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THE ROLE OF TAG QUESTIONS IN ENGLISH AND SERBIAN INTERVIEW DISCOURSE¹

Abstract: The paper is a report on research undertaken to discover the manner in which the speakers of English and Serbian employ question tags as communicative strategies for achieving various pragmatic effects and the role of gender-marked speech therein. This small-scale contrastive research project, largely inspired and founded on the specificities of gendered discourse style as identified by R. Lakoff (1973, 2004), and later discussed by Holmes (1995), Weatherall (2002), Talbot (2003), Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (2003) and others, is based on analyzing contextualized question tagging sampled from a corpus of texts within the journalistic register. The corpus encompasses at least 100 interviews from on-line newspapers and magazines and provided by English and Serbian male and female interviewees. The analysis also addresses such issues as answering the question whether and to which extent the use of tag questions could be associated with the pragmatic strategies of seeking agreement, confrontation, defense, attenuation, etc. The basic assumption and the expected result of the study is that attenuation and seeking for agreement will be the dominant role of tag questions usage in both languages, with English female speakers as the dominant study group, in view of tag questions using, of all the four groups observed in regard to this kind of linguistic expression.

Key words: Question tags, English, Serbian, Discourse, Contrastive analysis

1. Introduction

This paper is meant to present the research intended to discover the role the users of English and Serbian ascribe to question tag as communicative strategies for asking support on the part of the collocutors in interview-based verbal interaction. Also, one of the objectives is to determine whether female or male speakers of the two languages made a more explicit and extensive use of certain types of tag questions for their communicative purposes. Among these, it would be of interest to this investigation to establish whether English or Serbian men and women expressed

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their ideas more frequently by using questions tags for attenuation of the speech act, facilitating the discourse, challenging the collocutor, or plainly for checking the truth value of a statement. This would be directly indicative of the qualities of male and female language use, English and Serbian, respectively, as well as of the position of the male and female speakers and their own ideas of themselves as factors in communication by means of language. In other words, the research attempts at detecting the basic types of communicative strategy in tag-question usage for asking various kinds of support on the part of the interlocutors. As is commonly assumed, the increased use of tag questions may be indicative of a lack of confidence or their decreased use may point to a kind of self-confidence on the part of the speaker.

Tag questions are commonly referred to as a questions posed to attain certain communicative effect. On the other hand, question tags are normally defined as interrogative segments attached to an independent declarative clause, requesting confirmation or disconfirmation (Payne, 2011: 377), which then becomes a tag question. These are language structures meant to achieve certain communicative purposes, particularly in the domain of pragmatic efficacy, structures by means of which asking for agreement or agreement strategies are effected in everyday communication on the part of text producer. In this respect, sentences or utterances marked for indicative or imperative mood are transformed communicatively by adding a tag in the form of a minor question, wherefrom the label question tag or tag question, as it is used in the US variant of the language.

- (1) *It is beautiful here, isn't it?*

Question tags are more typical of the spoken form of language than they are of the written, as these are commonly taken to be indicative of a less formal way of communication. Moreover, it has been suggested in literature (Lakoff, 1975; Cameron, 2006) that question tags usage points to certain qualities in the language of the communicators that tend to use these grammatical structures more often. Stylistically speaking, among the most common attributes ascribed to question tag using is language politeness, emphasis and irony. One of the primary concerns of this research is to validate the findings by other analysts regarding the role of tags and the different types of tags and try to establish any correlation between the use of particular types of tags and the two genders and two speech groups. According to the Holmes on the one hand and Cameron et al. on the other, (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003: 170) a higher proportion of tags produced female speakers are primarily facilitative or mitigating and a higher proportion of those by male speakers will be primarily confirmation-seeking.

The main problem of the paper has been largely drawn from the studies by eminent linguists concerning the qualities of gender-specific language, namely English, such as the studies by R. Lakoff (1972, 1975), which were later commented on and elaborated by others, primarily Dubois, B. L., / Crouch, I. (1975), etc. As tag questions will be observed in the language use of the two genders of two different speech communities, it may be of interest to verify or falsify the statements of Lakoff (1972) and Dubois, B. L., & Crouch, I. (1975) after 40 years and cross-culturally.

The starting assumption is that the female speakers of English will be the group with the highest index of tag question usage in the interviewer □ interviewee discourse positioning. The reasons for this may be culturally specific, as the English tend to traditionally cherish a more tentative communication via language in comparison to Serbian speakers, irrespective of the gender, and that the increased values in tag questioning is to be ascribed to greater politeness, rather than insecurity in the opinion.

„So a tag-question is really intermediate between a statement and a question: a statement assumes that the addressee will agree, and a question leaves the response of the addressee up to him, but a tag-question implies that, while the speaker expects a certain sort of response, the hearer may not provide it.“ (Lakoff, 1972: 917).

