Exploration of forms and functions of Tag Questions in Pakistani English

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Abstract

The present research contributes in the exploration of the similarity or difference among Pakistani English and the native varieties. The study observes the formal and functional features of tag questions in Pakistani Written English Corpus. It follows the model used and presented by Axelsson for the analysis of tag questions. The results reveal that, in terms of form, Pakistani writers avoid the non-standard tags and follow the set patterns of the native English writers. Most of the tags are used with the declarative anchors; however, imperative anchors are also found, but interrogative and exclamative anchors are avoided. Both constant and reversed polarities are found, however, the latter with higher frequency. In terms of functions, the writers have used to mitigate the intensity of command or the event. Tag questions perform the similar functions as in

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the native varieties of English. The study reveals that Pakistani English conforms to the native varieties in some features such as in tag questions.

Introduction

The voices of 'World Englishes' cannot remain unheard in the present age. Researchers across the world are contributing in this comparatively new-emerging field. Many non-native varieties of English have been acknowledged as separate varieties which have been indigenized in the course of time. The same efforts are in progress in Pakistan where scholars are trying to highlight the linguistic and cultural differences among the native English varieties and the one used in Pakistan. Their remarkable efforts are to bring these differences to the conscious level of common people who may feel at home while using the indigenized variety of English. The present study contributes in this field by exploring the formal and functional features of tag questions found in Pakistani English.

Tag questions or question tags have been the focus of attention since the last two decades. Scholars have consumed their energies to explore the formal and functional uses of tag questions and their relative uses. A Tag Question normally has the following structure:
It's hot today, isn't it?

It consists of two parts, i.e. anchor and the tag. The first statement (its hot today) is called anchor and the attached question that consists of the relative subject and the operator is called tag. Axelsson (2001) observes tag questions and says that a tag question consists of an anchor and a tag (as defined above). The anchor of the TQ may be declarative, imperative, interrogative or exclamative and tag is an interrogative clause whose subject (personal pronoun and *there*) and operator correspond to that of anchor. There may be enclitic or non-enclitic negation in the tag. The present study limits itself to the general purpose corpus of Pakistani Written English (compiled by Mahmood & Mahmood, 2008).

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The present study takes written corpus into account because Pakistani English has been the focus of attention for the indigenous scholars and efforts are being made to standardize this variety and there is a general tendency to rely on published writings for the purpose. The present study will contribute in this campaign by exploring the tilt of the usage of tag questions. (cf. Holmes, 1982; 1984; 1995; Algeo, 1990; Roesle, 2001; Axelsson, 2011). The study will lead other researchers to explore the spoken corpus of Pakistani English. The main purpose of the study is to check the formal and functional features of TQs found in PWE. The study observes whether the subject and operators in anchor and tag correspond to each other or there are deviations. And if there are functional deviations how they affect the functions of TQs and if not, what are the functions that writers want TQs to perform in PWE.

Literature Review

Scholars have been trying to find out the inter and intra variety differences in englishes using various approaches and methods. They have consumed energies to find differences on phonological, syntactic and sociolinguistic basis. Pakistani English has got attention in the last decade and researchers are putting their efforts in the acknowledgment of PakE as a different standardized variety.

The syntactic variations in PakE have been observed by many scholars. Baumgardner (1987) points out that the English in Pakistan is being contextualized in the native setting and observes that to get thorough understanding of Pakistani newspaper, the reader must be familiar with Urdu language and Islamic context as they both are in use in local newspapers. Rehman (1990) compares PakE with standard British English and discusses the differences, however, his research was not based on sophisticated methodology and large data (Baumgardner, 1993). Baumgardner (1993) discusses the grammatical innovations and points out that there are differences in verb complementation in PakE.

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Tag questions have been a focus of attention since last two decades. Several studies have been conducted on the form and functions of TQs. Holmes (1982) conducted a study on 43,000 words spoken corpus New Zealand and extracted 73 variant tags and 17 invariant tags. She studied canonical tags in terms of solidarity i.e. positive politeness devices (cf. Brown & Levinson, 1987). Holmes furthers her study in 1984 and differentiates between the men's and women's use of tag questions. She comes up with the conclusion that women use more tags "expressing speaker's solidarity with, or positive attitude to addressee" (1984: 54). Holmes (1995) extends the corpus data and confines her research to variant tags, the frequency of which is not mentioned by Holmes but can be estimated to round about 100. Her results showed that women use more facilitative tags than men and the reason she implicates is that women have a tendency "to adopt a supportive and facilitative role in conversation" (1995: 83). Throughout her works, Holmes's focus remains to be on the politeness strategies.

