

Exploring Stance-Taking through Tag Questions in British University Seminars: A Typological Analysis

Jiayi Wu¹, Lifang Wei^{2*}

¹School of Foreign Languages, Wenzhou University, Wenzhou, China

²School of Foreign Languages, Shaoxing University, Shaoxing, China

Email: 19817585002@163.com, *fangzi827@126.com

How to cite this paper: Wu, J. Y., & Wei, L. F. (2024). Exploring Stance-Taking through Tag Questions in British University Seminars: A Typological Analysis. *Open Journal of Modern Linguistics*, 14, 1060-1074. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ojml.2024.146056>

Received: October 30, 2024

Accepted: November 18, 2024

Published: November 21, 2024

Copyright © 2024 by author(s) and Scientific Research Publishing Inc. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

Abstract

This paper investigates the role of tag questions in expressing stance within British university seminars. Building on [Kimps's \(2018\)](#) classification of stance-conveying tag questions, this study uses the British seminars from the BASE Corpus to explore how university instructors and students use tag questions to communicate their attitudes, opinions, and perspectives during seminar discussions. The findings reveal that stance expression through tag questions spans a continuum, from alignment to neutral to disalignment, with various nuanced stance types emerging in specific seminar interactions. This research aims to provide insight into how tag questions function as a tool for stance expression in the interactive discourse characteristic of higher education seminars.

Keywords

Stance-Taking, Tag Questions, British University Seminars

1. Introduction

In engaging with the world and during the manifestation of communicative contact and subjectivities, individuals form and communicate attitudes, emotions, judgments, and commitments about objects or ideas; this process, often facilitated through language, is known as stance-taking ([Biber & Finegan, 1988](#)). Consequently, the language chosen by participants in the conversation is deeply intertwined with their stance. As [Du Bois \(2007: p. 139\)](#) states, “One of the most important things we do with words is to take a stance.”

Tag questions—linguistic structures that merge statements with questions ([Quirk et al., 1985](#))—play a significant role in stance-taking among conversational

participants. Through these questions, speakers can express both their position and underlying assumptions while also influencing the interpretive frame of the conversation (Kimps, 2018). More specifically, tag questions convey the stance of both the speaker and the listener in various ways. On the one hand, tag questions reveal the speaker's assumptions and expectations regarding the content of the proposition and the anticipated response from the listener. Yet, because tag questions inherently carry an element of uncertainty or implicit challenge, the stance conveyed can sometimes differ from the initial assumption or presupposition. This potential for inconsistency makes tag questions a compelling and important subject for further research.

The study investigates the use of tag questions as a means of expressing stance in British university seminars. Although tag questions are commonly found in seminar discussions, they remain an underexplored area, especially regarding the stances they convey. It is anticipated that a systematic analysis of the different stance types conveyed by authentic examples of tag questions, drawn from the British Academic Spoken English (BASE) Corpus, can offer insight into how teachers and students effectively use tag questions to express their viewpoints during classroom discussions. Additionally, this study contributes to the research on tag questions within the specific context of tertiary education classroom interactions.

The next section conducts a critical review of relevant theoretical and empirical studies on stance and tag questions, followed by a detailed description of the research methodology in the third section. This includes an overview of the stance-taking research framework (Kimps, 2018), the data sources used, and a step-by-step description of the analysis procedures. The section that follows presents a comprehensive examination of various stance types expressed by tag questions within the data, analyzing their roles in particular contexts. The next section is a brief discussion of the typology of tag questions in university seminar interactions, and the final section of the conclusion wraps up the study and points out directions for future research.

2. Literature Review

Since the 1970s, research on stance theory has grown, leading to three main perspectives: semantic, functional, and interactive. From a semantic perspective, Biber and Finegan (1988) conducted pioneering work on stance, categorizing stance markers by their semantic and grammatical characteristics. Conrad and Biber (2000) later developed a classification model, encompassing epistemic, attitudinal, and stylistic stances, while Precht (2000) concentrated on the semantics of certainty and doubt, emphasizing emotional and attitudinal expressions. Within the functional perspective, Fairclough (1992) regarded stance as a tool for conveying the speaker's intention, while Ochs (1993) saw stance as a fundamental aspect of the relationship between language and culture. Hyland (2005) proposed a framework for analyzing discourse stance, identifying four stance markers

through an examination of academic writing. From an interactive perspective, Bakhtin and Volosinov (1973) examined how positioning is constructed in everyday conversation, and Du Bois (2007) developed the “stance triangle” model, foregrounding the intersubjective dynamics between participants. Haddington (2004) explored methods of signaling and constructing stance in news interviews, focusing on the expression of stance between participants.