Another parameter would be to establish whether increased tag question usage is relative to the gender not only of the speaker, but also relative to the gender of the person addressed, as a function of conversational dominance (Eckert/McConnell-Ginet, 2003: 15). The assumption is that there would appear more question tags in female-male discourse, than in female-female discourse. Since tag questions are more typical of colloquial, spoken language, the type of text chosen for this research was transcripts of interviews between individuals of the same or different gender. The interviewees encompassed belong to various professional and social backgrounds: artists, businessmen, politicians, musicians, actors, scientists, writers, etc. The interviewees encompass a wide age array, from 15 to 75, both male and female native speakers exclusively, in order to avoid affecting the results of the inquiry due to a potential age difference between the interviewers and interviewees.

1.2. The Form of Tag Questions

Question or interrogative tags may not be independent clauses as questions proper, but they do require a response, and present a highly interactive language forms (Downing & Locke, 2006: 187). Tag questions have varied formal expressions in different languages, ranging from one-word forms to phrasal structure or grammatical construction, from rising, expressive of doubt and uncertainty, to falling intonation, expressing a confirmation request. They can also be diversified according to various degrees of formality, from colloquial, informal to formal.

1.2.1. Tag Questions in English

English tag questions make a specific expressive field of the language with a variety of possibilities. This is conditioned by the specificity that English tags, unlike Serbian or French, do not have fixed form, but rather vary in accordance with the type and characteristics of the main verb in the independent clause.

One-word tag questions such as *alright? correct? okay? right?* are used with rising intonation to ask for confirmation on the part of the collocutors. They are also called *invariant* tags, present in a number of other languages, as their form is stable and not dependent on the grammatical context. Sometimes, in colloquial language

and in certain dialects of English, it is not uncommon to use a simple interjection *ah/eh?* Moreover, the studies of Algeo (1988, 1990) drew the attention to the use of *innit?* as a specific, somewhat stylistically marked tag in British English.

Multi-word tag questions in English are in the form of yes-no grammatical questions attached to the back part of the clause. They consist of an operator and subject (Quirk, *et al.*, 1985: 810) that make a reference back to the main verb in the clause with which it concurs in tense, aspect, number, person and modality. The tags vary in positive or negative orientation, depending on the operator in the main clause, which is most commonly in the form of an auxiliary verb. When the operator is positive, the tag is negative, and vice versa. However, it should be pointed out that the tags will always refer to the part of clause with the main sentential proposition, and not necessarily the main clause, as in (2) d.

- (2) a. *You don't know her, do you?*
 b. *My sister has arrived, hasn't she?*
 c. *Everybody is busy doing something useful, are they not?*
 d. *I think that she is a very clever girl, isn't she. (Cf. *don't I?)*

Multi-word tags can also be invariant. Some of the most frequently used would be: *am I right?*, *don't you think?*, *is that so?*, *wouldn't you say?*, etc. The enclitic form *n't* is appended to the operator, or the negative particle *not* placed after the subject pronoun, particularly in formal speech. Tag-questioning in English is a complex category, the productivity of which is caused by a number of factors such as type of the verb, auxiliaries, intonation, negation, etc. It is also acceptable to use positive tags with positive main clauses, what Huddleston & Pullum call „constant polarity“ (Huddleston & Pullum, 2005: 150) and Trask „rhetorical“ tags (Trask, 1996: 275) with a different communicative value, as in (3) d. However, the opposite pair is not an acceptable case in standard English. Instead of seeking confirmation, these tags imply sarcasm or recollection, surprise or disbelief as in (3) a. and b. According to certain estimates, up to 50% of all the tags used in conversation will be unbalanced in this respect (Parkes, 1989: 38).

- (3) a. *He would know the answer, **would he.***
 b. *Oh, that's what she wanted, **is it?***
 c. *Oh, I love tulips, **don't you?***
 d. *So that's your new car, **is it?***

Another variant of tags used for asking agreement by the collocutors is the one where the subjects and pronouns are not co-referential, as in (3) c. Normally, if the subject is in pronominal form, it is invariably *I* and that of the tag, *you*, which assumes the main group (tonic) stress (Downing & Locke, 2006: 187).

1.2.2. Tag Questions in Serbian

In Serbian, the range of tag questions on offer is comparatively more limited as the tags are fixed in form to the invariant *zar ne?*, a general type of tag based on the negation of the statement in the main clause, similar to the French *n'est-ce pas*, or Bulgarian *нали?* and Macedonian *не ли?*

It is of considerable interest that this syntactic-pragmatic structure has not been adequately treated in any of the major descriptions of the Serbian language, nor can there be found any particular reference to it or research mentioned in any of the corner-stone linguistic books on Serbian grammar. Even an adequate linguistic term referring to this feature seems to be missing in Serbian descriptive linguistics. An earlier research of a Serbian corpus of interview transcripts (Jovanović and Pavlović, 2014) has shown that although the the Serbian invariant tag accounts for 80% of all the uses, 5 other forms could be taken as TQs in written or spoken communication, as opposed to the 23 forms registered in an English corpus.

