affixed to assertions, play an important role in communication dynamics by requesting confirmation, conveying ambiguity, and allowing conversational flow. Despite their importance, tag questions have gotten little attention in scripted media situations, notably on television series. This research takes a mixed-methods approach, analyzing conversation transcripts from seasons one and two of "The Office." Data collection include gathering scripts from web sources, categorizing the corpus, and manually refining. The study finds that characters regularly use tag questions such "right?", "all right?", "yeah?", and "okay?" to verify, convey skepticism, and keep the discourse going. The findings show that tag questions add considerably to the comedy of "The Office" by punctuating jokes, underlining irony, and accentuating character peculiarities. This study contributes to our knowledge of language dynamics in scripted media by putting light on the pragmatic functions of tag questions and their significance in interpersonal communication in the setting of a popular comedy.

Keywords: Tag questions, discourse analysis, comedic timing, workplace interaction, linguistic humor.

INTRODUCTION

Tag questions, those small linguistic appendages put at the end of statements, are subtle yet effective communication tools. These compact structures, sometimes marked by a question fragment, serve a variety of functions in speech, including requesting confirmation and expressing uncertainty, as well as communicating civility and building conversational coherence (Safira 2019). Tag inquiries, while appearing benign, have substantial communication power, affecting interaction dynamics and impacting speech interpretation.

Despite their relevance, tag questions have received diverse amounts of attention throughout linguistic study disciplines. Studies have looked at their practical importance in oral communication scenarios (Ivanova, 2022), their involvement in second language learning (Safira, 2019), and even their distribution across diverse linguistic environments. However, there is a significant

vacuum in our understanding of the prevalence and usage patterns of tag questions in specific linguistic circumstances, notably in the context of broadcast discourse, such as talk shows.

The significance of comprehending tag issues in current communication situations motivates this research. Tag questions are important in interpersonal connection because they allow for a more fluid conversation flow and express subtleties of meaning. Furthermore, given the popularity and cultural relevance of "The Office," researching tag questions in this context might provide insights into how American English speakers use them in casual, conversational contexts.

Drawing on recent research on tag questions in various linguistic situations (Meguro, 2017; Safira, 2019), this study seeks to further our knowledge of tag question usage by concentrating on a specific genre of broadcast conversation. By examining the

frequency and distribution of tag questions in "The Office," this study can offer insight on how these linguistic traits contribute to the show's representation of interpersonal dynamics, comedy, and social interaction.

Understanding the function of tag questions in contemporary communication is critical for a variety of reasons. First and foremost, tag questions promote easier discussion flow by encouraging involvement and replies. They function as language clues, indicating the speaker's posture or attitude toward the proposition being delivered. Furthermore, in environments such as talk shows, where informal connection and spontaneous discourse are common, tag questions can serve as indicators of rapport and involvement among participants.

This article seeks to fill this vacuum by utilizing the American comedy "The Office" as a case study to explore the prevalence of tag questions in this popular type of entertainment. This study examines occurrences of tag questions in conversation exchanges among characters in order to provide insight on the prevalence and probable communicative purposes of tag questions within the scripted interactions of "The Office."

Building on previous research on tag questions, this study contributes to a better understanding of how linguistic elements are used in media depictions of interpersonal communication. This study intends to find patterns and consequences of tag question usage in scripted dialogue, providing insights into the representation of conversational dynamics within the sitcom genre. By examining tag questions in this popular television series, this study aims to offer valuable insights into their role in contemporary American English discourse and contribute to the broader field of linguistic research on interpersonal communication.

Research Questions

1. What is the frequency of tag questions in the dialogue of "The Office"?
2. How do tag questions contribute to the comedic timing and comedic effect within dialogue exchanges in "The Office"?

Research Objectives

1. To determine the frequency of tag questions in each episode of "The Office" by a thorough examination of the conversation transcripts.

2. To investigate how the existence and placement of tag questions affects the timing and delivery of humorous moments inside conversation exchanges in "The Office" by examining individual scenes and discovering comic use patterns.

