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Tag Questions in English

The First Century

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This study charts the early history of canonical tag questions in English (e.g., *It is cold, isn't it?*) focusing on the sixteenth century and using drama texts as a source. By means of semi-automated retrieval from computerized sources, 136 instances were collected. They were then analyzed in context to ascertain polarity, choice of operator and subject, meter and authorship, and especially pragmatic functions. Even at this early stage, tag questions had functions beyond asking for confirmation, such as expressing speaker attitude, challenging an interlocutor, or issuing directives. Cautious comparisons are made with Present-day English conversational use. The importance of modal verbs and *do*-support for the emergence of canonical tag questions is discussed, but it is argued that the rise of *not* as the sole sentence negator in English is the most important single factor in the emergence of canonical tag questions.

Keywords: *tag questions; language change; historical pragmatics; negation; discourse; polarity;* do-*support; corpus linguistics; drama as data; spoken interaction; authorial styles; meter*

Introduction

So-called "canonical" tags formed by an operator and a pronoun attached to a main clause are a prominent feature of English, while other languages tend to prefer invariant tags like *nicht wahr?, n'est-ce pas?, inte sant?, eller hur?*[1] Canonical tag questions in Present-day English (PDE) have received ample coverage in the literature, but their historical development has so far been given little attention. It is to this topic that we turn in the present paper, focusing on the first century that they were attested, the sixteenth century.[2]

Authors' Note: We are indebted to Alan Nelson for discussions of early drama, and to Matti Rissanen and Masatomo Ukaji for reading and providing valuable comments on the entire manuscript. We also thank participants at ICAME 28 and members of the English language seminar at Stockholm University and the Corpus Research Group at Lancaster University for discussion of earlier versions and many good ideas. We have also benefited from the insightful comments of two anonymous reviewers. We take full responsibility for the final product.

In PDE, canonical tag questions can be of the types shown in (1)-(4), with either reversed or constant polarity in the main clause, henceforth called the *anchor,*[3] and in the *tag.* (We reserve the term *tag question* for the combination of anchor and tag.) Example (4) with constant negative polarity is a minority type, whose authenticity has been questioned in the literature, but a few genuine instances were recorded by Tottie and Hoffmann (2006).[4]

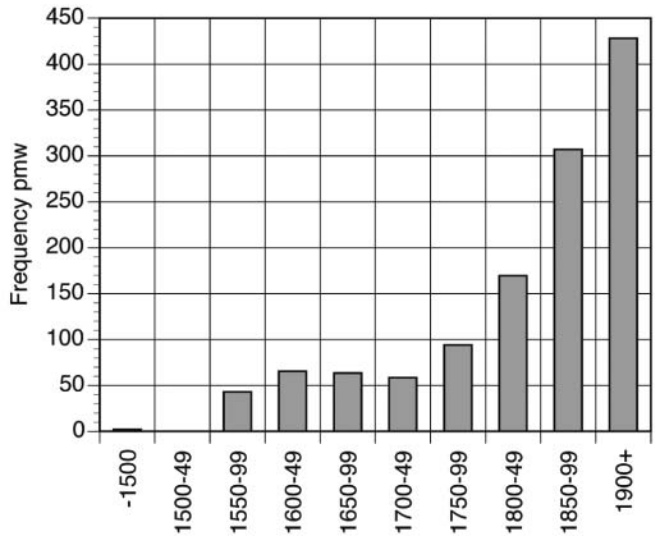
ANCHOR	TAG	POLARITY
(1) Makes you really think,	doesn't it?	Positive-Negative
(2) Oh the ring's not very valuable	is it?	Negative-Positive
(3) So this is the letter he sent you	is it?	Constant Positive (Positive-Positive)
(4) Yes, they don't come cheap	don't they?	Negative-Negative

The subject of the anchor can be any noun, a pronoun, or *there,* and the verb can be of any type, but in the tag, the subject must be either a personal pronoun, *one,* or *there,* and the operator can only be a form of *have, be,* or *do,* or a modal verb.

In a large-scale quantitative study, Tottie and Hoffmann (2006) described the use of tag questions in Present-day British and American English based on two major comparable spoken corpora, viz. the demographic component of the British National Corpus and the Longman Spoken American Corpus. We showed that tag questions are more than nine times as frequent in British English as in American English (4,383 instances per million words—henceforth pmw—vs. 455 pmw); that American English has a higher proportion of Negative-Positive tag questions than British English; and that the two varieties also differ in their choice of operators and pronoun-operator combinations. Through a study of the pragmatics of tag questions and an inquiry into sociolinguistic factors, we also show that age is to some extent determinative of canonical tag question use. Our study of pragmatic functions must be regarded as preliminary because of the nature of the data available—most importantly, it did not include intonation—but it is clear that tag questions are not predominantly used for information-seeking purposes but that they are mostly used for interpersonal purposes such as expressing the speaker's attitude, making an interlocutor participate in the conversation, or occasionally, aggressively challenging an interlocutor (Tottie & Hoffmann 2006:15-20).

We now turn to the history of tag questions in order to explain or at least elucidate our findings concerning PDE. As mentioned above, the history of tag questions has previously received little attention in the literature, but there are a few notable exceptions. Salmon (1987a, 1987b) discusses tag questions in the prose passages of William Shakespeare's "Falstaff plays" (*Henry IV,* parts 1 and 2, *Henry V,* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*). Ukaji's (1998) work is based on 180 tag questions culled from close readings of thirty-three different plays from 1512 to 1663.[5] He focuses on the derivation of tag questions within a generative framework, but he also makes

Figure 1
Tag Questions in the *English Drama Collection* (frequency pmw, *N* = 5,899)



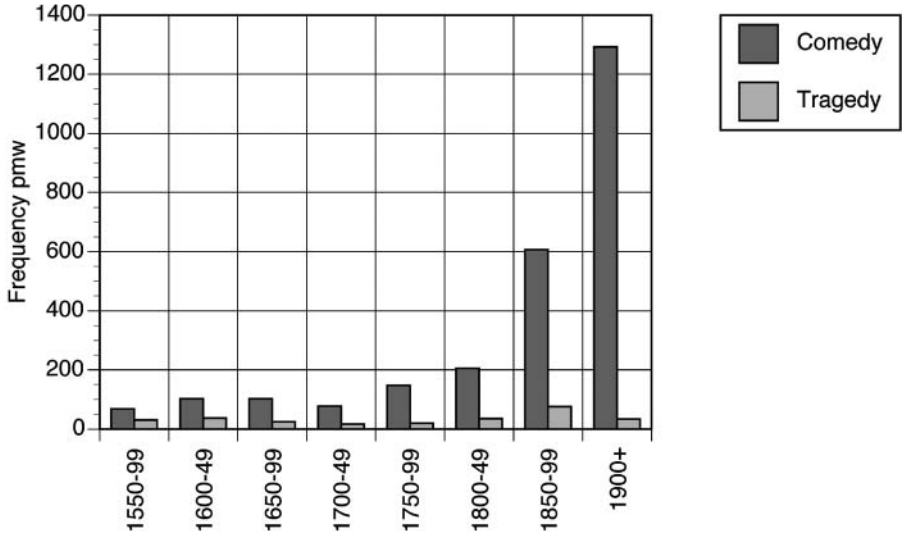
Source: Reproduced from Hoffmann (2006).

many interesting observations concerning their meaning and form. Furthermore, he argues that tag questions cannot have appeared in the language earlier than *do*-periphrasis.

Hoffmann (2006) is the first large-scale quantitative study of the history of canonical tag questions in English. It is based on a semi-automated search of the Chadwyck-Healey Drama Collection, a total of over 50 million words. Hoffmann shows that there was an enormous increase in the number of tag questions from 1750 on, from an average of just over 50 pmw before 1750 to about 425 pmw after 1900. If only comedy is considered, the frequencies are higher: 67 pmw at the end of the sixteenth century and 1,293 pmw in the early twentieth century (see Figures 1 and 2, reproduced from Hoffmann 2006). This is clearly a weak reflection of what must have happened in actual spoken language: recall that in the British National Corpus, the incidence of tag questions was found to be much higher, 4,383 pmw.

