The perception of multilingual question tags in Nigeria and Trinidad

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Pragmatic makers are productive linguistic features for research on the multilingual pragmatics of New Englishes. Speakers in New Englishes contexts frequently embed pragmatic markers borrowed from indigenous languages into English (e.g. Lim & Borlongan 2011; Unuabonah et al. 2021; Mbakop 2022). This multilingualism is also evident with regard to question tags, which are conceptualized as a set of pragmatic markers that includes variant (e.g. *do you*, *is it*) and invariant question tags (e.g. *right*, *eh*). Previous research on the use of question tags in Nigerian (Westphal 2022) and Trinidadian English (Wilson et al. 2017) shows a high degree of (multilingual) variation in both varieties. Nigerians commonly employ forms borrowed from indigenous Nigerian languages and Trinidadians frequently use forms associated with Creole. In both contexts, variant question tags are rarely used. Despite the growing body of research on question tags in New Englishes – and pragmatic markers in general – there is hardly any research on how speakers perceive these forms and in how far they accept 'local' pragmatic markers as part of the local standard variety.

This paper addresses this research gap and analyzes the perception of multilingual question tags among Nigerian and Trinidadian university students by means of a survey study. The analysis focuses on the perception of variant question tags, *eh*, *OK*, *right*, and *you know* as well as *abi*, *o*, and *sha* in Nigeria and *ent*, *nah*, and *not so* in Trinidad. The survey contains a multiple-choice test, where participants were presented with different dialogue scenarios and were asked to select the form they found most appropriate from a given list. In addition, the survey includes an indirect language attitude test, in which participants rated the use of different question tags on attitudinal scales and added open comments. The analysis is based on 49 completed questionnaires from Nigeria and 166 from Trinidad.

The results show that there is a preference for variant question tags over invariant ones, and students rated variant question tags most favorably regarding items reflecting 'decency'. This Standard Language Ideology, which is bias toward variant forms, is much more pronounced in Nigeria, where students generally downrated indigenous forms. In Trinidad, students demonstrated strong pride in Creole forms, evaluating them favorably especially in terms of 'expressiveness'. For both student groups the results also demonstrate a strong (register) awareness of when and for which function which form is appropriate. For example, *you know* was mostly selected for emphatic functions in private conversations, *OK* for classroom settings, and *right* when asking for confirmation or new information.

These results indicate that the endonormative stabilization of Trinidadian English seems to be more advanced than of Nigerian English in terms of the acceptance of local pragmatic markers. These perceptual insights provide valuable data for understanding the dynamics of variation in the use of question tags. The paper argues for a stronger inclusion of the speakers' perspectives in research on the pragmatics of New Englishes and shows one innovative way how perceptual data on pragmatic markers may be collected with a survey study.

[500 words]

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