Significance of the study

This research on tag questions in "The Office" is significant because it gives useful insights into the language dynamics of one of television's most renowned comedy shows. Understanding the prevalence and humorous function of tag questions broadens our understanding of how language influences comedy and human interaction in popular culture. Furthermore, findings from this study might contribute to wider conversations about the use of language elements in scripted media, with implications for television writing, comedy production, and audience reception studies.

Methodology

This section discusses the article's research methodology. Corpus-based analysis is used in this research to explore the frequency of tag questions appearing in the mockumentary sitcom TV series "The Office" season one and two.

Research Design

A mixed-methods approach was used for this research. This study deals with the frequency and nature of the tag questions.

Data collection and corpus creation

This is about the corpus's data collection and construction. The data was collected through the qualitative method. The data collection source was secondary, as the present study extracted scripts of spoken mockumentary sitcom TV series "The Office" season one and two from an authentic online website.

Corpus compilation

For this study on seasons one and two of "The Office," data was acquired from an online domain and compiled into different notepad files for each season. The data was then tagged with MAT tagger version 1.3.3 and compiled into a single notepad file with TXTcollector. Manual refining was carried out to guarantee that the corpus was accurate and consistent. The total word token count for the

combined corpus was 79,492. Finally, the data was processed with Antconc 3.5.9 (2022) software to detect patterns and frequency of tag questions.

Literature Review

Meguro (2017) evaluated the effect of textual augmentation on grammar acquisition and reading comprehension in Japanese high school students. The study used a pretest-posttest design with three treatment sessions, concentrating on English tag questions divided into three types: auxiliary (AUX), do-support (DO), and modal (MODAL). Participants were separated into three experimental groups and one control group. The experimental groups got passages with visually modified target shapes, whereas the control group received passages that were not improved.

The results showed that textual enhancement had different impacts on learning the target forms, with just one enhanced group (Group 3) outperforming the control group. Furthermore, the researchers discovered that textual augmentation did not impair reading comprehension. However, the efficiency of increasing certain sorts of target forms varied between the groups, with Group 3 benefiting from augmentation but the other two not. These findings imply that the impact of textual augmentation on grammar acquisition and comprehension might differ depending on the instructional environment and target forms used (Meguro, 2017).

Haroon and Arslan (2024) conducted the study to analyze taboo and euphemism. Framed within Allan and Burridge's (2006) theoretical perspectives on euphemisms and Timothy Jay's (1992) work on taboo language, a qualitative content analysis of the film's script was conducted. The study highlights the intricate relationship between language, culture, and social dynamics, suggesting further exploration of linguistic choices in media narratives to illuminate broader cultural phenomena, aiding in the understanding of authenticity and rebellion within contemporary society.

Oktapiani, Natsir, and Setyowati (2017) did study to discover women's language characteristics based on Lakoff's theory and to reveal the language functions supplied by these elements in the *Devil Wears Prada* film using Jakobsen's theory. Data gathering used a descriptive qualitative technique, which included several viewings of the film, script readings, and identification of female character utterances with women's language characteristics. Nine of the ten

identified features were observed in the film: lexical hedges or fillers, tag questions, rising intonation on declaratives, empty adjectives, precious color terms, intensifiers, super polite forms, avoidance of strong swear words, and emphatic stress.

Intensifiers identified as the most common trait, used by female characters to accentuate their words and draw the addressee's attention. In contrast, hypercorrect grammar was lacking, indicating that the characters mostly used informal language to overcome social gaps. The study discovered three language functions in the female characters' utterances: expressive, directive, and metalinguistic, which corresponded to Jakobson's taxonomy of language functions (1960).