How can we explain the enormous increase in the number of canonical tag questions? And at what stage did they become part of the inventory of English grammar? It seemed to us that in order to answer those questions, or at least to get a better understanding of the issues, we must look at the use of tag questions over the centuries since their first appearance in texts around 1500, including all aspects

Figure 2
The Frequency of Tag Questions in the Genres *Comedy* and *Tragedy* (frequency pmw, *N* = 3,277)



Source: Reproduced from Hoffmann (2006).

available to study—form, frequency, meaning, and pragmatics—and taking into consideration linguistic co-text as well as pragmatic context. Initially, we hypothesized that tag questions originated as "pure" information-seeking questions, and that they only gradually developed the full range of pragmatic functions that are available today. However, as Hoffmann (2006) shows, they had certainly already developed additional interpersonal functions by the time they are first attested in written data—i.e., in the sixteenth century—for example, to express an antagonistic stance. The question is now whether it is an increased use of such functions or possibly a greater diversity of functions that led to the enormous surge in the use of tag questions in the last century and a half. In order to answer this question, we first need an accurate and detailed description of the use of tag questions in the earliest attested examples.

In this paper we thus focus on the earliest century from which we have documentation of tag questions, the sixteenth century, with a solitary example from the 1490s. We first account for the frequency of the different polarity types and operators and then concentrate on the pragmatic functions of tag questions. We also compare the polarity types, operators, and pragmatic functions in sixteenth-century

drama (henceforth 16CD) with those documented in spoken PDE. This will be followed by a discussion of the different uses of tag questions by Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, and other authors as well as the importance of style and meter for the choice of polarity. We also cross-classify pragmatic functions and polarity types. Finally, we discuss the implications of our findings for an understanding of the origins and rise of canonical tag questions in English.

Data and Retrieval

Tag questions are almost exclusively a feature of the spoken language, which is obviously not available for a historical study of this kind.[6] Like Salmon (1987a, 1987b) and Ukaji (1998), we are forced to resort to drama as an approximation of spoken language, with the obvious limitations this entails. We are aware of the pitfalls of this undertaking—not just the lack of intonation but the general artificiality of data, which involves the absence of some types of real-world situations as well as the over-representation of others. Moreover, changing literary traditions will have had an impact on the "naturalness" of the depiction of spontaneous conversation in plays from a succession of centuries. However, as shown by Culpeper and Kytö (2000), drama—or more precisely, comedy—is the source that comes closest to genuine spoken language in many ways, followed by courtroom data, and drama is thus what we have used.[7]

We base our study on a subset of the data presented in Hoffmann (2006), which made use of the complete Chadwyck-Healey English Drama Collection of the 4,000 works of drama contained in this collection, we manually downloaded 197 plays dating from the sixteenth century and converted them to a format that could be searched with Perl scripts.[8] We were able to retrieve a total of 135 tag questions from these texts and also added the first example from Henry Medwall, which dates from the 1490s.[9] For a complete listing of plays that were found to contain tag questions, see the appendix.

We are aware that our sample is small and that results must be treated with care. It is also skewed in several ways. Forty out of the 136 examples come from Shakespeare, and 28 from Jonson (counting only works produced no later than 1599 from either author); thus only one-half of the instances (68 out of 136) are taken from about 25 different authors.[10] Moreover, only 66 out of 136 instances or slightly less than half are in prose—the rest are mostly in blank verse (51 out of 136), in rhymed verse (10 out of 136), or some other meter (10 out of 136).[11] In later sections of this paper, we will discuss the influence of meter and also account for Shakespeare's and Jonson's uses of tag questions separately where they differ in interesting ways from each other or from those of other authors. In addition to these imbalances, most of the instances date from after 1585—only 15 out of 136 precede

Table 1
Tag Questions in Sixteenth-century Drama: Frequencies per Million Words (pmw)

Period	1497	1500-1549	1550-1584	1585-1599	Total
Number of words	n/a	289,626	737,538	1,845,585	2,872,749
Number of tag questions	1	0	14	121	136
Number of plays		40	48	109	197
Frequency pmw		0	19	61.7	

this year. The first attested tag question is from 1497, but it is followed by a hiatus lasting until 1550. After this date, tag questions are still rare occurrences, with no more than a handful of instances per decade, to be followed by what looks like a veritable explosion in usage in the last fifteen years of the century. This spectacular increase mirrors the rise of English drama in the late 1580s, followed by its flowering in the 1590s—"the triumphs of the century's final years," as Nicoll (1978:52) puts it.

As Table 1 shows, however, this unequal distribution is at least to some extent an artifact of the skewed composition of the corpus: about two-thirds of all texts (approximately 1.85 million words) stem from the last fifteen years of the century. Nevertheless, if normalized frequencies are calculated, we can still observe more than a threefold increase from about 19 pmw in earlier texts to about 62 pmw in the final years of the century.

We turn now to an overview of the formal characteristics of tag questions in our material, beginning with the use of polarity types.

Polarity

In this section we present an overview of the distribution of the different polarity types in 16CD. The three major types, represented by examples (1)-(3) above, are all present and are exemplified in (5)-(7). (All italics in quotations are ours; spellings and punctuation are those used in the Chadwyck-Healey English Drama Collection, except for the expansion of some names of protagonists. Where no author's name is given, the authorship is unknown.)

Positive-Negative polarity:
(5) You *serue* Octauius Caesar, *do you not?* (William Shakespeare: *Julius Caesar,* 1598)

Negative-Positive polarity:
(6) . . . you *are not* Pageant Poet to the City of Millaine sir, *are you.* (Ben Jonson: *The case is altered,* 1597)

Constant Positive polarity:

(7) Sir Hugh *is* there, *is he* (William Shakespeare: *The Merry Wives of Windsor,* 1597)

Table 2
Distribution of Polarity Types in Sixteenth-century British Drama and Twentieth-century Spoken British and American English Tag Questions: Row Percentages

Polarity Type	Positive-Negative	Negative-Positive	Positive-Positive	Negative-Negative
Sixteenth-century drama *N* = 136	68	15	17	0
British PDE *N* = 1,000	75	17	8	<1
American PDE *N* = 1,000	68	27	4	0

Note: PDE = Present-day English.

In principle, tag questions with truncated anchors—normally deletion of subject and verb—as well as imperatives can have either Positive-Negative or Negative-Positive polarity; in this corpus all instances have negative tags. There are eight tag questions with truncated anchors and five imperatives in all. As in Tottie and Hoffmann (2006) they are classified as Positive-Negative, exemplified by (8) and (9):

(8) . . . maister Flautus, a tall yong gentleman, *small in the middle, is he not?* (George Gascoigne: *The glasse of gouernement,* 1575)

(9) Why *strew rushes on it, can you not* . . . (*Arden of Feversham,* 1588)

The findings are presented in the top row of Table 2. For comparison, the table includes PDE data from Tottie and Hoffmann (2006), drawn from the demographic sample of the British National Corpus and from the Longman Spoken American Corpus.[12]

Because of the disparate nature of the data, it would be imprudent to make a detailed comparison of proportions in the drama corpus and PDE spoken language or to calculate statistical significance. Instead, we will focus on the ranking of polarities in the three corpora. Positive-Negative tag questions are predominant in 16CD with 68 percent of the total, as they are in spoken PDE, with proportions running between 68 percent in American PDE and 75 percent in British PDE. Tag questions with Negative-Positive polarity come third in the 16CD material with 15 percent, but they rank second in the modern corpora, where they range from 17 percent to 27 percent. The most striking difference between the data sets is that

16CD shows a higher proportion of Constant Positive polarity tag questions than the PDE corpora: with 17 percent of the totals, they rank second, compared with the low proportions in British PDE (8 percent) and American PDE (4 percent). (This is still much lower than the proportion recorded by Hoffmann 2006 for the second half of the eighteenth century, where it was over 40 percent.) There are no instances of Negative-Negative polarity at all in 16CD, which is not surprising, given the smallness of this sample.[13]

Differences in polarity are often correlated to the pragmatic functions of the tag questions, as well as the style and meter of individual plays. These factors will be discussed in later sections of this article.