The study of tag questions has garnered significant attention in academic circles. Research has primarily focused on tag questions’ grammatical structures, sociolinguistic aspects, and functions. Regarding grammatical structure, researchers such as Quirk et al. (1985), Biber et al. (1999), and Huddleston and Pullum (2002) have thoroughly examined the polarity relationships in tag questions. Functionally, Holmes (1995) developed a framework around the pragmatic functions of tag questions within the politeness principle; Gabriela (2016) investigated their role in crisis negotiations, showing how they can help balance power dynamics and foster positive relationships. Meanwhile, Kimps et al. (2018) have applied systemic functional linguistics to examine tag questions’ roles in discourse, focusing on grammar, semantics, and prosody. From a sociolinguistic perspective, Lakoff (1975) explored how social variables like age, gender, and group affiliation influence the use of tag questions by speakers.

Research specifically addressing tag questions and stance remains relatively limited in number and scope, which indicates a significant gap in the field of research. Moore and Podesva (2009) conducted a comprehensive study on the discourse, grammatical, and phonological features of tag questions within a community of high school girls in northwest England, examining how style, social indexing, and social meaning are conveyed through their use. Kimps (2018) introduced a new framework for understanding the functional roles of tag questions, integrating both speech act functions and stance based on authentic conversational data from the LLC, COLT, and ICE-GB corpora. This framework is valuable because it provides a more complete approach to studying tag questions.

In summary, prior studies on stance and tag questions have laid a foundation for further exploration in this field. However, much of the existing research has concentrated on written academic discourse or everyday conversational contexts. There remains a clear and important research gap in studying tag questions within the context of oral academic discourse, such as university seminars, which reflects the need for this current study.

3. Research Methods

This study conducts a qualitative analysis of how stances are expressed through tag questions in classroom seminar interactions within the BASE Corpus. The central research question guiding this investigation is: What types of stances can tag questions convey in British university seminars? On the basis of this, the functions of tag questions in British university seminars are also discussed to see how they help achieve interactional dynamics.

This section will first outline the analytical framework developed by [Kimps \(2018\)](#), then discuss the data used for the study and detail the procedures for analysis.

3.1. Analytical Framework

According to [Kimps \(2018\)](#), tag questions signal the speaker's stance toward the proposition, underlying assumptions, and co-participants in the conversation. His research, based on authentic conversational data, identifies two main types of stances: those that establish common ground and those that challenge it. Here, "common ground" refers to the shared knowledge, assumptions, and beliefs between the two conversational parties. The typology of tag question stance types, aimed at negotiating this common ground, is structured as follows ([Figure 1](#)):

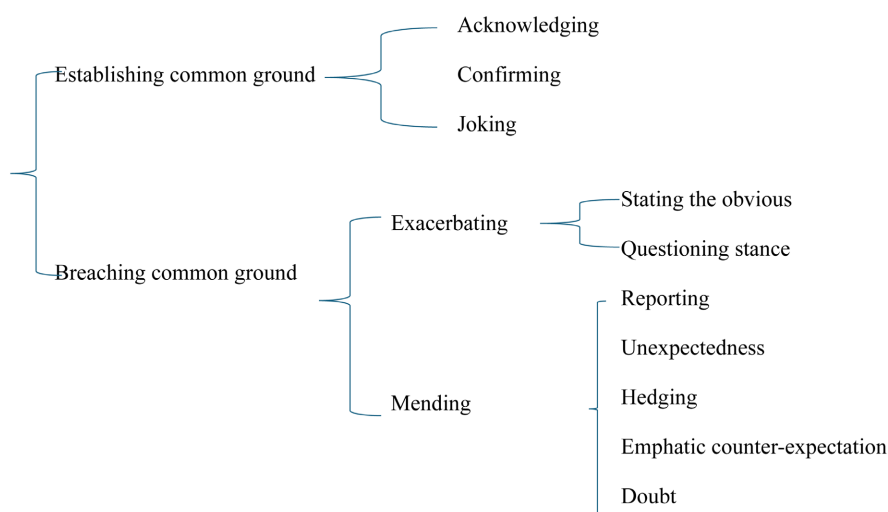


Figure 1. A typology of tag question stance types negotiating common ground (based on [Kimps \(2018\)](#)).