Safira's (2019) work focuses on mistake analysis in the context of second language learning, specifically the competency of English Department Students 2017 at Andalas University in writing tag questions. Tag questions, distinguished by the additional "tags" at the end of sentences, serve purposes such as confirmation and persuasion. Despite their intricacy, not all people, particularly second language learners, are proficient in their creation in regular conversation. Safira's goal is to examine these students' level of knowledge and ability in comprehending and spontaneously composing tag questions. The study used the Discourse Completion Test (DCT) as the major research instrument and performs syntactical mistake analysis to examine participant utterances, with an emphasis on tag question creation. The results show that, while most English Department Students 2017 at Andalas University are familiar with tag questions and can use them in specified settings, mistakes continue in their utterances. The fundamental difficulty is a lack of understanding of tag question form, which includes notions like auxiliary use, sentence kinds (nominal or verbal), and subject-verb agreement.

In recent years, the landscape of community-driven question answering (cQA) platforms has grown significantly, as seen by platforms such as Yahoo! Answers and AnswerBag, which cater to users seeking accurate information (Nie et al., 2020). This tendency has been accelerated since 2010, with the introduction of new cQA platforms such as Quora and Zhihu, which not only enhance interactions but also allow users to apply subject tags to questions, revealing the key topics inherent within them (Nie et al., 2020). This work aims to handle the difficulty of automatically annotating freshly uploaded questions

with predetermined subject tags structured into a directed acyclic graph (Nie et al., 2020).

To address this issue, the authors offer an end-to-end deep interactive embedding model that tries to learn the embeddings of questions and themes in a shared space for similarity assessment (Nie et al., 2020). The model uses parallel deep learning architectures to train question and topic tag embeddings, with a focus on regularizing topic tag embeddings to account for hierarchical structures and relieve uneven topic distribution (Nie et al., 2020). The model then interacts each question embedding with the topic tag matrix, followed by the application of a sigmoid cross-entropy loss function to reward good question-topic couples while penalizing negative ones (Nie et al., 2020). Extensive studies done on a large-scale social aspect show that the suggested paradigm is effective.

Arslan, Mehmood and Haroon (2022) conducted the study regarding the use of adjectives across novels written by male and female authors. Study opted for corpus based approach. The study revealed that the female novelists used adjectives at a higher frequency than the male novelists. Haroon and Arslan (2021) analyzed the poem 'The Old Building' through the lens of transitivity. The study used the UAM tool for the analysis of corpus. This paper investigated the relationship between linguistic structures and its meaning in the literary poem through ideational meta-function.

Dominguez's (2022) study looks at how L2 English speakers understand tag questions. The author divides the polarity of replies to tag questions into truth-based and polarity-based languages, highlighting the differences among languages. While earlier study has shown variations between these groups, there is still a lack of comprehension of tag questions among English second language users. Based on previous research, Dominguez expected that L2 language would have no affect on participants' answer choices. The study used a survey style in which participants rated the right answers to ten tag questions with varied polarity. The results showed that individuals with a mixed L1 background scored the best, followed by those with a truth-based L1, and those with a polarity-based L1 scored the lowest.

Arslan, Haroon and Shakeel (2023) conducted critical discourse analysis of the short story 'My son the fanatic'. This research aimed to study social power relations in a postcolonial hybrid culture. This

study followed Fairclough's critical discourse analysis model for studying the power relationship. The results showed that power is a constantly changing phenomenon. However, the male dominance was reported in the language and social practices of postcolonial literature.

Notably, questions with positive tags and positive responses had the most accurate answers from all participants, followed by negative tags with negative responses. The findings demonstrated that L1 background had a considerable influence on survey scores and, as a result, comprehension of tag questions. However, the author recognizes limitations owing to uneven sample sizes, which may restrict the findings' generalizability to a larger group of L2 English speakers. Despite this, the study offers useful insights and avenues for further research on L2 learner understanding of tag questions.

In her research, Ivanova (2022) investigates the distribution of pragmatic roles of tag questions in oral face-to-face communication and author-created fictional conversations. The analysis uses data from the spoken demographic component of the British National Corpus (BNC-SDM) and the Longman Spoken American Corpus (LSAK) and compares it to a corpus of tag questions in fictitious adjacency pairings from British and American literature.