2. Theoretical background and previous research

There are various means, particularly in terms of language use, that are typical of certain discourse positions. The focus of this study was the treatment of linguistic devices for achieving certain pragmatic effects, or pragmatic markers, such as tag questions.

In his reputable introductory book in general linguistics, G. Yule (2006) defines the term **tag questions** within the section titled *Gendered speech* and makes a comparatively determined claim: „They are used more often by women when expressing opinions. These features of women’s speech all seem to be ways of inviting agreement with an idea rather than asserting it. Men tend to use more assertive forms and ‘strong’ language[...]“ (Yule, 2006: 224).

Apparently, this attitude is based on the conclusions presented by R. Lakoff, first in her article „Language in Context“ (1972) and later in her book *Language and Woman’s Place* (1975). The publications that caused a huge debate and incited a line of research basically propounded the idea that speakers using tag questions in speech leave the impression of not being completely sure of themselves, of looking for confirmation from the collocutor, even of having no views of their own. Tag-question studies by Dubois and Crouch, 1975; Holmes, 1984, and Cameron et al., 1988, came up with an array of different findings. Some other studies confirmed that women use two to three times more tags in task-oriented exchanges (McMillan et al., 1977; Fishman, 1980), while others discovered this to be relevant for men’s verbal production (Lapadat and Seesahai, 1977). The on-going debate resulted in two different, even conflicting, approaches to this problem, the *difference* and the *dominance* approaches, based on whether the advocates were more in favour of the stance that women and men spoke differently due to their relation to language or that the men’s dominance in society was only mirrored in language.

It is arguable whether tag-questioning or their increased use should be taken as a sole and potent indicator of the quality of women’s language pointing in the direction of lack of self-confidence or that the opposite indicates security in men. Concerning the fact that tag questions cannot be considered signs of speakers’ „...having no views of their own“ under any circumstances, other potential strategies underlying the use of these linguistic forms could be envisaged. In this respect Hellinger M. and

H. Busmann (2002: 17–18), referring to Holmes (1995) state that the occurrence of *tag*-questions may have various communicative functions in actual discourse, wherefrom the explanation of their purpose in terms of uncertainty or tentativeness is only one among a number of possibilities. Thus, as it has been established:

„A tag, for example, can both indicate a willingness to entertain alternative positions beyond that which the main clause conveys (thus, the absence of unshakeable conviction) and also serve to connect the speaker more firmly to others. Establishing such connections may ultimately strengthen a speaker's position by enlisting social support for the speaker and their ideas and projects.“ (Eckert/McConell-Ginet, 2003: 160).

The language of female speakers has been qualified by Lakoff (1975) as determined by hedges or mitigators and inessential qualifiers, euphemisms, diminutives, etc. that make their language tentative, powerless, and trivial, thus disqualifying them from potential positions of power and authority in speech and the society. Certain sociological studies, based on all gender couples, however, have shown that irrespective of gender, lower rate of tag-questions would be a sign of a dominant speaker (P. Kollock/ P. Blumstein/ P. Schwartz, 1985). Part of the social position of subordination is achieved through expressing conventional politeness, especially forms that mark respect for the addressee and increased use of tag questions in their speech.

One of the key objections to Lakoff's arguments expounded in her book has been that they fail to investigate into the entire range of imports that tag questions may have in language use. Pointing out that „a tag may be capable of several readings simultaneously“, Sunderland (2006: 100) states that „[...] she [Lakoff] emphasizes the 'wanting confirmation' meaning at the expense of the 'co-operative', trying-to- elicit-conversation meaning“. Immediately after the publication of Lakoff's (1975) book, the article by Dubois, B. L. & Crouch, I. (1975) disputed the claim that women used tag questions in more conversational situations than men did or that such questions signified an avoidance of commitment. In their research, using taped interactions during an academic conference, they had found more instances of men using these tags than women, and that in at least one social context, men used tag questions where women did not.

The meanings that can be invested in a tag question or the pragmatic use it can be put to belong to a set of related elements. Tag questions can be conversational resources intended to open up the conversational floor to other interlocutors, to provide a space for others' contributions (facilitation), meant to soften or mitigate the potential negative impact of a statement (attenuation), meant to elicit admissions of guilt or no reply whatsoever (challenge) or meant to be expressive of uncertainty in one's opinion, looking for agreement or asking for confirmation from the collocutor (epistemic modality).

The following overview takes into consideration certain pragmatic strategies and conversational roles, and how these might relate to gender. The following is based on the discussions by Holmes (1995) and Eckert/McConell-Ginet (2003),

which is probably the most complete treatment of the tag question problem in gender specific language.