Kimps's typology thus offers a robust framework for coding tag question stances for the purposes of this study, facilitating the attainment of the research objective. Whether this typology fully applies to the university seminar setting within the BASE Corpus remains to be seen. Some stance types identified by Kimps may not be as prominent in the context of BASE seminars, while new stance types may also emerge within the data.

3.2. Description of Data

The BASE Corpus forms the data source utilized in this research. It has been developed as a partnership between the Universities of Warwick and Reading under the leadership of Hilary Nesi and Paul Thompson. The project was supported by funding from BALEAP, EURALEX, the British Academy, and the Arts and Humanities Research Council. The corpus includes 160 teacher-led lectures and 40 seminars recorded between 2000 and 2005, representing four main academic fields: social sciences, humanities and arts, physical engineering, and life sciences. For this study, the data focuses on the 40 seminars from the BASE Corpus,

spanning both undergraduate and graduate levels. These seminars feature a variety of discussion activities, including classroom debates, case studies, group discussions, and student performances, among other formats.

Seminars, as a primary form of academic discourse, are designed to foster a relaxed, open environment that encourages students to freely share their ideas and engage in learning through discussion. This format naturally involves significant interaction between teachers and students, as well as among students themselves, making it an ideal setting for examining discourse. This focus on seminars over lectures within the BASE Corpus is based on the seminar's unique interactive qualities, which are central to the study's goals. In addition, choosing the context of seminars may provide more insights to students from non-English university contexts and help them become familiar with the interactional patterns revealed through tag questions in seminar discussions, as they have not had access to seminars before.

3.3. Procedures for Analysis

The study began with a pilot phase, where two seminars from each academic discipline were selected for initial analysis. All transcripts were stored in word processing files and searched for potential tag question forms. Additionally, printed copies of the transcripts were manually reviewed to ensure that all instances of tag questions were identified. Each example of a tag question was then extracted into an Excel sheet along with its surrounding context, allowing for a detailed analysis of the stances expressed. The analysis was initially guided by *Kimps's (2018)* typology of tag question stances, with additional categories developed as new patterns emerged in the data. The same procedure was then applied to the remaining seminar data. Then, in order to ensure inter-coder reliability, data from 10 seminar sessions were coded by an additional researcher in linguistics, achieving a consistency rate of 92.5%. Cases where differences in interpretation arose were resolved through discussion. Following this section on research methods, the next section will present the qualitative findings on the stance types of tag questions within the BASE seminar data.

4. Results and Findings

This section provides a detailed qualitative analysis of the various subtypes of tag questions observed in the BASE seminars, with each subtype explained in depth. Broadly, tag questions can be categorized into three major types: those expressing stance alignment, those expressing a neutral stance, and those expressing disalignment. Each type is illustrated with examples from different contexts to clarify their use.

4.1. Tag Questions Expressing Stance Alignment

Tag questions that convey stance alignment can be further divided into three subtypes: acknowledging, confirming, and joking. Each subtype is examined in detail

below.

4.1.1. Tag Questions for Acknowledging

Acknowledging tag questions arise when both the speaker and listener share the same stance, with the listener's response (typically "yes") affirming the previous statement in the main clause of the tag question. In these instances, the listener fully agrees with the speaker, indicating that the listener's assumptions are aligned with those of the speaker and accurately reflect the situation. Acknowledging tag questions helps reinforce shared understanding and highlight the alignment of perspectives between participants. The following example illustrates this concept:

1) *ahsem001*

T2: ... so yes, it does come up this, er er... need for some sort of intimacy for self-expression through the written worder.

T1: In fact, that's a kind of echo of Sancho, isn't it?

T2: Yes.

T1: That particular.

T2: Yes, it is er yeah.

This example originates from a seminar in the arts and humanities, specifically discussing the theme of writing by Black authors in the UK. Two teachers were present, engaging in an analysis of the literary techniques in the book under discussion. After T1 shared an analysis of the book's content, T1 posed a tag question: "In fact, that's a kind of echo of Sancho, isn't it?" Here, T1 suggested that this element echoed Sancho's work. The reply, "yes," confirmed agreement with T1's interpretation. This exchange reflects that T1's statement was within the shared understanding of both teachers, demonstrating consistency in their stances.