Algeo (1990) finds different uses of politeness strategies in BrE and AmE. He developed a model for analyzing politeness strategies. He categorizes TQs in terms of functions and observes that impolite uses of TQs would not be found in AmE: "the impoliter types are distinctively British" (1990: 449). Later in 2001, Roesle applied Algeo's categories to larger spoken corpora of BrE and AmE and after analysis modified Algeo's (1990) categories and extended the model from five to eight categories. She concludes that "British and American English differ in terms of frequency, pronunciation, grammar and pragmatics" (Roesle, 2001: 86). Her work contributed impressively in the field of corpus based research on tag questions.
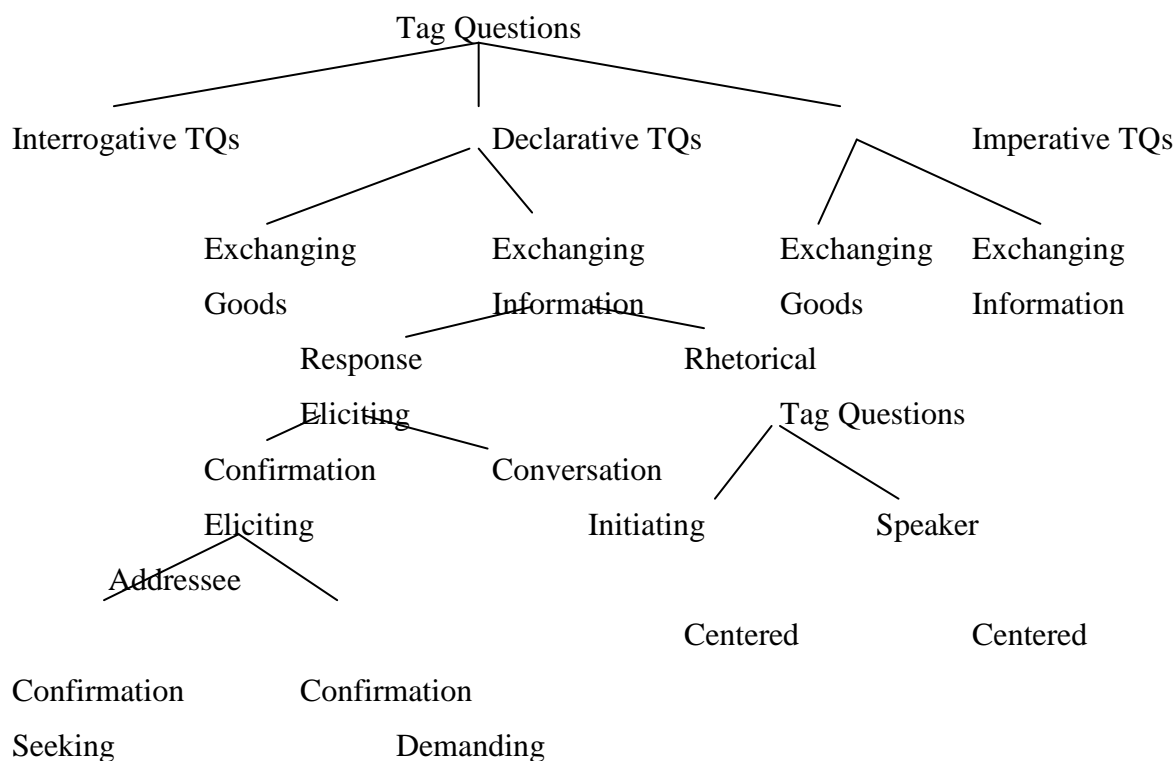
The comparison and analysis of tag questions has not been limited to inter-varieties corpora. The researchers have also put their energies on the analysis of intra-variety corpora. Axelsson (2011) conducted a research on the formal and functional differences of TQs in the two subcorpora of BNC i.e. fiction dialogue corpus and spoken demographic subcorpus. Her major aim remains to compare TQs in fiction dialogue, their frequency, formal features and pragmatic functions. She finds that form and functions of TQs differ in terms of frequency, form and function. For the functional analysis of TQs, she develops a model based on fiction sub-corpus quoted below:

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Tag Questions

Interrogative TQs   Declarative TQs   Imperative TQs

              Exchanging   Exchanging   Exchanging   Exchanging
              Goods   Information   Goods   Information
                        Response   Rhetorical
                        Eliciting   Tag Questions
              Confirmation   Conversation
              Eliciting   Initiating   Speaker
        Addressee
                                        Centered   Centered

Confirmation   Confirmation
Seeking   Demanding

 (Adapted from: Axelsson 2011, p. 87)

The same model would be applied in the functional analysis of the present study as the present work also deals with written corpus.