Operators, Subjects, and Word Order in Tags

We turn now to the distribution of operators in tags in 16CD. It is important here to recall a finding reported by Ukaji (1998), who did not use automatic search methods but based his research on readings of entire plays. Although Ukaji found that *do*-support was always used in tags, without exception, ordinary questions in his material (overlapping with ours though not entirely identical) still showed variation between main verb with inversion and *do*-support, as in (10)-(13), quoted from Ukaji (1998:6):

(10) *Went you not* to her yesterday, sir . . .? (William Shakespeare: *The Merry Wives of Windsor,* 1597)

(11) *Why dost thou not go* to church . . . (William Shakespeare: *Twelfth Night,* 1601-02)

(12) *Know we not* Galloway nags? (William Shakespeare: *2 Henry IV,* 1598)

(13) *Do you not know* I am a woman? (William Shakespeare: *As You Like It,* 1599)

We can thus be fairly sure that our automatic search did not miss any instances of tags with full verbs. Tags always have *do*-support if the anchor contains a lexical verb, as in (14) and (15) from our corpus:

(14) . . . thou *knowest* the Duke of Yorkes Funerall must be carried into England, *doest thou not?* (*The famovs victories of Henry V,* 1583)

(15) But yet I *slew* my mother, *did I not?* (Robert Yarington: *Two lamentable tragedies,* 1594)

The distribution of operators in our material is displayed in Table 3, where a comparison with data from Tottie and Hoffmann (2006) on spoken PDE is also shown.

The use of operators in 16CD resembles that in late-twentieth-century spoken English as far as ranking is concerned: *be* is the most frequent operator, followed by *do*.[14] The most interesting difference is between the proportions of *will* in the PDE

Table 3
Distribution of Operators in Tags in Sixteenth-century British Drama and in British and American Present-day English (PDE): Row Percentages

Corpus	*be*	*do*	*will*	*have*	*can*	*shall*	Other
Sixteenth-century drama *N* = 136	40%	30%	14%	5%	2%	5%	4%
British PDE *N* = 3,724	49%	25%	9%	8%	5%	1%	2%
American PDE *N* = 2,311	41%	40%	6%	3%	2$%	<1%	1%

and sixteenth-century samples, with 14 percent of all instances in 16CD, compared with only 9 percent and 6 percent in PDE. This can be related to the use of *will* in hortatory constructions in 16CD. *Shall* accounts for a larger proportion in 16CD than in PDE—5 percent versus 1 percent or less, which bears witness to the demise of *shall* in PDE (cf. Leech et al. in press).

In our drama sample of 136 tag questions there were sixty different types of operator–pronoun/*there* combinations. This high type-token ratio can at least in part be explained by the fact that pronouns and auxiliaries were in a state of flux in the sixteenth century—there was variation between the second-person pronouns *you* and *thou,* and between verb forms: *are/art, does/doth, have/hast, will/wilt.* Making comparisons with present-day use of operator-pronouns is therefore difficult, and even presenting an overview of sixteenth-century uses is complicated. Table 4 records those combinations that reach four or more instances; the total number includes all variants for each pronoun-verb combination. The right-hand columns give PDE rankings for tags that were among the top fifteen in British and American PDE in Tottie and Hoffmann (2006).

Sixteenth-century *is it not?* and its PDE equivalent *isn't it?* are at the top in both 16CD and PDE, and the majority of the other high-frequency sixteenth-century tags are also high-frequency items in PDE. However, there is one striking difference: tags containing *will,* either positive or negative, do not figure among the high-frequency items in PDE. This is clearly related to the high frequency of hortatory uses of tags in 16CD—see below in Table 8.

One other formal feature of tags deserves to be mentioned here. As shown in Table 2 above, the majority of the 16CD tag questions (68 percent, or 93 out of 136), have Positive-Negative polarity, and thus negative tags. In all of these except one, the word order was Operator + Subject + *not,* as in *is it not?* or *do you not?* above. As pointed out by Rissanen (1994, 1999), this word order was predominant with pronominal subjects in negative questions with auxiliaries in sixteenth-century English. However, the word order Operator + *not* + Subject was *de rigueur* with nominal subjects, as is shown by (16), quoted from Rissanen (1994:340):

Table 4
The Most Frequent Combinations of Operators and Pronouns in Tags in Sixteenth-century Drama (16CD)

16CD Form	*N*	Rank in 16CD	PDE Form	Rank in British PDE	Rank in American PDE
is it not?	15	1	*isn't it?*	1	1
do you not? (8)	12	2	*don't you?*	4	2
doest thou not? (4)					
do you? (6)	7	3	*do you?*	5	3
dost thou (1)					
will you? (6)	7	3	*will you?*	Not in top 15	Not in top 15
wilt thou? (1)					
will you not? (5)	6	4	*won't you?*	Not in top 15	Not in top 15
wilt thou not? (1)					
are they not?	4	5	*aren't they?*	3	9
did you not?	4	5	*didn't you?*	12	7
is he not?	4	5	*isn't he?*	13	13

Note: PDE = Present-day English.

(16) *Dyd not christ* lykewyse ascend unto his father . . . ? (John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester)

This word order had begun to appear with pronominal subjects as well in Early Modern English and became predominant in subsequent centuries. Rissanen records eighteen out of sixty, or 30 percent, such cases in his material from the first Early Modern subperiod (1500-1570) of the Helsinki Corpus. It is therefore noteworthy that in our corpus, only a single instance (out of seventy-eight) of this word order occurs (17):

(17) I told you, *did not I?* (John Jefferes: *The Bugbears,* 1563)

The question of word order is interesting because of its implications for the dating of the cliticization of *not,* which Jespersen (1917:117) puts at a later date, around 1600. Ukaji (1998)–who did not include Jefferes' play in his corpus–found not a single instance of this word order in the negative tags in his drama corpus, which extended to 1663. It thus seems likely that word order changed later in tags than in other negative questions. Rissanen (1994:341) hypothesizes that the order Operator + *not* + Subject was obligatory with noun subjects for two reasons: noun subjects are heavier than personal pronouns and thus provide end weight, and furthermore, they normally carry new information and are "thus more likely to be included in the focus of the

negation and/or interrogation than personal pronoun subjects." In question tags, pronouns constitute old information and negation provides the new, and the order Operator + Subject + *not* would therefore prevail even if cases like (17) could occasionally occur.

Classifying the Functions of Tag Questions

Like other questions, tag questions are not just used for seeking information, but have a wide range of interpersonal uses, such as showing speaker attitude, involving an interlocutor in conversation, or putting down or challenging an interlocutor (Algeo 1988, 1990, 2006; Cameron, McAlinden & O'Leary 1989; Cameron 1992; Holmes 1983, 1984, 1986, 1995; Coates 1996; Tottie & Hoffmann 2006; Keisanen 2006; Kimps 2007). Any given tag question may be multi-functional. However, we take the position of Holmes (1983:45), who maintains that it is usually possible to "identify the predominant or primary function of any particular tag question in a specific social context." Furthermore, it is no more difficult in principle to assign pragmatic functions to 16CD texts than to twentieth-century transcriptions; in fact it is often easier because of the clues given by authors and the existence of a coherent co-text—authors construct dialogue to propel the action forward, and there are few overlaps or unclear passages. Difficulties arise mostly from the use of obsolete language and references to current sixteenth-century events, but they can usually be obviated by consulting good editions of the plays. The real problem rests elsewhere: just as present-day playwrights do not usually include a realistic number of tag questions in their written dialogue, neither probably did sixteenth-century dramatists. We have no solid data on tag questions in present-day drama dialogue as yet and can only assume that they, like hesitation markers, filled pauses, and non-lexical items in general such as *uhuh, mmm,* etc., are vastly underrepresented (Tottie 1989, 1991).

Tottie and Hoffmann (2006) present a system for analyzing the pragmatic functions of tag questions, based on the previous work by Algeo and Holmes and adjusted to fit empirical findings from large corpora of authentic spoken late-twentieth-century British and American English.[15] Following Holmes (1995), two macro-categories are recognized, *epistemic modal tag questions,* whose main function is to seek information or confirmation, and *affective tag questions,* which perform various discourse functions such as expressing speaker opinion or attitude (*attitudinal* tag questions), challenging or putting down an addressee (*peremptory* and *aggressive* tag questions), or involving the interlocutor in conversation (*facilitative* tag questions). The last-mentioned category often makes a reference to shared knowledge, as seen in the example in Table 5. This table also gives the proportions of the different tag-question types in late twentieth-century colloquial British English taken from the British National Corpus.

The system proposed in Tottie and Hoffmann (2006) works as a pragmatic classification of most of the sixteenth-century examples, with a few adaptations. We

Table 5
The Pragmatic Functions of Tags, from Tottie and Hoffmann (2006)

Macro-category	Category	Example	Percentage (N = 371)
Epistemic modal	Informational	You're getting paid for this, *are you?*	4%
	Confirmatory	I don't need a jacket, *do I?*	37%
Affective	Attitudinal	. . . she'll be in trouble, *won't she,* she often gets her own drinks anyway . . .	18%
	Peremptory	I wasn't born yesterday, *was I?*[a]	1%
	Aggressive	Ernest: . . . I put six eggs on. Peggy: you put what? Ernest: put six eggs on *didn't I?*	1%
	Facilitative	Teacher: Right, it's two, *isn't it?* Pupil: *Mm.*	36%
	Other		4%

Note: Examples are from the British National Corpus unless otherwise stated.
a. From Algeo (1990), as British National Corpus examples required too much context to be included here.