4.1.2. Tag Questions for Confirming

When a speaker employs a confirmatory tag question, they often anticipate that they and the listener share the same stance, though they may not require the listener's explicit affirmation. In these cases, both parties maintain a shared understanding, and the speaker subtly reinforces this common ground, encouraging further input to achieve a mutual objective. For instance:

2) *pssem003*

S1: I suppose it's more open discussion, isn't it?

S2: Yeah, like putting ideas forward.

S3: Brainstorming.

S1: Yeah. Brainstorming. Yeah. And then then you have to cut it down and try, and think what's the best ideas that have come out of that brainstorming.

S2: Yeah, and make sure everyone's involved.

S1: And make sure everyone agrees as well to the best as possible.

S2: And make sure you try and think about every like eventuality.

This example is drawn from a social science seminar titled "Gender and Globalization," where students are reflecting on their performance after a group activity. S1 suggested the importance of *open* discussion in teamwork, hoping that

others would share this perspective and build upon it. S2 responded by narrowing the idea of open discussion to include only the proposal of ideas, while S3 contributed by defining open discussion more specifically as brainstorming. After S2 and S3 added depth to the shared understanding, S1, as the initiating speaker, continued with his viewpoint, emphasizing that it is essential to select the best ideas from the brainstorming session. From this foundation, the discussion evolved as the participants built on the shared ground, with many new insights emerging.

The use of confirmatory tag questions here encouraged participants who held similar views to share additional perspectives. In this interaction, participants often used affirmations like “yeah” to indicate alignment with others’ viewpoints. In some cases, new ideas were introduced without a clear confirmation first, but even in these instances, the underlying purpose was to validate the other’s position and reinforce the collective understanding, guiding the group toward consensus.

4.1.3. Tag Questions for Joking

Tag questions used for joking reveal the speaker’s sense of humor. The main clause of the tag question sets up a lighthearted remark, drawing attention to something amusing at the moment and encouraging listeners to consider their own stance. This type of humor relies on context and the specific content of the statement, excluding irony or exaggeration. Joking tag questions allow participants to demonstrate understanding, acknowledgment, and appreciation of the speaker. For example:

3) *sssem002*

*T: How are you doing for next week? Are you... Are you organized? Is everyone feeling alright about the presentations? **You probably haven't done anything yet, have you?** [laughter] Right er who's the Latin America group*

This example is taken from a social science seminar. Here, the teacher asked students about their progress on group projects at the start of class. The teacher used the main clause of the tag question—“You probably haven’t done anything yet”—to humorously suggest his assumption that students had not yet started their tasks. The negative-positive structure of the tag question here conveyed the teacher’s confidence in his assumption that the students were likely procrastinating. This stance appeared to align with the actual situation of the students. The laughter that followed this tag question added a layer of humor to the interaction.

Similar instances are seen in the next two examples, where the teacher humorously hints at his perception of the students’ inner thoughts.

4) *ahsem007*

*T: ...and then with that what do you make of that and then he's done it again ten years later. Has he run out of ideas or er... [mumbling] **You think that, don't you?** [laughter in group]*

5) *ahsem008*

*T: ...because you are bound to you know to have some flops and that's why I guess **a lot of these people always move on, don't they?** [laughter] You know,*

they're always on the next market, you know, so they sort of slash and burn.

Both examples suggest the teacher was aware of something subtly amusing in the situation, and he assumed most students shared his perspective. The students' laughter further signaled their acknowledgment of the teacher's humorous stance. In this way, tag questions for joking not only showcase the teacher's sense of humor but also invite students to engage in the conversation, lifting the classroom atmosphere and easing any academic stress.

4.2. Tag Questions Expressing Neutrality: Tag Questions for Informing

Tag questions for informing are used when a speaker highlights the current situation or adds new information through a tag question, reinforcing the shared knowledge or providing additional context that the listener may not have previously considered. In these cases, the speaker neither expects a response nor seeks confirmation of their statement. Here, the speaker primarily acts as the information source in the interaction, while the listener's role as a source is minimized, functioning instead as a background participant in the dialogue. For example:

6) *ahsem002*

T1: Er and it also seemed to take quite a long time for the Romans to get their heads around the idea of the fact that a coin didn't have to represent er the value of the metal contained.