Methodology

The present study is a corpus based work; the general purpose corpus of 2.1 million words of Pakistani Written English (compiled by Mahmood & Mahmood, 2008) has been used in the present study. The corpus analysis software 3.2.4 has been used for the data extraction. However, the checklist prepared and used by Axelsson (2011) for the extraction of tag questions from the data has been used.

After extracting the data from the PWE, their syntactic form and polarity is observed to determine whether they follow the traditional grammar or there are variations on the basis of

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variety. Moreover, an attempt is made to determine their functions using the model presented by Axellsom (2011: p. 87) and to observe whether their functions differ on the basis of their syntactic forms.

Data Analysis

The following table shows the basic categorization of tag questions found in PWE.

Size of Corpus Used	Tag Questions in Corpus			Total
	Declarative TQs	Interrogative TQs	Imperative TQs	49
2.1 million	44	1	4	

The results show that tag questions with declarative anchor are larger in number than any other type of anchor. Only two anchors are found with imperative statements (1, 2 & 3) and one with the interrogative anchor (3).

1) Now please let me eat; <u>will you</u>?
2) Just help Aalia, <u>will you</u>?
3) Saleem, you'll bring your stamps, <u>will you</u>?
4) Let's not talk about religion, <u>shall we</u>?
5) Would you like any of your friends and relatives to have seen her as she appeared today? <u>Would you</u>. Begum?

The sections below deal with the formal functions of tag questions.

Formal Features of Tag Questions

The following section deals with the formal features of tag questions.

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1. Polarity

The tag operators and anchor operators have been observed in terms of polarity in anchor and the tag. The formal definition of tag questions prefers that there should be the reversed polarity. However, the constant polarity is also acceptable. The results reveal that 40 out of 49 instances follow the preference in polarity, i.e. they have reversed polarity as in (5, 6 & 7) below:

6) You <u>didn't</u> read the email I sent, <u>did you</u>?

7) You<u>'re not </u>Arab, <u>are you</u>?

8) He <u>resembles</u> Aftab, <u>doesn't he</u>?

The only instance with interrogative anchor follows the constant polarity as in (5 above). The imperative tag questions also follow the constant polarity with positive anchor and positive tag as in (1, 2, 3 & 4 above).

Total TQs	Positive/Negative	Negative/Positive	Positive/Positive	Total Reversed Polarity	Total Constant Polarity
49	28	12	9	40	9
100%	57.1%	24.4 %	18.3 %	81.6 %	18.4%

There is greater preference for the reversed polarity. The results show that there is higher tendency to use the tag questions with positive/negative polarity. However, the TQs whose anchor is imperative or interrogative use the same polarity and that is positive/positive, as in (5, 6, 7, 8 & 9 above).

The other deviated pattern that occurs in the corpus is a positive/positive polarity with the addition of *or* with the tag. It can be observed in (9, 10 & 11)

9) They are geometric shapes only. Or <u>are they</u>?

10) How skewed our perception might be is another issue, or <u>is it?</u>

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11) They were keen, focused, and far more nationalist to accomplish their goals. Or <u>were they</u>?

In the normal way (9) should have been like this: *they are geometric shapes only. Aren't they?* or with non enclitic negation i.e. *…Are they not?* But the pattern is disturbed when the writers of these three instances include *or* with the tag and use the constant polarity in the tag. This might refer to a special pattern of Pakistani English as all the three instances have been written by three different writers. However, no generalizations can be made on such a small data.

2 Negation (enclitic & non-enclitic) in tags

Both enclitic and non-enclitic negation are found in the tags. However, the enclitic (e.g. *hasn't*) negation is more frequent than non-enclitic (e.g. *has it not*) negation. Only three non-enclitic instances are found out of total 28 instances of negative tags. These are (12, 13 & 14):

12) 'You were thinking of me, <u>were you not</u>?
13) But he went down fighting, <u>did he not</u>?
14) Just a few girls wearing skirts and flimsy blouses dancing away and staring at you. Just your average harmless voyeuristic fun, <u>is it not</u>?