2.1. Epistemic modality

This is potentially the commonest of uses that tag questions have been associated with. These tag questions may occur at various instances during a speech event, and are characterized by rising intonation. They can be indicative of uncertainty in one's opinion, looking for agreement or asking for confirmation from the collocutor, as illustrated in (4).

(4) *The boy looked in this direction for a second, didn't he?*

As it has been often claimed, women's speech to a certain degree may indicate uncertainty or unwillingness to take a stand and thus it is marked by an increased use of tags. This, on the other hand need not be a signal of subordination in conversational exchange.

„Even when tag questions signal uncertainty it does not mean that the speaker has a powerless speech style. Edwards and Potter (1993) suggested that displaying a lack of confidence, through the use of features like tag questions, could be a powerful strategy to avoid being accountable for later statements that contradict earlier ones.“ (Weatherall, 2002: 149).

However, a more important implication of this kind of use would be the one that it reveals the speaker's relation toward the speech content, and that by employing it, the speaker brings in the addressee to help in appraising that content, rather than shows lack of self-confidence. Eckert/McConnell-Ginet (2003: 169) invoke, and quite justifiably, a difference which should be made between uncertainty which lies behind paradigmatic epistemic modal uses, and uncertainty which could be considered fully „justified“ due to obvious circumstances, such as objective inability, specific features of the context of situation, etc.

2.2. Attenuation

The second type of tag questions as pragmatic markers would be that by which the speaker tends to soften or mitigate the potential negative impact a statement might have on the collocutor Face. Such tags are in line with the example in (5).

(5) *„This wasn't very nice of you George, was it?“*

At times, it may be considerably problematic to distinguish this use from other uses, as the tentativeness communicated by tag questions generally may also serve mitigating purposes. This feature may be explained by the fact that single utterances containing tags may be multifunctional through *polysemy* (Cameron et al., 1988). Softening tags from discourse participants of lower status in the unequal exchanges are principally very unlikely, as this study found absolutely no instances of the sort.

2.3. Facilitation

Another pragmatic use to which tag questions may be put is to help a speaker in certain discourse positions achieve a better effect, such as the one of a more efficient moderating or facilitating a discourse situation. The positions that most often resort to this meaning are interviewers, talk show personalities and educators to involve the collocutors and procure a contribution to the discourse. The tag would appear with a falling intonation in the first pair part of the conversation adjacency pair.

(6) *You have written a number of new poems recently, haven't you?*

However, there have not been offered any unambiguous facts yet which would link with certainty this role to any of the genders in particular, despite the prevailing majority of studies that have found this kind of tags to be used primarily by women. As Christie (2001: 168) points out in her book *Gender and Language*, the data obtained through research by Cameron, McAlinden and O'Leary (1988) showed that certain types of tag questions apparently functioning as a device for facilitating conversation and encouraging others to contribute, were extensively used by certain male subjects, at least in one segment of the study. These data are also inconclusive, as the men in the study knew that their conversation was being recorded for this purpose, which might be the reason that their speech reflected an effort to elicit as much talk as possible from other participants. In other words, these speakers had either consciously or unconsciously taken on the role of conversational 'facilitator'. In order to avoid this sort of pitfall, the research methodology in the present study involved transcripts of conversations of male and female speakers in ordinary media interviews.

2.4. Challenge

The last type of use implies tagging utterances that are meant to elicit admissions of guilt or no reply whatsoever. As with other types, it may be increasingly problematic to identify this particular trait and distinguish it from other types of affective tagging. The primary reason that this is the case, as Weatherall (2002: 61) has put it, is that „not only is there no one-to-one relationship of a form (e.g. a tag question) to a function [...], but a single form may be multifunctional“. Anyhow, the context of the conversation and the intonation of the speaker may be of considerable help.

(7) *You won't do that again, will you?*

3. Corpus analysis

3.1. The Corpora

The corpora for this research have been devised independently for Serbian and English. These consist of separate texts, transcripts of interviews by English male and female speakers, as well as Serbian male and female speakers. Attention

has been paid to another set of parameters, the gender of the interviewer and interviewee, respectively. Thus, four groups of interviews were created: the first, male interviewers interviewing female interviewees, the second, female interviewers interviewing male interviewees, the third female interviewers interviewing female interviewees and the fourth, male interviewers interviewing male interviewees. The observed quality of language included the use of tag questions, as well as the implied reason for the application of these.

It should be kept in mind that these are official interviews, which is different from normal conversation. This implies a difference in the status of the speakers taking turns in the act, unequal encounters, where the interviewer is supposedly the interlocutor with less significant role in the communication, simultaneously being the conversational facilitator. All the tag questions were considered, irrespective of the various degrees of formality or style.