Table 6
Revised Classification of Pragmatic Categories

Macro-category	Category
Epistemic modal	Confirmatory
Affective	Attitudinal
	Challenging
	Facilitative
Hortatory	Softening
	Emphatic
	Neutral

simplified the system by conflating the *informational* and *confirmatory* categories, as there were few if any purely informational tag questions, and kept the term *confirmatory* for this type. We replaced the previous terms *peremptory* and *aggressive* with the umbrella term *challenging* (from Holmes 1995:80).[16] We also introduced a category of *hortatory* tag questions, which could be either softening, emphatic, or neutral, but which were always used with a directive function—see further below, examples (25)-(27). The revised system of classification is shown in Table 6. However, it is important to keep in mind that the pragmatic functions of tag questions form a continuum and that functions overlap and shade into one another. The statistics concerning pragmatic functions should therefore be regarded as capturing tendencies in the material, unlike the clear-cut data concerning formal characteristics.

In what follows, examples are given of how the system of classifying pragmatic functions was applied to tag questions from 16CD. As *confirmatory* we classified those tag questions that clearly seek and receive answers and which do not have any strong affective functions. They are usually turn-final but do not have to be. The very earliest tag question is of this type, as is clear from the rather long excerpt given in (18). Notice also that this is a Constant Positive polarity tag question.

(18) B I se well thou hast wedyd a shrew!
A The devyll I have!
Nay, I have marryed two or thre . . .
B And kepist thou them all styll with the?
A Nay, that wolde not quyte the cost . . .
B Than *thay have* some maner gettynge
By some occupacione, *have thay?*
A Syr, thay have a prety waye!
The chef meane of ther levynge
Is lechery . . .
(Henry Medwall: *Fulgens and Lucrece,* 1497)

Another early instance of a confirmatory question is (19), where Dame Custance wants to make sure that she has already charged Merygreeke with a letter dismissing her importunate suitor Ralph Roister Doister:

(19) Custance I sent him a full answere by you *dyd I not?*
Merygreeke *And I reported it.*
Custance Nay I must speake it againe.
R. Royster No no, he tolde it all.
(Nicholas Udall: *Ralph Roister Doister,* 1553)

In contrast, the tag questions in (20)-(23) are not turn-final but appear in the middle of long turns and do not seem to expect an answer but to express the speaker's *attitude.* Although there is turn-taking, the next speaker does not answer the question in the tag. In (20), from a comedy based on the biblical story of Jacob and Esau, the servant Ragau addresses the audience in an aside, giving his opinion that there will be fighting.

(20) Esau Come out whores & theues, come out, come out I say.
Ragau *I told you, did I not?* that there would be a fray.
Esau Come out litle whoreson ape, come out of thy denne.
(*Iacob and Esau,* 1550)

In (21) two burghers of Antwerp have been dispatched to inquire of Governor Danila why a shot has been fired into the city. Notice that the tag question is the last of a

series of rhetorical questions, and that there is also another indication of the speaker's attitude: the tag question follows the pragmatic marker *I think.*

(21) 1st Burger Is that the cause and reason of your shot?
Danila Burger it is.
2nd Burger You should haue sent vs word of your dislike:
Danila Why so we did, did we not send our poast
Euen now vnto you?
And wrapt our Packet in a ball of lead?
I thinke we sent a bolde Embassador.
That spoke our minde in thunder: did he not?
You might before haue knowne of our dislike,
But that we did perceiue you would not see,
Twas well you heard of vs.
(*A larum* [sic] *for London,* 1594)

Examples (22) and (23) are both taken from morality plays with characters representing virtues and vices. In (22) Temerity has promised Covetous to show him "reverence," yet when leaving, Temerity just says "Fare wel Couetouse," omitting any respectful epithets.

(22) Temeritie Fare wel Couetouse till we meet again:
. . .
Couetouse Body of me you are no better then knaues euery one.
Fare wel Couetouse; nay fare wel good Lob:
You haue euen asmuch maners as hath a Dog.
Plain Couetouse? *this is according to promise is it not?*
Wel what I intend to doo for it, I wot what I wot.
Temeritie I cry you mercy right worshipful Maister couetise,
Moste prudent, politick, sapient and wise.
(William Wager: *Inough Is As Good As a Feast,* 1560)

In (23) Dissimulation runs into Simplicity, who is on his way to Usury, carrying a basket. When Dissimulation asks what is in the basket, Simplicity challenges him by saying that there is nothing in it for him, as a "bagge pudding" does not contain any deceit (and of course, deceit is the only thing Dissimulation would want). Like the attitudinal tag questions, *challenging* tag questions do not expect and do not receive answers.

(23) Dissimulation Pray thee leaue prating Simplicitie, and tell me
what thou hast there?
Simplicitie Why, tis nothing for thee, thou doest not
deale with such kind of ware.
Sirra there is no [d]eceite in a bagge pudding, is there?
nor in a plaine pudding thy:

But there is deceite and knauerie too in thy fellowe
that is called Userie.
(John Wilson: *The Three Ladies of London,* 1584)

The combination of anchor and tag in (20), *I told you, did I not?* seems to have already been formulaic by the middle of the sixteenth century. It also appears in (24), which is identical except for the novel placement of *not,* but here the function of the formula is to challenge the interlocutor, not to give an opinion to the audience.

(24) Biondello how goeth the world w*[i]*th you.
Amedeus I am dead
Brancatius I am slayne
Biondello *I told you, did not I?*
Cantalupo O. my soule is departed.
Biondello how say you did I lie?
(John Jefferes: *The Bugbears,* 1563)

Hortatory tag questions with directive functions can either be other-directed with imperative anchors—like (25) below—or contain speaker-inclusive constructions of the *let's do X* type, followed by a suasive tag—like (27). They often have different modal verbs in the anchor and the tag as in (25) and (27), or the anchor can be truncated as in (26). Hortatory tags can be *softening, emphatic,* or *neutral.* In (25) Venus is cajoling Cupid to join her and leave Sappho, softening her request by adding a tag question:[17]

(25) Sappho . . . I will keepe Cupid in dispighte of you . . .
Venus Will you? . . . *Come Cupid,* shee knowes not how to vse thee,
come with mee, you knowe what I haue for you: *will you not?*
Cupid Not I.
(John Lyly: *Sapho and Phao,* 1583)

Below, (26) shows an example of an *emphatic hortatory* tag after an imperative anchor. The stage directions ("Eubulus beatyng Carisophus") as well as the imperative anchor show that this is not a softening tag question but just the opposite.

(26) Eubulus beatyng Carisophus.
Away villaine, away you flatringe Parasite,
Away the plague of this Courte, . . .
. . . , *away false Sicophant, wilt thou not?*
Carisophus I am gone sir, seing it is the kinges pleasure . . .
(John Edwards: *Damon and Pithias,* 1564-8)

Finally, (27) is neither softening nor emphatic but *neutral.* King Techelles summons his troops to battle, and they enthusiastically agree:

Table 7
Tag Questions in Sixteenth-century Drama up to 1584

	1497	1550s	1560s	1570s	1580-1584	Total
Confirmatory	1	1	1	2	2	7
Attitudinal		1	2		1	4
Challenging		1	1			2
Facilitative						0
Softening hortatory					1	1
Emphatic hortatory			1			1
Total	1	3	5	2	4	15

(27) Techelles Then *let vs* bring our light Artilery,
. . .
How say ye Souldiers, *Shal we not?*
Souldiers Yes, my Lord, yes, come lets about it . . .
(Christopher Marlowe: *Tamburlaine,* 1587)

Table 7 demonstrates that most of the different pragmatic categories of tag questions are attested even in the very earliest data from before 1585.

Most of the first fifteen instances of tag questions are confirmatory (7) or attitudinal (4), but other uses are also attested: challenging (2), softening hortatory (1), and emphatic hortatory (1). The only pragmatic categories missing in this subsample are thus the *facilitative* type and the "neutral" subtype of hortatory tag questions. The first—and only—instance of a facilitative tag question found in our sample is from a later play, George Peele's *The old wiues tale* from 1588. This is shown in example (28).