3 Tag Operators

The only non-standard instance that has been found in the total of 49 instances is

Tag Operators	Frequency	Percentage
You	20	40.8
It	11	22.4
We	7	14.2
They	3	6.1
I	3	6.1

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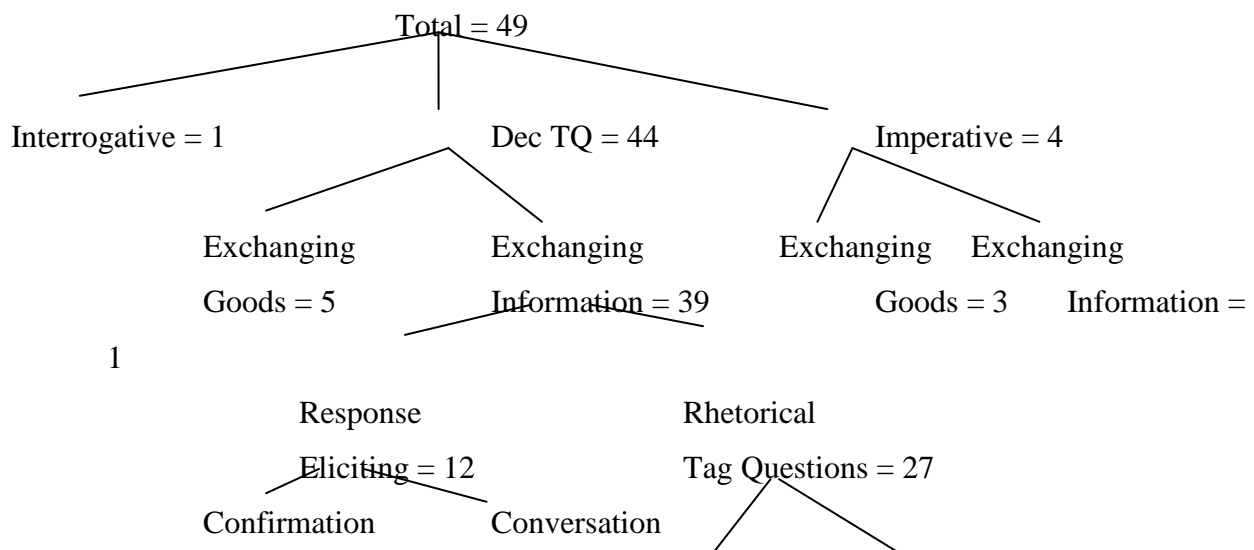|		
He	3	6.1
She	2	4.0
Total	49	100

The results show that the most frequent tag subject is *you* with the highest frequency of 20. 3 out of 4 tags with imperative anchors also have the tag subject *you* and only 1 with *we* as a subject in imperative tag question. Lower to that is *it* with the frequency occurrence of 11. The least instances are found with the subject of *he* and *she* with frequency 3 and 2 respectively.
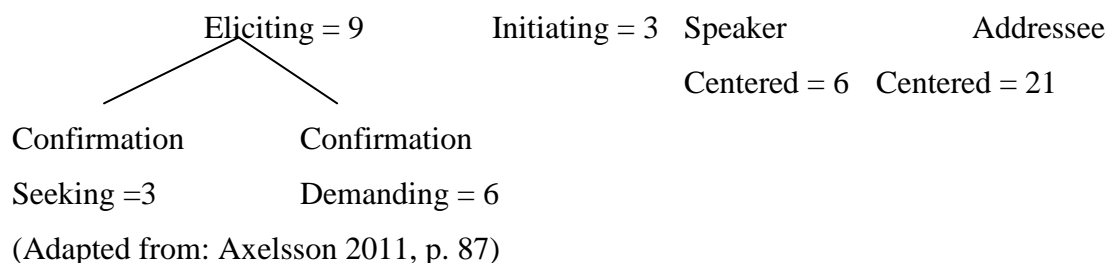
Functional Features of Tag Questions

The table below shows the frequency and percentage of all the three types of tag questions.

Total Tag Questions	Declarative TQs	Imperative TQs	Interrogative TQs
49	44	4	1
100%	89.7%	8.16%	2.04%

The above results show that declarative tag questions are most frequent in Pakistani English, imperative TQs possess 8.16% of the total tags and the only interrogative tag question is found in the data.