The English language corpus consisted of 100 interviews with approximately 422.000 words in total. The interviews have been randomly sampled from both English and American on-line newspapers and magazines from the past 50 years, whereas the Serbian corpus consisted of approximately 191.000 words contained in 100 interview transcripts, sampled from on-line sources in Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The corpora analysis of interview-form English and Serbian language has shown a higher frequency of tag-question employment instances in English than in Serbian, the relation being almost 3:1. Thus, it can be established with a considerable amount of certainty that the English speech community has a more pronounced tendency towards using tags, than the Serbian speech community.

3.2. The English corpus

The quantitative approach analysis of the English corpus produced certain results that could be considered significant. As Table 1. shows, the four different sections of the corpus totaling approximately 422.000 words yielded 174 instances of tag question usage, with an average of 4.12 tags per 10.000 words.

	DISCOURSE DIRECTION	NUMBER OF WORDS	NUMER OF TQ	AVERAGE PER 10,000	PERCENTAGE
1.	Female to female	76.000	22	2.89	12.6%
2.	Female to male	69.000	65	9.42	37.5%
3.	Male to female	109.000	42	3.85	24.2%
4.	Male to male	168.000	45	2.68	25.7%
	total	422.000	174	4.12	100%

Table 1. Number of tag questions in the English corpora and the frequency index regarding gender-relevant interaction

When gender-relevant interaction is considered, it is obvious that the highest frequency index would be found within the communication of female speakers with male speakers, irrespective of the role, i.e. either as interviewers or interviewees. On the other hand, the lowest index value can be registered in male-to-male interaction.

Among other things that could be stated on the basis of the results is the fact that the estimates expressed in some earlier publications (Parkes, 1989: 38) were not corroborated in this research of interview- based interaction, as only 2 instances of unbalanced tags were detected of 92 tags involving auxiliaries and pronoun subjects, which amounts to only 2.17%.

The following research results are presented in the form of tables that represent the analysis of the corpus segments on the basis of the role that tag questions have in interview-based discourse. The values in Table point out an overwhelming supremacy of two pragmatic uses of TQs in English, as 48% of all the uses are facilitative and 46% epistemic modals, which is a fairly balanced share. The same can be stated for the parting regarding the gender of the speakers. Both of the genders seem to use an equal proportion of epistemic modality and facilitative tags. The segment of attenuative tags accounts for 5.18% of all the cases, and challenging only for 0,57%.

	ENGLISH CORPUS	NUMBER OF WORDS		EPISTEMIC MODALITY	ATTENUATIVE	FACILITATIVE	CHALLENGING
1.	Female speakers++	422.000	overall	40	5	41	1
			to male	26	5	29	1
			to female	14	0	12	0
2.	Male speakers	422.000	overall	40	4	43	0
			to male	22	3	20	0
			to female	18	1	23	0
	Total	422.000		80	9	84	1

Table 2. Role and number of TQ types in interview-based discourse

However, the underlying impact of gender and discourse position in the English corpus can be seen in the results exhibited below. Each table (from Table 3 to Table 6) represents the direction of interaction and the position of the speaker in these asymmetric interviewer-interviewee encounters.

	ENGLISH CORPUS	EPISTEMIC MODALITY	INDEX PER 10,000	ATTENUATIVE	INDEX PER 10,000	FACILITATIVE	INDEX PER 10,000	CHALLENGING	INDEX PER 10,000
1.	Male -er > Male	15	0.89	0	0	12	0.71	0	0
2.	Male < Mal -ee	7	0.42	3	0.18	8	0.48	0	0

Table 3. Role and number of TQ types in male - male interview discourse of 168,000 word.

In all-male discourse, the position of greater power, the position of an interviewer is apparently the one with the most expressive tag question use, as the

highest index values can be seen for both modality and facilitation tags, whereas the interviewee position is more prominent for attenuative or softening tags.

	ENGLISH CORPUS	EPISTEMIC MODALITY	INDEX PER 10,000	ATTENUATIVE	INDEX PER 10,000	FACILITATIVE	INDEX PER 10,000	CHALLENGING	INDEX PER 10,000
1.	Male -er > Female	5	0.46	1	0.09	16	1.47	0	0
2.	Male < Female -ee	26	2.39	5	0.46	20	1.83	1	0.09

Table 4. Role and number of TQ types in male - female interview discourse of 109.000 words

In a different arrangement of positions, it turned out that female speakers would be using more both epistemic modality and facilitative tags in the „powerless“ position of an interview when communicating with male interviewers. The same applies to the use of attenuative tags, but also the challenging ones. When compared to the index values of Table 5, where male speakers where in the „powerless“ position, the values of the frequency index are 30 to 60% higher for female speakers addressing the opposite sex. Female speakers would also use more modality tags as interviewers, but fewer facilitative tags.