(28) Enter Corebus and Zelanto the foule wench, to the well for water.
Corebus Come my ducke come: I haue now got a wife, *thou art faire, art thou not?*
Zelanto My Corebus the fairest aliue, make no doubt of that.
Corebus Come wench, are we almost at the wel.
(George Peele: *The old wiues tale,* 1588)

Here, Corebus is neither seeking confirmation nor expressing an attitude, challenging or exhorting his ugly wife. Rather, he is jokingly (and of course ironically) trying to involve her in their conversation.

Functions of Tag Questions in 16CD

Although it is necessary to keep the skewed nature of our corpus in mind—a mixture of prose and verse (mostly blank verse) with weighty contributions from

Table 8
The Distribution of Pragmatic Functions in Sixteenth-century and Present-day English (PDE) Tag Questions: Column Percentages

Pragmatic category	Sixteenth-century Drama $N = 136$	British PDE $N = 371$	American PDE $N = 500$
Confirmatory[a]	63%	41%	34%
Attitudinal	13%	18%	12%
Challenging	15%	2%	1%
Facilitative	<1%	36%	50%
Hortatory	10%	—%[b]	—%[b]
Other		4%	<4%

Note: PDE data from Tottie and Hoffmann (2006).
a. *Confirmatory* tag questions subsume those categorized as *informational* in Tottie and Hoffmann (2006).
b. Because of low numbers, hortatory tag questions were not classified separately in Tottie and Hoffmann (2006) but were included under *Other* uses.

two single authors (Shakespeare and Jonson)—it will be useful to take a bird's-eye view of the distribution of pragmatic functions of tag questions over the entire sample and to compare the results with those reported in Tottie and Hoffmann (2006) for PDE. The purpose here is to give a general overview of the tendencies in our material, taking account of proportions and stressing ranking rather than exact percentages or small differences between them. This will then be followed by a discussion of the influence of meter and authorial styles on the use of forms and functions of tag questions.

The first column of Table 8 shows the distribution of pragmatic functions in the whole 16CD sample, including the examples from the beginning of the century. Confirmatory tag questions are the most frequent type, with 63 percent, followed by attitudinal and challenging tag questions, with 13 and 15 percent, respectively, and hortatories with 10 percent. The second and third columns of Table 8 permit a tentative comparison of the distribution of pragmatic functions in 16CD and PDE, keeping the disparity of the samples in mind.

The differences between 16CD and PDE at first seem great, with the facilitative tag questions providing the most eye-catching discrepancy: this type accounts for under 1 percent in 16CD but for 36 percent in British PDE and even more in American PDE, 50 percent. There may be several explanations for this: the facilitative type had not yet become an important feature of conversation; writers were unaware of the type; writers were loath to include it in their written dialogue; or writers were not aiming for realistic dialogue, as modern dramatists often are. It is likely that all of these were contributing factors. Challenging and hortatory tag

Table 9
Pragmatic Functions versus Polarity Types: Row Percentages

	Positive-Negative		Negative-Positive		Constant Positive		Total
Confirmatory	65	76%	12	14%	8	**9%**	85
Attitudinal	13	76%	2	12%	2	**12%**	17
Challenging	4	**20%**	5	**25%**	11	**55%**	20
Hortatory	10[a]	77%	1	8%	2	**15%**	13
Total	93	68%	20	15%	23	25%	136

Note: The boldfaced percentages highlight the major differences between categories.
a. This figure includes five imperative anchors.

questions also account for greater proportions of the totals in 16CD—15 percent and 10 percent, respectively, compared with 1 or 2 percent in both British and American PDE. Again, these differences could be explained either by the different types of language involved in the comparison, 16CD and PDE natural unscripted conversation, or by differences in speaking styles between the two time periods. It is clear that dramatic dialogue is more likely to contain confrontational situations than overtly recorded conversations, but standards of politeness may also have changed over the centuries. Such factors would affect the use of challenging tag questions and the expression of directive constructions by means of hortatory tag questions.[18]

Although our findings from 16CD may be difficult to compare with those from PDE, they definitely show that if tag questions indeed originated as information- or confirmation-seeking questions, they had already acquired a number of additional pragmatic functions in the sixteenth century.

Pragmatic Functions and Polarity Types

It has often been mentioned in the literature that the different polarity types tend to correlate with particular pragmatic functions (especially Constant Polarity with adversarial functions; cf. e.g. Quirk et al. 1985:812). We will now address this interaction in some detail. For this purpose we cross-tabulated the examples as shown in Table 9. Numbers are low and statistics therefore not always reliable, but it seems worth pointing out the especially high or low proportions compared with sample averages. The table shows how the different pragmatic functions are realized by polarity types. The boldfaced percentages highlight the major differences between categories.

Table 9 shows that all three polarity types can be used for the four most important pragmatic functions—the single facilitative tag is left out of the comparison.

Confirmatory, attitudinal, and hortatory functions are less frequently realized by Constant Positive polarity tag questions: 9 percent, 12 percent, and 15 percent, respectively, compared with the sample average of 25 percent. It is among the challenging tag questions that the greatest deviations from "normal" polarity usage can be seen, with more than half, 55 percent, realized by means of Constant Positive polarity.[19] However, this is closely connected with authorial preferences—see the discussion in "Authorship and Style" below.

Although the total number of challenging tag questions is low, only twenty, it is tempting to draw the conclusion that there is a clear link between form and pragmatic function here. Our findings tally well with what Quirk et al. (1985:812) say about Constant Positive tag questions in PDE, namely that they can be scolding or sarcastic. Moreover, Hoffmann (2006:44-45) reports that Constant Positive tag questions are especially frequent—in fact the major type with over 40 percent of all occurrences—in the second half of the eighteenth century, and that they tend to express "an adversarial stance on the part of the speaker" much more often than reversed polarity tag questions during this period. However, in a large-scale empirical study, Kimps (2007) gives a different view of the functions of Constant Positive tag questions in PDE, showing that challenging uses are more often stereotypically used by fiction writers than by actual speakers. Based on the evidence currently available, it thus appears that the use of Constant Positive tag questions to challenge an interlocutor was already common in the sixteenth century, that it increased between then and 1800, and that it then decreased again in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But more work is necessary to substantiate this.

Meter, Polarity, and Function

As shown in Figure 2 above, tag questions are more frequent in comedy than in tragedy, with an ever-widening gap in Late Modern English from 1750 on. However, division into dramatic genres makes little sense for 16CD, as tragedies tend to have comic interludes, where quick conversational interaction often takes place, and this is precisely where tag questions tend to appear. Instead the focus will be on the distribution of tag questions in verse and prose and in passages written in different styles and by different authors. Forty-nine percent of all tag questions occurred in prose passages, but there was also a high proportion in blank verse—38 percent. Some even occurred in rhymed verse, and some in other types of meter, as shown in Table 10.[20] (However, we have no breakdown of the entire sample into verse or prose and cannot therefore say anything about the absolute frequency of tag questions in the various prosodic types.)

Tag questions are in fact particularly well suited to blank verse: tag questions of the most frequent type with Positive-Negative polarity have a rising iambic rhythm

Table 10
Tag Questions and Meter in Sixteenth-century Drama

Meter type	*N*	Percentage
Prose	66	49%
Blank verse	51	38%
Rhymed verse	9	7%
Other verse	10	7%
Total	136	100%

Table 11
Meter and Polarity in Sixteenth-century Drama: Row Percentages

	Positive-Negative		Negative-Positive		Constant Positive		Total
Prose	32	48%	19	29%	15	23%	66
Blank verse	44	86%	0		7	14%	51
Rhymed verse	7	78%	1	11%	1	11%	9
Other verse	10	100%	0		0		10
Total	93		20		23		136

and easily serve to fill out a line. Most tag questions also occur at the end of lines; (29) and (30) are typical, with stress on the operator and *not:*

(29) Cast her away then Master; *can you not?* (William Haughton: *Grim the collier of Croyden,* 1593)

(30) Iohn Beane, this is the right way, *is it not?* (*A warning for fair women,* 1596)

Table 11, in which Positive-Negative polarity tag questions include those with imperative and truncated anchors, shows how polarity types map onto different kinds of meter. Positive-Negative polarity dominates in all prosodic types, including Rhymed and "Other" verse, with 78 percent and 100 percent, respectively. These types will be left out of the subsequent discussion because of their relative scarcity.[21] The differences between prose and blank verse are striking, however, as illustrated by Figure 3.