Total = 49

Interrogative = 1   Dec TQ = 44   Imperative = 4

Exchanging   Exchanging   Exchanging   Exchanging

Goods = 5   Information = 39   Goods = 3   Information =

1

Response   Rhetorical

Eliciting = 12   Tag Questions = 27

Confirmation   Conversation

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Eliciting = 9   Initiating = 3   Speaker   Addressee

                                            Centered = 6   Centered = 21

Confirmation   Confirmation

Seeking =3   Demanding = 6

(Adapted from: Axelsson 2011, p. 87)

The following sections discuss the functional analysis of the Tag Questions according to the model given above.

1. Imperative Tag Questions

Three out of four imp TQs fall in the category of exchanging goods and services and the one in the exchanging of information. In the category of exchanging goods and services the speaker commands the addressee to do some specific task, and the tags are used to lessen the intensity of commands. In (15), the speaker is demanding service from the addressee to help Aalia, and the use of tag *will you* lessens the intensity of the command, on the one hand, and demands confirmation from the addressee that the command will be obeyed.

    15) 'That's fine. Just help Aalia <u>will you</u>?

In (16) the speaker is a teacher and Saleem is the student. The speaker is ordering the addressee to bring the stamps and becomes polite by using the tag *will you*, also he demands confirmation and the addressee, in its reply, says, *'yes, sir'*. In (17), again, the speaker tries to mitigate the intensity of the command.

    16) Saleem, you'll bring your stamps, <u>will you</u>?

    17) Now please let me eat; <u>will you</u>?

    18) I only believe in Allah and his one last messenger Mohammad. <u>Let's not talk about religion, shall we</u>? Gives me indigestion.

      Phew! Yes yaar, we should not discuss things that we do not know about.

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In (18), a proposal is given to the addressee, not to talk about religion and explains that it gives him some indigestion. The addressee then accepts the proposal not to talk about religion as they lack knowledge in that.

2. Declarative Tag Questions

This section deals with the functions of declarative tag questions.

2.1 Exchanging Goods or services/ Exchanging Information

Declarative tag questions are further categorized in 'TQs exchanging information' and 'TQs exchanging goods or services' the former with higher frequency.

Exchanging Goods or Services

Declarative tag question exchanging goods or services are less in use as there are only 5 instances in the total of 44 declarative tag questions. The primary function of the exchanging goods and services is either offering or commanding something.

19) You do want to eat <u>dont you</u>?
20) We want to provide our little girls a worry-free childhood and an intact future. <u>Don't we</u>?
21) I think we should order now or the waiter is gonna kill us with his stares... <u>shouldn't we?</u>
22) I could not lend my horse to a complete stranger. <u>Could I</u>?

In (19 & 20) above, the service has been offered; while in (21) the speaker is quite uncertain or wants the confirmation from the addressee to get the services. In (22) the speaker is explaining that he could not exchange his good i.e. *horse*. All the instances that come under the category of *exchanging goods and services* follow the reversed polarity.

Declarative Tag Questions Exchanging Information

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This category has been further subdivided in *rhetorical tag questions* and *response eliciting tag question.* These categories have been dealt under separate headings

2.1.1. Rhetorical Tag Questions

The rhetorical TQs are further subcategorized in '*Addressee centered'* and '*Speaker centered'.*
2.1.1.a. Speaker-Centered Rhetorical TQs

The rhetorical TQs that deal with the events which are only known to the speaker are categorized as speaker centered TQs and the events with which are known to the speaker only are known as 'A-events'. For example

23) A: "I'm so sorry love. He whispered in her ear as his hand moved over her body. "I am such a jerk aren't I, forgetting our anniversary! He felt her body shudder under his touch. He smiled as she turned to look at him and before she could complain, he put his lips on her.

In the example given above, the speaker knows that his forgetfulness can create a problem for him in his conjugal life. He confesses his fault before he could get any complaint.