	ENGLISH CORPUS	EPISTEMIC MODALITY	INDEX PER 10,000	ATTENUATIVE	INDEX PER 10,000	FACILITATIVE	INDEX PER 10,000	CHALLENGING	INDEX PER 10,000
1.	Female -er > Male	4	0.58	0	0	9	1.30	0	0
2.	Female < Male -ee	13	1.88	0	0	7	1.01	0	0

Table 5. Role and number of TQ types in female - male interview discourse of 69.000 words

This research may also be partly a case in point to the findings of a previous study (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003: 170) where tags used in overtly asymmetric encounters were also examined. Among the unequal pairs of teacher-student, doctor-patient, parent-child, employer-employee, the researchers investigated the relation interviewer-interviewee and discovered that the relatively powerless individual in the asymmetric encounters was the one more likely to produce epistemic modal tags and the relatively powerful was the one more likely to produce facilitative or attenuative tags. However, when interlocutors of the same gender interact, they would use more epistemic modality tags as interviewers, as well as a greater number of facilitative tags.

	ENGLISH CORPUS	EPISTEMIC MODALITY	INDEX PER 10,000	ATTENUATIVE	INDEX PER 10,000	FACILITATIVE	INDEX PER 10,000	CHALLENGING	INDEX PER 10,000
1.	Female -er > Female	6	0.79	0	0	9	1.18	0	0
2.	Female < Female -ee	4	0.50	0	0	3	0.39	0	0

Table 6. Role and number of TQ types in female - female interview discourse of 76.000 words

Generally speaking, these figures show that female speakers tend to use more of the so-called affective tags, a label with which Holmes (1984) marks tags that are either attenuative, since they are largely concerned with saving the face of the addressee or facilitative, encouraging the addressee to take a turn at speaking. In the data coming from an examination of a large New Zealand linguistic corpus (Weatherall, 2002: 60), where modal and affective tags were coded and counted as used by men and women, affective tags were used predominantly by women and modal tags were used predominantly by men. Our data show that the use of epistemic modality and affective tags is relative to the discourse position of the genders. Male interviewees will use four times more modality and two times more facilitative tags when speaking to female interviewers than to male interviewers. On the other hand, female interviewees appear to use five times more modality tags and four times more affective tags when interacting with male interviewers than with female ones.

A sample from the English corpus has been supplied in the examples (8) and (9), where the interview direction is specified by the labels in the parentheses. The label M stands for a male interlocutor and F for a female one, whereas the mark *-er* indicates the interviewer and *-ee* the interviewee position.

- (8) *But people do know what will make them happy, don't they? (Mer > Mee)*
- If you ask people whether they would rather have gallbladder surgery or a weekend in Paris, they get the answer right.²
- (9) *Does anyone ever discuss bringing back Big Train? (Fer > Mee)*
- No, I don't think so. [Big Train co-star] Kevin Eldon's got his own show coming up, which will have a flavour of that I think. But no, not directly. There are quite a few shows coming back, aren't there?³

3.3. The Serbian corpus

The quantitative approach analysis of the Serbian corpus also provided data, which could be analysed in relation to the data obtained in the English corpus analysis. Table 7 shows the four different sections of the Serbian corpus totaling approximately 191.000 words, which contained only 31 examples of tag question usage, with an average of 1.62 tags per 10,000 words, which is almost 3 times lower than the English index.

	DISCOURSE DIRECTION	NUMBER OF WORDS	NUMER OF TQ	AVERAGE PER 10,000	PERCENTAGE
1.	Female to female	40.000	8	2.00	25.8%
2.	Female to male	47.000	11	2.34	35.4%
3.	Male to female	41.000	10	2.44	32.3%
4.	Male to male	63.000	2	0.32	6.5%
	Total	191.000	31	1.62	100%

Table 7. Number of tag questions in the Serbian corpus and the frequency index

² http://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/interview_gilbert.html. Retrieved on October 11th 2013

³ <http://www.tvchoicemagazine.co.uk/interviewextra/mark-heap-outnumbered>. Retrieved on September 27th 2013

Obviously, the two most representative roles that tag questions can have in Serbian interview-based discourse are epistemic modality, with more than half of all the instances of TQ using and facilitation, with somewhat over a quarter.

	SERBIAN CORPUS	NUMBER OF WORDS		EPISTEMIC MODALITY	ATTENUATIVE	FACILITATIVE	CHALLENGING
1.	Female speakers	191.000	overall	10	1	6	2
			to male	5	0	6	0
			to female	5	1	0	2
2.	Male speakers	191.000	overall	7	1	2	2
			to male	1	1	0	0
			to female	6	0	2	2
Total		191.000		17	2	8	4

Table 8. Role and number of TQ types in interview-based discourse

As it can be read from the above table, the most frequently used TQs in Serbian would be those indicative of epistemic modality, with 55% of all the uses, followed by TQs used for facilitative purposes somewhat below 26%. The Serbian corpus showed similar results in comparison to the English one, with a conspicuously larger margin between the frequency index values for male and female speakers. The male speakers also used more epistemic TQs, as indicated by the index 0.36 to 0.12, whereas female speakers tend to use twice as many facilitative tags, which is evident in the relation between the values of 0.37 and 0.18.