Ivanova discovers that, whereas virtually all pragmatic roles recognized in oral conversation exist in fiction, the enabling function is conspicuously absent. This disparity demonstrates a disconnect between real-life oral discourse and its representation in fiction. Ivanova believes that this disparity emphasizes the importance of writers' contextual signals in deciphering pragmatic meaning inside fictional conversation. These findings are important for understanding the function of positive and negative politeness techniques in promoting cooperative communication across several communication channels.

In the literature, the Hungarian question tag "mi?" is investigated in terms of contextual constraints in comparison to "ugye?" According to Gunlogson (2008), a speaker is a source for a proposition if their commitment to it is independent of the commitment of any other participants. An online study of pragmatic situations backs up the idea that "mi?" provisionally commits the addressee as a source for the tag question's anchor proposition, as well as the speaker's commitment to the proposition "p". Kiss (2022) shows that "mi?" is preferred in situations

where both the speaker and the addressee are independently committed to "p" and the speaker is also independently committed to the addressee's commitment. This preference for independent commitment is consistent with the findings of the online poll, which showed that "mi?" is favored when both parties are individually committed to the proposition "p". Kiss's work adds to the literature on the pragmatic analysis of tag questions in Hungarian by clarifying the contextual limits of "mi?" and distinguishing it from "ugye?".

Another study suggest using IntelliTag, an intelligent cloud customer service system, to meet the growing customer service demands encountered by small and medium-sized organizations (SMEs) (Yang et al.,2021). They highlight the unique issue faced by cloud-based systems in acquiring user personal information, necessitating the inclusion of a tag suggestion tool to quickly determine user query intents through tag selection. The authors emphasize three key considerations in the development of IntelliTag: first, the difficult task of mining high-quality tags; second, the complexity of using diverse data types and relationships to construct a sequential recommendation model for tag suggestions; and finally, the meticulous planning required in system implementation and deployment to meet online service demands. Yang et al. (2021) describe the data production, model design, and system deployment processes, as well as give empirical findings that compare IntelliTag to other contemporary approaches. Notably, they emphasize IntelliTag's extensive acceptance, which now serves hundreds of thousands of businesses and millions of users in industrial production environments.

Arslan, Mahmood and Rasool (2020) investigated the use of derivational morphemes across three different varieties of English language. The study took the data from ICNALE and opted for the methodology of corpus. The study revealed huge differences regarding the use of derivational morphemes across three varieties of English language. The study also provided certain morphological indicators of different parts of speech of English language.

Lin et al. (2022) examine the function of visual representation in knowledge-based visual question answering (VQA), emphasizing the need of using regional information to improve performance. Despite the widespread emphasis on visual input, knowledge-based VQA explores visual

representation less than standard VQA. The authors point out two major flaws in existing methods: first, the disregard of essential links inside and across object areas while extracting visual features for knowledge retrieval; and second, the underutilization of visual characteristics in the final response model. To overcome these challenges, the authors suggest REVIVE, a novel technique that includes explicit information from object areas during both the knowledge retrieval and response stages. Their method is driven by the realization that object regions and their interactions play an important role in knowledge-based VQA. Through extensive testing on the OK-VQA dataset, the authors establish a new state-of-the-art accuracy of 58.0%, outperforming the prior technique by a wide margin (+3.6%). They also present thorough studies that demonstrate the importance of regional information across several components of the framework for knowledge-based VQA. The code for their approach is freely available on GitHub.

Analysis

Tag questions are common linguistic strategies in "The Office" discourse, serving a variety of purposes in the show's representation of interpersonal relationships, comedy, and conversational realism. The number and range of tag questions used in the series represent the various ways in which people manage workplace encounters, seek confirmation or agreement, and communicate concerns or worries. Based on previous research, such as Safira (2019) and Ivanova (2022), which stress the pragmatic relevance of tag questions in various linguistic settings, we may expand on the function of tag questions in "The Office" discourse. According to Safira's study, tag questions are important in enabling conversational cohesiveness and agreement-seeking behavior, which is consistent with the show's frequent usage of tag questions such as "right?", "all right?", and "okay?" These tag questions help characters maintain clarity and alignment in the office setting, simulating real-world business communication dynamics.