Notice that 86 percent of the blank verse examples have Positive-Negative polarity, but only 48 percent of the prose examples do. In prose, Negative-Positive polarity accounts for 29 percent of all examples, but there is not a single instance in blank verse. This is very likely because of rhythm: positive tags fit in less well at the end of a line of blank verse and only with difficulty in the middle of a line. However, tag questions with Constant Positive polarity occur even in blank verse, but they account for a lower proportion than in prose: 14 percent versus 23 percent. Mostly, they do not appear at the end of a line but medially, as in (31):

Figure 3
The Distribution of Polarity Types in Prose and Blank Verse

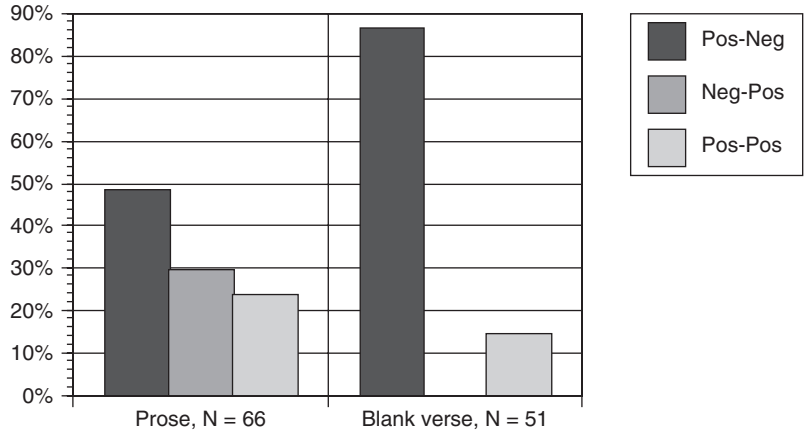


Table 12
Meter and Pragmatic Function in Sixteenth-century Drama: Row Percentages

	Confirmatory		Attitudinal		Challenging		Hortatory		Total
Prose	41	63%	5	8%	13	20%	6	9%	65
Blank verse	37	73%	6	12%	4	11%	4	11%	51

Note: This includes prose and blank verse only. One facilitative example was omitted.

(31) You leere vpon me, *do you?* There's an eie
Wounds like a Leaden sword.
(William Shakespeare: *Loues labour's lost,* 1595)

Prose thus shows greater diversity of polarity than blank verse, but as will be clear from the following section, authorial preferences also play a large part here. But first, Table 12 displays the correlation between meter and pragmatic function.

All pragmatic functions are present in both prose and blank verse, and tag questions are most frequently used in confirmatory function in both, but somewhat more often in blank verse than in prose, 73 percent versus 63 percent. The results for attitudinal and hortatory tag questions hover around 10 percent in both prose and blank verse, but challenging tag questions account for a larger proportion in prose than in blank verse, 20 percent versus 11 percent. This is not surprising, as blank

verse and prose are mostly used in different situations for different characters, with prose more often chosen where the context is informal and characters are engaged in heated exchanges.

Authorship and Style

It is well known that Shakespeare and Jonson differ greatly in their dramatic production, in quantity as well as in style and content, and this is also reflected in their use of tag questions. Looking first at quantity and frequency, we compared

Table 13
Late Mixed Sample, Shakespeare, and Jonson: An Overview

Authorship	Number of Plays	Sample Size	Number of Tag Questions	Frequency per Million Words	Frequency per Play
Late mixed sample	83[a]	1,282,433	53	41	0.64
Shakespeare	22[a]	463,431	40	86	1.8
Jonson	4	99,721	28	280	7

a. Not all plays contained tag questions; e.g., only seventeen by Shakespeare did.

Figure 4
The Distribution of Polarity Types in Prose from the Late Mixed Sample (*n* = 21), Shakespeare (*n* = 19), and Jonson (*n* = 22)

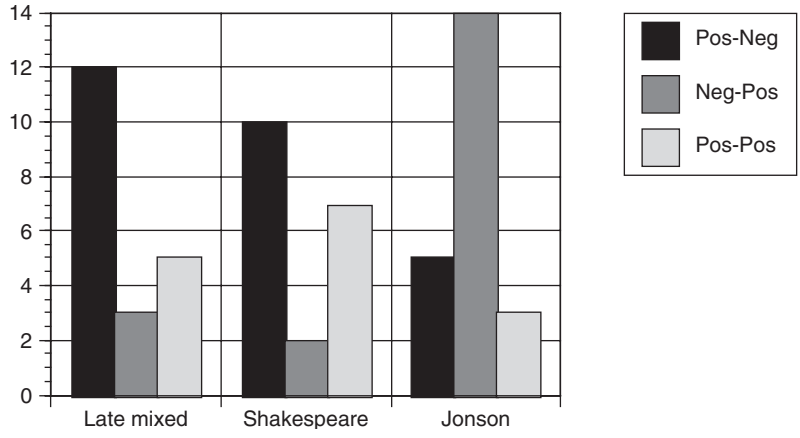
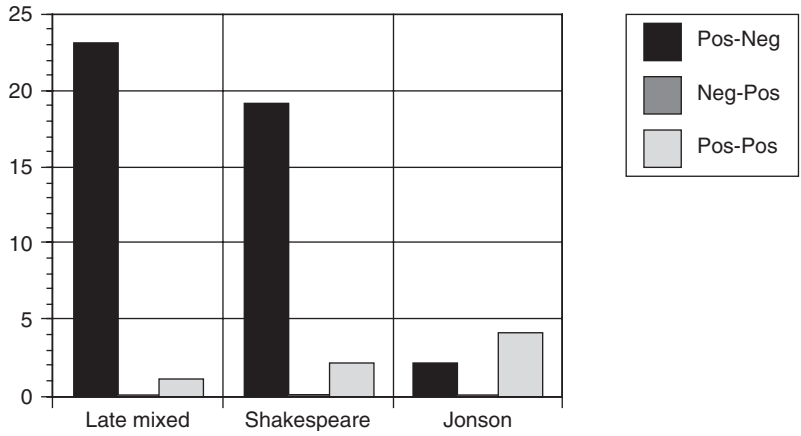


Figure 5
The Distribution of Polarity Types in Blank Verse from the Late Mixed Sample (*n* = 24), Shakespeare (*n* = 21), and Jonson (*n* = 6)



Shakespeare and Jonson with the other dramatists from the same time period, 1585-1599, henceforth *the late mixed sample.* The results are shown in Table 13, with extrapolation of the frequency of tag questions to 1 million words.

Ben Jonson is the most prolific user of tag questions, with 280 pmw and an average of 7 per play, followed by Shakespeare with 86 tag questions pmw and 1.8 per play, compared with much lower frequencies for the aggregate late mixed sample: 41 pmw or 0.64 per play. (Numbers can be found in the listing of plays in the appendix.) However, the comparison is somewhat misleading; although we have no exact statistics concerning the proportions of prose and blank verse in the three samples, Shakespeare definitely uses more blank verse and Jonson more prose. When Shakespeare limits himself to prose in treating racy subjects, as in *The Merry Wives of Windsor,* he also produces a greater number of tag questions, a total of 10 in a single play.

In what follows, we discuss the effects of meter, polarity, and function in the tag questions recorded for Shakespeare, Jonson, and the late mixed sample. All instances of "other" meter have been removed, so that the late mixed sample now counts a total of 45 instances. Figures 4 and 5 give graphic representations of the interplay of these factors; notice that they show absolute numbers, not percentages, which would be misleading because of the smallness of Jonson's blank verse sample.

Comparing Figures 4 and 5, Shakespeare's profile proves to be similar to that of the mixed sample, with a majority of Positive-Negative tag questions in prose as

Table 14
Pragmatic Functions of Tag Questions in the Late Mixed Sample, Shakespeare, and Jonson: Row Percentages

	Confirmatory	Challenging	Attitudinal	Hortatory	Facilitative	*N*
Late Mixed Sample	67%	11%	**13%**	7%	2%	45%
Shakespeare	**75%**	13%	8%	5%		40%
Jonson	57%	**25%**	7%	11%		28%

Note: This includes prose and blank verse only. Boldfaced percentages indicate particularly high proportions.

well as blank verse, a smattering of Negative-Positive tag questions in prose, and a somewhat higher proportion of Constant Positive tag questions in prose and very few in blank verse. Neither Shakespeare nor the mixed sample authors have a single instance of Negative-Positive polarity in blank verse. Ben Jonson's profile is completely different; the most striking feature of his work is the high proportion of Negative-Positive tag questions in his prose, 14 out of 22 or 65 percent.