When the findings of the corpus analysis are broken down into four parts taking into consideration the discourse positions and the gender of the interlocutors, the following tables (Table 9 to Table 12) can be obtained.

	SERBIAN CORPUS	EPISTEMIC MODALITY	INDEX PER 10,000	ATTENUATIVE	INDEX PER 10,000	FACILITATIVE	INDEX PER 10,000	CHALLENGING	INDEX PER 10,000
1.	Male -er > Male	1	0.16	0	0	0	0	0	0
2.	Male < Mal -ee	0	0	1	0.16	0	0	0	0

Table 8. Role and number of TQ types in male - male interview discourse of 63.000 words

Male to male interview-discourse is not very typical for TQ usage, as very low index values were recorded in this domain of the corpus, quite opposite to the female-to-female segment.

	SERBIAN CORPUS	EPISTEMIC MODALITY	INDEX PER 10,000	ATTENUATIVE	INDEX PER 10,000	FACILITATIVE	INDEX PER 10,000	CHALLENGING	INDEX PER 10,000
1.	Male -er > Female	3	0.64	0	0	2	0.42	0	0
2.	Male < Female -ee	4	0.85	0	0	3	0.64	0	0

Table 9. Role and number of TQ types in male - female interview discourse of 47.000 words

Male gender Serbian interviewees use more modality tags when interacting with female interviewers, whereas female interviewees use them approximately to the same extent irrespective of the gender. Moreover, the use of facilitative tags seems to be more female-specific in Serbian, as female speakers use them to a greater extent when they interact with male gender interlocutors either as interviewers or interviewees.

	SERBIAN CORPUS	EPISTEMIC MODALITY	INDEX PER 10,000	ATTENUATIVE	INDEX PER 10,000	FACILITATIVE	INDEX PER 10,000	CHALLENGING	INDEX PER 10,000
1.	Female -er > Male	1	0.24	0	0	3	0.73	0	0
2.	Female < Male -ee	3	0.73	0	0	0	0	2	0.49

Table 10. Role and number of TQ types in female - male interview discourse of 41.000 words

The Tables 10 and 11 indicate that both male and female speakers of Serbian are prone to using challenging TQs to an equal extent, particularly in the less powerful discourse position of an interviewee, strongly suggesting the general attitude of the speakers of Serbian toward a more powerful position interlocutor in an act of communication. The overall research finding also show that the Serbian corpus exhibited more numerous challenging TQs in Serbian than in English, the index values being 0.2 and 0.02, respectively.

	SERBIAN CORPUS	EPISTEMIC MODALITY	INDEX PER 10,000	ATTENUATIVE	INDEX PER 10,000	FACILITATIVE	INDEX PER 10,000	CHALLENGING	INDEX PER 10,000
1.	Female -er > Female	0	0	1	0.25	0	0	0	0
2.	Female < Female -ee	5	1.25	0	0	0	0	2	0.50

Table 11. Role and number of TQ types in female - female interview discourse of 40.000 words.

The labels used for the examples from the English corpus also apply in illustrative segments of the Serbian transcripts.

- (10) *Pomislite li nekad da je život mogao da Vas odvuče u neku drugu profesiju? (Fer > Fee)*
 - *Zbog toga što sam od malena ..., jer je to ono što mi lako ide i za šta je potreban sluh. I muzika je jedna vrsta jezika, zar ne?*⁴
- (11) *Kako uspevaš da budeš uspešna majka, supruga i direktor? Danas je to jako teško ostvariti, zar ne? (Mer > Fee)*
 - *Baš jeste. Odgovor je naravno u do perfektnosti razijenom sistemu funkcionisanja i dobroj organizaciji. Uz sve to, preostaje vrlo malo vremena za san, ...ciljeve verujemo.*⁵

⁴ <http://casopisinterfon.org/2013/04/07/intervju-tamara-zivkovic-zivot-u-ritmu-violine/>. Retrieved on October 2nd 2013.

⁵ <http://www.milosblog.com/wp/internet-marketing/intervju-dragana-dermanovic-princeza-domace-blogsfere/1091.html>. Retrieved on October 3rd 2013.

Finally, based on the frequency index derived from 10.000 words shows, it can be deduced that male speakers in Serbian, as opposed to the English corpus, use more modal epistemic TQs, expressed by the value of 0.72 in comparison to the English 0.68. On the other hand, female speakers appear to use more facilitative TQs, as the data show the index value of 1.24, while the index for male speakers is 1.01.