The frequency of tag questions appeared in the data is given below in the table.

Tag questions	Frequencies
do you	2
don't you ?	1
am I?	2
isn't it ?	1
aren't you ?	1
right ?	31
all right ?	13
yeah ?	69
okay ?	62
huh ?	3

"Right?" is the most commonly used tag question, appearing 31 times. It is a simple confirmation-seeking tag question that is frequently used to assess agreement or comprehension. Its high frequency indicates that it is a frequently used tag question in the dialogue of "The Office," reflecting characters' desire to seek validation or affirmation in their relationships.

"All right?" has a frequency of 13 and functions similarly to "right?" but with somewhat different language. Its usage indicates a similar tendency of seeking agreement or affirmation in discussion exchanges.

"Yeah?" is the most commonly asked tag question, appearing 69 times. "Yeah?" is an informal tag question used to affirm or concur, typically in a casual or conversational tone. Its frequent use demonstrates a penchant for casual language and conversational manner in the dialogue of "The Office."

"Okay?": "Okay?" has a frequency of 62 and functions similarly to "yeah?" in terms of asking confirmation or agreement. Its high frequency indicates that characters in "The Office" frequently utilize this tag question to ensure knowledge or agreement during conversation exchanges.

"Huh?": Although it appears just three times, "huh?" is an interrogative tag that is frequently used to ask explanation or repetition. Its use denotes that characters may not have fully comprehended or heard anything.

Other tag questions: The remaining tag questions ("do you", "don't you", "am I", "isn't it", "aren't you") exist with lower frequency, suggesting less widespread usage in the dialogue of "The Office." These tag inquiries serve a variety of purposes, including obtaining confirmation, expressing hesitation, and seeking agreement.

According to the research, characters in "The Office" primarily utilize confirmation-seeking tag questions such as "right?", "all right?", "yeah?", and "okay?" in their dialogue, revealing a conversational style typified by casual language and frequent requests for agreement or validation.

Role of tag questions in The Office

In "The Office," tag questions play three major roles in the dynamics of speech exchanges. First and foremost, they serve as instruments for characters to confirm and agree. According to the frequency research, tag questions such as "right?", "all right?", "yeah?", and "okay?" are commonly employed to verify clarity and alignment in the office setting. This is consistent with earlier research on tag questions in diverse language contexts (Safira, 2019; Ivanova, 2022), which has highlighted their significance in promoting conversational cohesiveness and agreement-seeking behavior.

Tag questions are used to convey doubt or confusion gently. Characters in "The Office" employ tag questions in questioning tones to imply uncertainty or skepticism about actions or remarks without openly confronting them. For example, a character may remark, "We're going to finish this project by the end of the day, okay?" with a questioning tone, implying doubt about the timeline's viability. The use of tag questions adds richness to the conversation and reflects the complicated interpersonal relationships within the office.

This subtle use of tag questions deepens the conversation and reflects the complicated interpersonal dynamics of the workplace context. This conclusion is consistent with Safira's (2019) study, which highlights the pragmatic value of tag questions in conveying doubt in second language learning environments.

Tag questions help to create a conversational flow inside "The Office." Characters utilize tag questions to engage their coworkers in discussion, get input, and seamlessly move between topics. This element of tag question usage is consistent with research on

conversational dynamics and discourse analysis (Meguro, 2017), which emphasizes the importance of tag questions in sustaining the rhythm and tempo of dialogue exchanges. The table given below shows its role in conversation.