The use of tag questions in different functions in the three samples is displayed in Table 14. Shakespeare has a higher proportion of confirmatory tag questions than either the mixed sample or Jonson: 75 percent versus 67 percent in the late mixed sample and only 57 percent in Jonson. The latter has more challenging tag questions (25 percent) than Shakespeare (13 percent) or the mixed sample (11 percent)—not surprising, considering Jonson's racy style and the frequency of confrontational situations in his plays. Shakespeare tends to use tag questions to explain what is happening and to carry the action forward. Jonson's and Shakespeare's styles are epitomized in (32) and (33)—notice also the Positive-Negative polarity in the Shakespeare example and the Negative-Positive polarity in the extract from Jonson:

(32) You stand within his danger, *do you not?* (William Shakespeare: *The merchant of Venice,* 1596)

(33) Hel ho, your page then sha'not be super intendent vpon me? he shall not be addicted? he shall not be incident? he shall not be incident? he shall not be incident, *shall he?* (Ben Jonson: *The case is altered,* 1597)

The late mixed sample has a higher proportion of attitudinal tag questions than either Shakespeare or Jonson (but note that numbers are very low here—6, 3, and 3, respectively). They are typically in the third person, with an opinion offered in the anchor, and no reply to the tag question, as in (34):

(34) Franke Looke ye sirra, where your fellow lies,
Hees in a fine taking, is he not?
Coomes Whope Hodge, were art thou man, where art thou?
(Henry Porter: *The two angry women of Abington,* 1598)

It is clear that no analysis of tag questions based only on either or both of the two major authors can give a fair view of the use of tag questions in the sixteenth century; a more representative sample is necessary for an undertaking of this kind.

Summary and Discussion

The three major types of polarity were well represented in our sample of 136 tag questions from 16CD, with a majority of Positive-Negatives (68 percent), followed by Constant Positives (17 percent), and Negative-Positives (15 percent). The main difference compared with PDE spoken language was the higher proportion of Constant Positive tag questions, which ranged between 4 percent and 8 percent in the PDE samples. Operators show fairly similar distributions to PDE, with *be* and *do* accounting for the highest proportions (40 percent and 30 percent, respectively). *Will* and *shall* are both more frequent in the 16CD tags, which can be linked to the use of *will* in hortatory function and the general demise of *shall* in PDE.

In the sixteenth century, tag questions had already developed all the pragmatic functions that they have in PDE, going beyond the seeking of confirmation to expressing speaker stance (attitudinal), issuing directives (hortatory), challenging interlocutors, or involving them in the discourse (facilitative). However, the proportions in which they were used are very different from those of PDE conversation and large enough to merit consideration in spite of the smallness of the 16CD sample. In the 16CD data, confirmatory uses are the most frequent type, with over 60 percent of all cases, compared with 30-37 percent in PDE. This suggests that confirmation seeking may indeed have been the original use of tag questions. Attitudinal tag questions account for fairly similar proportions in 16CD (13 percent) and PDE (12-18 percent), but challenging and hortatory functions are more important in 16CD with 15 percent and 10 percent, respectively, compared with 2 percent or less in PDE for either type (see Table 8). However, the greatest difference between PDE and 16CD is the almost total lack of facilitative tag questions in 16CD, with a single instance accounting for less than 1 percent, compared with high proportions in PDE (36 percent in British and 50 percent in American English).

These differences could be an effect of the enormous disparity of the text types compared: drama for the present study and genuine spoken conversation for PDE. However, it is probable that they are also due to what Biber (2004:130) calls "a general shift in cultural norms." It is possible that speakers have become less inclined to challenge and direct interlocutors and more inclined to involve and draw them into conversation. Standards and types of politeness may have changed over time. This must remain speculation until we have more data from different time periods.

Even in 16CD, attitudinal tag questions are markers of stance, just as they are in PDE. This use of tag questions has been well documented by Keisanen (2006) in her study of American English conversation. We would call for their inclusion in

diachronic studies of stance marking. Biber (2004) treats only (semi-)modal verbs, adverbials, and complement clause constructions in his historical study of stance, but he also suggests that ". . . there are likely other stance features that should be added to the set of features studied here" (131). In their stance-marking function tag questions are now firmly entrenched in the language, even appearing in written PDE (Tottie & Hoffmann in press). This all points to an extended range of uses for tag questions, which is likely to account for the enormous increase in their use over the centuries. But more data is needed; we return to this topic in a study of tag questions in English drama between 1600 and 1900 (Tottie & Hoffmann 2009).

Function and form are closely interrelated—the use of *will* is a case in point, but more importantly, there is a clear correlation between the use of Constant Positive polarity and challenging function, something that was to increase in the following centuries as shown by Hoffmann (2006) but which then seems to have decreased again (Kimps 2007).

This study also suggests that meter and authorial styles strongly influence the use of tag questions in 16CD. In blank verse, dramatists tend to use tag questions with Positive-Negative polarity, ending in a stressed *not,* especially at the ends of lines; although Constant Positive polarity tag questions occur, Negative-Positive polarity tag questions are absent, presumably because of the problem of putting stress on a final pronoun as would be required in blank verse. The large contributions of Shakespeare and Jonson also complicate the analysis. Shakespeare proves to be the more mainstream user of tag questions, but Jonson's predilection for confrontational situations, his "curt baroque style" (Barish 1960:7), and his use of negative anchors make him stand out—a caveat against using single-author samples for conclusions concerning linguistic phenomena past or present.

In terms of the origin of tag questions, it is clear that although their frequency may have been different from those in PDE, all the modern functions of tag questions were available to sixteenth-century speakers. Could that have been the case if the syntactic operation required to produce tag questions had been an absolute novelty, or is the fact that they are first attested in 16CD only an effect of the development of dramatic dialogue? When did tag questions actually originate in English?[22]

There are no instances of tag questions in the early part of the Chadwyck-Healey English Drama Collection, whose texts date back to the end of the thirteenth century. Searches of other text types such as sermons (which might have contained rhetorical questions similar to tags) have so far not yielded any examples.

Linguistic evidence has been used for dating by Ukaji (1998). Working within a generative framework, he argues that the appearance of tag questions in the history of English "is not earlier than the introduction of periphrastic *do* in interrogative sentences" (Ukaji 1998:1).[23] As evidence he postulates that "Verb Phrase deletion [in the tag] leaves Tense alone as Auxiliary" and that "[t]o bear the stranded Tense, periphrastic *do* will be introduced" (9). Although the timing seems right, this does not appear to us to have been the most important prerequisite, as tag questions could in principle have been formed with *be* and *have* at an early stage, before *do*-support became generalized and even

before the modal auxiliaries were firmly established in Middle English. Note that in the earliest attested tag question from Medwall 1497, quoted as (18) above, and repeated in abbreviated form here, *have* is the operator, and that it has Constant Positive polarity:

(18) B Than *thay have* some maner gettynge
By some occupacione, *have thay?*

Arguably a factor of equal or greater importance for the development of tag questions must have been the establishment of *not* as the default sentence negator. It appears unlikely that tag questions would have begun to be used when the sole negator was *ne,* which normally preceded the verb in Old English. As the negator provides the new information and would require end-weight, *ne* could not have fulfilled this function. The introduction of *noht* after the verb to reinforce the light particle *ne* in Middle English, and the subsequent gradual disappearance of *ne,* therefore probably played a large part in the development of tag questions. Recall that most tag questions are of the Positive-Negative type, that subjects are pronominal, and that negative tags ending in *not* would therefore have been the predominant type. This makes it possible to set a *terminus a quo* for the possible use of Positive-Negative tag questions to around 1400; both Mazzon (2004:56f.) and Iyeiri (2001:25-26) show that by the fifteenth century plain *not* had become the predominant negator.

We thus suggest that the development of *not* was a *sine qua non* for the development of canonical, reversed polarity tag questions in English, at least for the most common type with Positive-Negative polarity. The use of *do*-support and the development of modal verbs are obviously contributing factors, however. Quite possibly, the use of *do*-support in tag questions may have sped up the overall spread of the construction. Reversed-polarity tag questions only began to be documented around the middle of the sixteenth century, which is precisely when *do*-support really began to take off (Ellegård 1953:161-63). These phenomena are obviously intertwined.