4. Conclusion

According to the findings of this study, the use of tag questions in interview-based discourse could be associated predominantly with the pragmatic strategies of seeking agreement and facilitation in both English and Serbian. Among other strategies described in the introductory part, the challenging one seems to be unequally represented in the corpus. Challenging tag questions through forms of either confrontation and defense proved to be ten times more present in Serbian than in English, potentially pointing to the kind of attitude interlocutors take in an act of communication of unequal encounters. The array of linguistic devices for this pragmatic purpose appeared to be much wider in Serbian, with *što da ne?*, *malo li je?*, *ili šta?*, *pa šta?*, *ko bi?* than in English, where this pragmatic use can be represented only by sporadic tags such as *why not?*.

It has been established in the present research that tag questions usage in interview-based discourse is predominantly culturally-conditioned. When regarded contrastively, the results have shown that the speakers of English appear to use three times more tag-questions than speakers of Serbian, quantitatively indicated by the frequency index per 10,000 words. However, on a more general level, these findings could not be brought into a relation with any smaller-scale tentativeness in speech on the part of Serbian speakers, but rather a higher degree of politeness in the language employed by the speakers of English when addressing members of either gender.

When it comes to the gender issue in interview discourse tag using, the present research results corroborate the approach according to which both of the genders tend to equally use tag questions in their speech. Tags in English do not seem to be gender-conditioned, since in terms of the total number in the entire corpus, both male and female English speakers use them to an equal extent, supported by the 50% share of the overall usage. In Serbian, the slight preponderance is on the side of female speakers, the ratio being 60% to 40%. However, when it comes to frequency index values, calculated by the number of tags in 10.000 words of the corpus, it appears that English female speakers use the largest number of tags when interacting with male speakers (9.42) and that male speakers use fewest tags when communicating with other male speakers (2.68). Contrary to the previous, the Serbian male speakers would use most tags in their interaction with women (2.44), while the lowest index was registered with male-to-male interaction among Serbian speakers (0.32). Therefore, tag questions in English, and probably in any other language for that matter, should not be associated only with female speakers, as both men and women tend to use various types of tag questions (Weatherall, 2002: 87), but rather with hesitancy and with utterances that seek confirmation on a more universal level.

Lastly, the two most representative roles that tag questions can have in both English and Serbian interview-based discourse are epistemic modality, with around half of all the instances of TQ using and facilitation, but the latter with only over a quarter in Serbian. It should be noted that of all four groups of the corpus, the English female speakers had the highest index value for all the pragmatic roles tags can have. This may indicate that even though female speakers may use more tags, this does not suggest any inferiority in communicative exchange. When it comes to the role that TQs can have and their relation to gender, it can be concluded that both male and female speaker indexes of modal and facilitative tags tend to rise when addressing an interlocutor of the opposite gender in a more powerful position, and it falls when the interlocutor is of the same gender. As for the Serbian speakers, the index values exhibit a rising trend when addressing interlocutors of the opposite gender only for the facilitative tags. The female speakers of Serbian use the most tags with epistemic modality significance in communication with both genders, particularly when in a more powerless position of the interviewee.

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ULOGA UPITNOG DODATKA U DISKURSU INTERVJUA ENGLESKOG I SRPSKOG JEZIKA

Rezime

Ovaj rad predstavlja istraživanje koje je imalo za cilj da otkrije stepen u kom govornici engleskog i srpskog jezika koriste upitni dodatak kao komunikativnu strategiju za ostvarenje različitih pragmatikih funkcija u interakciji sa sagovornikom. Kontrastivno istraživanje malog obima u osnovi rada je umnogome inspirisano osobenostima diskursa obeleženog polnim i karakteristikama kulture po nalazima R. Lakoff (1975, 2004), i kasnije autora kao što su Holmes (1986), Romaine (2003), Talbot (2003), Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (2003) i drugih. Istraživanje je zasnovano na analizi kontekstualizovane upotrebe upitnih dodataka iz korpusa tekstova u žurnalističkom registru na 100 intervju na engleskom i toliko na srpskom jeziku koje su dali govornici muškog i ženskog pola za novine i časopise na internetu. Utvrđeno je da je od četiri osnovne uloge koje se mogu pripisati upitnim dodacima, u oba jezika govornici ih



najviše koriste za postizanje efekta epistemičke modalnosti i pospešivanja razmene u diskursu. Na osnovu frekvencijskog indeksa u 10.000 reči, rezultati pokazuju da je prva funkcija svojstvenija govornicima muškog pola, dok je druga karakterističnija za ženski pol. Pragmatska uloga atenuacije je najčešće primenjivana kada je komunikativni čin bio usmeren prema govornicima muškog pola, dok su govornici srpskog jezika oba pola u desetostruko većoj meri upotrebljavali upitne priveske sa takozvanim izazivačkim implikacijama.

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