Tag Questions in South Asian Englishes

Research into the pragmatics of world Englishes has been on the increase in recent years. As utterance elements that are syntactically optional (Pichler 2013: 4) and rather carry discourse-pragmatic functions, tag questions, in particular, have been investigated predominantly in first-language varieties of English (e.g. Tottie & Hoffmann 2006; Barron *et al*. 2015), but also in selected second-language varieties like Philippine, Trinidadian (e.g. Westphal 2021) or Indian English (IndE; e.g. Lange 2012; Lange & Leuckert 2020). Against this background, the present study extends empirical research into tag questions in the Kachruvian outer circle by investigating their usage patterns in Sri Lankan English (SLE) as evident from the respective spoken part of the International Corpus of English (ICE) and comparing them to realisations of tag questions in IndE and the historical input variety British English (BrE). The study is concerned with the following research questions:

1. Can quantitative differences in the use of tag questions be attested across the three varieties?
2. To what extent is the choice of a variant or an invariant tag influenced by (a combination) of structural, contextual and sociobiographic factors in all three varieties?
3. Do speakers of IndE and SLE exhibit tag question patterns that
   a. are pan-South Asian, i.e. set both of them apart from BrE?
   b. are variety-specific for the two South Asian Englishes?

In order to answer these research questions, 3211 tag questions were annotated for the following contextual, structural and sociobiographic variables:

- VARIETY: BrE vs. IndE vs. SLE
- CONTEXT: the specific communicative context in private/public settings according to the ICE corpus design
- INDIG_LANG: whether indigenous terms were used in the utterance
- SENTENCE_STRUCTURE: declarative vs. interrogative vs. imperative
- NEGATION: whether or not the respective utterance is negated
- PAUSES: whether or not one or more pauses occur in the respective utterance
- FUNCTION: the tag question's function (i.e. facilitative vs. informative vs. punctuational),
- TYPE: the tag question's type (i.e. auxiliary vs. indigenous vs. other)
- TENSE: the tense of the utterance the tag question occurs in (i.e. present vs. past vs. future)
- GENDER: whether the speaker is female or male
- GROUPGENDER: whether other speakers present in the communicative situation were of the same gender as the speaker
- AGE: the speaker's age (<26 vs. ≥26)

Overall, tag questions occur more frequently in SLE than in IndE and BrE. Furthermore, the results of multifactorial statistical analyses, including a random forest (cf. Breiman 2001) and a generalised linear mixed model tree (cf. Fokkema et al. 2018), indicate that the choice of variant vs. invariant tag question is highly dependent on the above-mentioned factors as well as on interactions of said factors. Moreover, IndE and SLE exhibit pan South Asian tag question patterns, with SLE featuring an additional unique tag question (*ne*), the realisation of which seems particularly influenced by additional sociobiographic factors, such as the speaker's home language and additional languages.

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