2.1.1.b. Addressee-Centered Rhetorical TQs

The rhetorical questions that deal with the events that are known to the addressee only are called Addressee centered and such events i.e. events known to the addressee only are known as 'B-events'. For example in (24)

24)   S

he felt like screaming and crying loudly and running to embrace Dadi Anna's corpse opening her mouth, kissing her pale lips, and asking her, 'You were thinking of me, were you not? See, I'm here, why are you now lying quietly with your eyes closed…

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A few other instances have been found where the addressee is not participant in the conversation, as they are the writings in mags, news etc. In such places the tag questions are, off course, addressee centered whose function is to let the reader think for the proposition made in the anchor. As in (25 & 26) below:

25) Theres no sex, theres no physical interaction, theres no stripping or lap dances. <u>Just a few girls wearing skirts and flimsy blouses dancing away and staring at you. Just your average harmless voyeuristic fun, is it not</u>?

26) The traffic was stopped including an ambulance carrying a man in a critical state, who breathed his last when he was unable to reach the hospital on time. <u>The life of any human being is equally precious as that of a President or a high ranking government official. Isn't it?</u>

These tags function as a station on the road where the reader stops for a while to think over the propositions which are made in the anchors before he goes on.

2.1.2 Response Eliciting TQs

Response eliciting TQs are subdivided in conversation initiating and confirmation eliciting categories.

Conversation initiating

The three instances are found in the data where the intention of addressee is to initiate a conversation. In (27 & 28) below, the aim of the speaker is to initiate a conversation and the addressee is required to answer.

27) He felt the coolness of the apple's touch on his hands and face, and fixed his eyes on the door. '<u>You're not upset, are you</u>?' Rasheed asked his wife, rubbing his fingers on her cheeks as she lay beside him in bed. 'Why should I be?'

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28) Mianji felt pity for the man. Looking through his pockets, he asked the beggar, 'The four annas weren't enough, were they?' The beggar answered him in a choked voice, as though he was barely managing to hold back a falling roof on his raised hands. He said, 'Sir, I am not a beggar.

Confirmation Seeking

Confirmation eliciting category has been categorized in Confirmation seeking and confirmation demanding.

A. Confirmation Seeking

The situation where the speaker is uncertain about the event being discussed, he seeks confirmation from the addressee. Three instances of such situations have been found in the data. These are (29 & 30) below:

29) 'That's kind of scary, Nani,' Saira interrupts me. 'I mean, it's weird to have real stories about witches and all. I always read that stuff in books, but it's not real, is it?' I pat her shoulder. 'Well, we were very young and so the story felt real to us. Do you want to hear what happens next?'

30) 'To draw boundaries between his demands and my needs without feeling like I'm a bad person for having needs in the first place. It makes me a bad person, doesn't it?' 'No Sara, it just makes you real,

B. Confirmation Demanding

Confirmation demanding TQs are used where the speaker is certain about the event and knows the situation under discussion and still wants a confirmation from the addressee. Below are the instances which have been found in the data demanding confirmation.

31) 'Sain . . . please, for God's sake, forgive and release us.'

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'You have eloped with this girl, haven't you?' thundered Rais Ahmad Khan, thumping on
  the ground with one foot.

'Yes, Sain,' confessed Mahmud.

32) 'So, how long before you head off to the homeland?' Samia asked, following me into
  the bedroom.

'Tomorrow morning. You didn't read the e-mail I sent, did you?' I yanked my shirt over my
  head and tossed it at Samia.

'Not with any kind of obsessive attention to detail.'

33) "I can see there's something in your mind. Come on now, out with it.

"I don't know, uncle."

"But I do. You're smoking with your friends, aren't you?"

Nina almost screamed, "How did you know that?" "I didn't, but now I do,"

In the instances above, the speaker knows the event and so does the addressee. Thus, the confirmation demanding tag questions deal with the *AB-event* i.e. the event known to both addressee and the speaker. The intention of the speaker might be to mitigate the bad-sounding of the event (as in 33), or the speaker wants to influence the addressee and thus wants to come over the situation (as in 31).

Conclusion

The present research focuses on the forms and functions of the tag questions in the corpus of Pakistani Written Corpus. The results reveal that the writers in Pakistan do incorporate with the grammar as far as the tag questions are concerned. Non-standard tags (i.e. *innit,* which has replaced *isn't it* or *is it*) have been avoided. The reversed polarity is more frequent than the constant polarity. However, one deviated pattern has been found as far as the formal features are concerned; the constant polarity is found with the addition of *or* in the tag. Tag questions perform almost the similar functions in Pakistani English as they perform in native varieties of English. However, no generalizations can be made on such a small amount of data but the

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present research is a door which may open the new horizons for the upcoming researchers to find out the formal and functional features of tag question in larger data and in the spoken corpus.

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