Role in Conversation	Description
Confirmation and Agreement	Characters seek validation or consensus through tag questions like "right?", "all right?", "yeah?", and "okay?".
Subtle Expression of Doubt	Characters use tag questions in a questioning tone to imply uncertainty about actions or remarks.
Conversational Flow	Characters use tag questions to engage others in discussion, get input, and transition between topics.

Contribution to Comedic Timing and Effect

Tag questions improve the humorous timing and effect of conversation exchanges in "The Office." The frequent use of tag questions with exact timing and delivery adds to the show's particular humorous style and is consistent with earlier study on comedy in scripted media (Ivanova, 2022). The snappy, rhythmic style of tag questions aids in comic timing and emphasis on jokes or hilarious situations. Tag questions are used humorously or subtly to heighten the comedy in "The Office." Characters use tag questions to minimize ludicrous or embarrassing circumstances, adding irony or sarcasm to the discussion. This comic method is consistent with theories of humor and irony in media discourse (Ivanova, 2022), which highlight the importance of language techniques in increasing humorous effect and audience involvement.

Furthermore, tag questions highlight character peculiarities and eccentricities, adding to the humorous range of "The Office." Each character may use tag questions in a unique method that reflects their personality qualities and comic flair. This characterisation through tag questions deepens the characters and adds to the show's overall humorous complexity.

In terms of how tag questions add to the humorous timing and effect of conversation exchanges in "The Office," they play an important part in boosting the show's humor in numerous ways:

Pace and Rhythm: Tag questions, with their short and snappy nature, contribute to the pace and rhythm of funny conversation exchanges on "The Office." Characters frequently ask tag questions with perfect timing, and they punctuate jokes or hilarious situations with short, sharp words. This rhythmic pattern enhances the show's overall comic timing,

allowing for well-timed punchlines and comedy beats.

Irony and Understatement: Tag questions can be used sarcastically or subtly to enhance the comedy in "The Office." Characters may utilize tag questions to minimize ludicrous or embarrassing situations, adding irony or sarcasm to the discussion. For example, a character may reply, "We're definitely not breaking any HR rules, are we?" in a knowing tone, emphasizing the ridiculousness of the scenario but retaining an air of innocence. The use of tag questions heightens the humorous effect by stressing the incongruity or absurdity of the workplace setting. Tag questions may also be used to emphasize character quirks and eccentricities, which contribute to the humorous characterization of "The Office." Each character may use tag questions in a unique method that reflects their personality qualities and comic flair. For example, a character known for their dry humor may employ tag questions in a deadpan tone, whilst a more energetic character may deliver them with exaggerated passion. These personalized answers to tag questions give the characters more depth and increase the show's humorous variety.

The table given below further explains the contribution of tag questions to comedy.

Contribution to Comedy	Description
Pace and Rhythm	Short, snappy tag questions add to the comedic timing of jokes and situations.
Irony and Understatement	Sarcastic use of tag questions highlights the absurdity of situations.
Character Quirks	Unique use of tag questions reflects individual characters' personalities and comedic styles.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the examination of tag questions in "The Office" demonstrates their major importance in influencing dialogue dynamics, improving humorous timing, and adding to the overall realism of workplace interactions shown in the program. Characters in "The Office" employ tag questions often to efficiently manage workplace interactions, seek confirmation or agreement, and convey concerns or anxieties, reflecting the intricacies of office communication.

The frequency analysis reveals that tag questions like "right?", "all right?", "yeah?", and "okay?" are often used by characters to seek validation, indicate uncertainty covertly, and sustain conversational flow. These tag questions help characters negotiate interpersonal relationships, express anxieties, and engage colleagues in debate, emphasizing their practical use in professional communication. Furthermore, the importance of tag questions in determining humorous timing and effect in dialogue exchanges is clear. Tag questions contribute to the show's distinct comedy style by punctuating jokes and heightening amusing situations. Tag questions are used hilariously or quietly by characters to reduce absurd events, underline irony, and highlight character peculiarities, so expanding the show's comic depth and engaging the viewer.

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