Appendix

Play Dialogue quoted from the Chadwyck-Healey Collection of English Drama (available at http://collections.chadwyck.com/)

The Mixed Sample from different authors, arranged chronologically from 1497 (circa) to 1599. Only plays that actually contained tag questions are included. The number of tag questions from each play is given in parentheses if there were more than one.

1497	Henry Medwall.	*Fulgens and Lucrece*
1550	Anonymous.	*Jacob and Esau*

(continued)

Appendix (continued)

1553	Nicholas Udall.	*Ralph Roister Doister*
1560	Wager, William.	*Inough is as good as a feast*
1563	John Jefferes.	*The Bugbears*
1564-68	John Edward.	*Damon and Pithias*
1565	Anonymous.	*Kyng Daryus*
1569	Anonymous.	*Mariage of witte and science*
1575?	Anonymous.	*Gammer Gurton's Needle*
1575	George Gascoigne.	*The glasse of gouernement* (2)
1583	Anonymous.	*The famous victories of Henry V* (2)
1583	John Lyly.	*Sapho and Phao*
1584	John Wilson.	*The three ladies of London*
1587	Christopher Marlowe.	*Tamburlaine* (4)
1588	Anonymous.	*Arden of Feversham* (2)
1588	George Peele.	*The old wiues tale*
1588	Robert Wilson.	*The three lordes and three ladies of London* (2)
1589	Christopher Marlowe.	*The Jew of Malta* (3)
1589	Anonymous.	*Faire Em*
1589	Anonymous.	*Solyman and Perseda* (2)
1590	George Peele.	*Edward I* (2)
1592	Thomas Heywood.	*Edward IV, part ii* (3)
1592	Thomas Nash.	*Summers last will and testament* (2)
1593	William Haughton.	*Grim the collier of Croyden* (2)
1594	Anonymous.	*A larum for London* (2)
1594	Robert Yarington.	*Two lamentable tragedies*
1596	Anonymous.	*A warning for fair women* (2)
1597	Anonymous.	*Looke about you*
1597	George Chapman.	*An humerous dayes myrth*
1597	Thomas Heywood.	*The fair maid of the west,* part i
1597	William Rowley.	*The birth of Merlin* (2)
1598	Henry Chettle.	*The downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntington*
1598	William Haughton.	*English-men for my money* (2)
1598	John Marston.	*Histrio-mastix*
1598	Henry Porter.	*The two angry women of Abington* (4)
1599	Anonymous.	*Thomas Lord Cromwell* (2)
1599	Anonymous.	*Everie woman in her humor* (2)
1599	Anonymous.	*The history of the tryall of cheualry*
1599	Anonymous.	*The merry devill of Edmonton*
1599	Anon. (Univ. Plays).	*Club law* (4)
1599	John Marston.	*Antonio and Mellida,* part i
William Shakespeare		
1590		*The comedie of errors* (2)
1590		*Edward III* (3)
1590		*Henry VI, part ii* (3)

(continued)

Appendix (continued)

1590	*The taming of the shrew*
1591	*Henry VI, part iii*
1591	*Richard III* (2)
1594	*Titus Andronicus*
1595	*Loues labour's lost*
1595	*Richard II*
1596	*Henry IV, part I* (3)
1596	*The merchant of Venice*
1597	*A midsommer nights dream* (2)
1597	*Henry IV, part II*
1597	*The merry wiues of Windsor* (10)
1598	*Julius Caesar* (5)
1598	*As You Like It*
1599	*Henry V* (2)
Ben Jonson	
1595	*A tale of a tub* (2)
1597	*The case is altered* (11)
1598	*Every man in his humor* (9)
1599	*Every man out of his humor* (6)

Notes

1. The term *canonical* is taken from Holmes (1983). For a discussion of earlier literature on canonical tag questions, see Tottie and Hoffmann (2006).

2. Although a fascinating topic, a comparison with invariant tags is beyond the scope of the present study, which is strictly semasiological.

3. Terminology is rife in the field. The term *anchor* is from Huddleston and Pullum (2002).

4. On tag questions with constant negative polarity, see e.g., Quirk et al. (1985), Biber et al. (1999), Huddleston and Pullum (2002:892).

5. Ukaji's dates are based on year of publication; as he points out, his earliest example from Medwall's *Fulgens and Lucrece,* which is also our first, was probably written in the early 1490s. We shall use the date of its probable first performance, 1497.

6. But see Tottie and Hoffmann (in press) for a survey and discussion of tag questions in written language.

7. Unfortunately more "genuine" data, like courtroom proceedings, are not available or are insufficient for the sixteenth century. Tag questions may also have been edited out, as courtroom transcripts tend to focus on content, rather than form—see Archer (2002), Grund (2007), and Tottie and Hoffmann (2008). Although Culpeper and Kytö (2000) refer only to comedy in their discussion, we include every kind of play available, for two reasons: our already limited sample would otherwise have been too small, and many of our examples come from comic interludes in tragedies.

8. A further twenty-nine plays from the same period were not considered for our study because they are English translations of Latin and Italian plays. We base our datings of plays on those given in the Chadwyck-Healey English Drama Collection for first performances. However, dates are not always possible to ascertain with certainty, as performance often preceded publication (Greg 1939; Berger 1998). Wherever possible, the year of first performance has been used for (approximate) dating.

9. The automated Perl searches of our data had missed a few examples that we found in Ukaji; we added those. Moreover, the Chadwyck-Healey collection does not include a couple of early plays by Thomas Nashe and Thomas Deloney that contained three tag questions cited by Ukaji; we left those out. One reviewer pointed out that tags could potentially occur without an overt subject. While a small number of these reduced tags can indeed be found in later periods of the corpus—e.g., "Thou art a Souldier, *art not?*" (Richard Brome: *The queen and concubine,* 1635)—no occurrence of this type was found in sixteenth-century drama.

10. As the authors of some plays are anonymous, it is impossible to give an exact number.

11. Some passages are printed as verse but are very hard to scan—they border on prose but we keep them separate from genuine prose examples.

12. For ease of reading, we present our data as percentages only in our tables, but total numbers are always indicated to enable assessment of validity.

13. Ukaji (1998) found one possible instance in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* (1601), but notice that the anchor is also a question here: ". . . is't not a gallant man too, *is't not?*" He dismisses it, as we would, because of the nature of the anchor.

14. As shown in Tottie and Hoffmann (2006), the higher frequency of *do* in American English is due to two factors: the American preference for *do* in tags following *have* as an anchor verb, and the American preference for the preterite over the present perfect.

15. Algeo (2006) came out too late to be considered in Tottie and Hoffmann (2006), but the classification there is not substantially different from that in Algeo (1990), although he uses the term *antagonistic* for aggressive tag questions.

16. Salmon (1987a) did historical pragmatics *avant la lettre.* She mentions Shakespeare's use of "question tags denoting the speaker's desire for an opinion or approval," like *He is at Oxford still, is he not?* (1987a:49) and the fact that "[c]ertain tag questions [Positive-Positive, or Negative-Negative] can imply irony, annoyance or impatience," like *She comes of errands, does she?* (1987a:55). These would correspond to our confirmatory and challenging uses, respectively. However, Salmon did not attempt to systematically classify tag questions according to function, or to quantify their uses in her material. Wikberg (1975) also briefly mentions the "emotional implications" of tag questions with Constant Positive polarity.

17. Our classification differs from that of Holmes (1983) here. She includes directives among different uses of softening tags but does not mention other types of hortatories.

18. As suggested by one reviewer, the higher frequency of confirmatory tag questions in sixteenth-century drama may be related to the use of "cue scripts" by actors to learn their parts, including only the actors' own words and the end of the previous actor's turn.

19. It is worth noting that among the Positive-Negative tag questions, those with deleted anchors function only in confirmatory and attitudinal uses, and, not surprisingly, imperatives are only used in hortatory function—see examples (25) and (26).

20. We followed the indications given in the editions used in the Chadwyck-Healey English Drama Collection by means of line arrangements.

21. This has the added advantage of making samples more homogeneous, as rhymed verse is only used in the earliest plays in our sample.

22. No evidence has been found for influence from Celtic languages; the canonical tag questions appear to be uniquely English. We thank Ray Hickey, Markku Filppula, and Juhani Klemola for helpful discussions of this possibility.

23. This would mean in the early fifteenth century (Ellegård 1953).

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