T2: But this was true of the whole of the ancient world, wasn't it? *It's true of those states that are on a silver basis for their currency. They too have got er the idea that weight equals value and it's only with the advent into the Greek world of bronze that.*

In a session on Classical Literature and Ancient History, focusing on Greek and Roman coinage, two teachers discussed whether the value of ancient coins matched the actual value of the metals they contained. T1 remarked that it seemed to have taken the Romans a long time to grasp that coins did not need to represent the exact value of their metal content. T2 then responded with a tag question, stating, "But this was true of the whole of the ancient world, wasn't it?" By doing so, T2 provided additional background, noting that many ancient societies, especially those with silver-based currencies, equated weight with value. This stance was not intended to provoke a response from T1 but rather to add depth to their (shared) understanding.

In another example, from a physical science seminar, the teacher encouraged students to reflect on what they might try to improve for future tasks, asking, "Any conclusions here on what you might try and do better next time?" After several students shared their responses, the teacher used informative tag questions to suggest ideas the students hadn't considered, contributing new information to the collective knowledge. In this context, the teacher did not anticipate any direct replies from the students.

7) *pssem003*

T: Any conclusions here on what you might try and do better next time?

S1: *Be more open-minded about the possible problems you could have thrown at you.*

S2: *Yeah, think about.*

T: Okay, so that's where if we look back at our ground rules, it's around here again, isn't it?

4.3. Tag Questions Expressing Disalignment

This type of tag question encompasses various stances, including doubt, unexpectedness, counter-expectation, questioning, and stating the obvious. Below is a detailed examination of each subtype.

4.3.1. Tag Questions for Doubts

Tag questions expressing doubt allow the speaker to convey skepticism about previous assumptions, expectations, or attitudes, indicating uncertainty regarding the validity of the proposition. For instance:

8) *pssem002*

S1: *Somebody can just sort of... Who's down here? Just hold it up and...*

S2: *If you have one person in each corner, then you can move it down to the next corner. Yeah.*

S3: *These are all the same. Yeah. **But they're not at right-angles, are they? It's not quite a corner, is it?** Who are the blindfolded people? They are the only people that can touch the barrels.*

This example is taken from a physical engineering class focused on outdoor practical tasks, and the conversation occurred immediately after the teacher assigned a project. The materials provided were pipes of varying lengths and sizes, leading group members to discuss strategies for construction. S1 initiated the discussion, guiding the group toward the next steps based on prior conversation outcomes. However, S1's uncertain wording hinted at doubts about whether this approach would actually work effectively. In response, S2 suggested an arrangement for team roles to enhance efficiency, saying "yeah" to express confidence in this idea and hoping to gain agreement from the rest of the group for coordinated action in future steps.

S3, however, subtly challenged S2's suggestion by asserting that the pipe materials were the same, using "yeah" to appear aligned with S2's position initially. In reality, S3 detected a gap in the common understanding and, through two tag questions, highlighted flaws that had gone unnoticed, indirectly signaling that his stance differed from S2's. This interruption subtly questioned S2's proposed approach without direct confrontation, offering alternative guidance.

In teamwork, group members typically hold equal roles, and thus each participant is viewed as a shared source of information. To avoid open disagreement and prevent direct conflict, students used tag questions to gently signal inconsistencies in shared knowledge. This approach acknowledged the other's perspective while subtly suggesting alternative viewpoints, helping preserve the cohesion of the group discussion and maintaining a respectful and collaborative environment.

4.3.2. Tag Questions Expressing Unexpectedness

Tag questions expressing unexpectedness often convey the speaker's surprise or disbelief regarding the listener's stance or current behavior. When the speaker strongly disagrees with the listener's assertion, they may use a tag question to signal that the listener's stance seems misaligned and to invite further discussion to restore shared understanding. Unlike informative tag questions that simply provide information, tag questions expressing unexpectedness aim to renegotiate perspectives, reflecting the speaker's desire to address or alter the listener's or even their own viewpoint. For example:

9) *pssem003*

S1: We discussed it more than last time.

S2: I think we sort of split into two little groups talking about stuff and then we just joined together.

T1: So you've got quite a big group so that's interesting, isn't it? That you split up. How did that happen? How did you get back together? Was it spontaneous or did someone?

This example is taken from a physics engineering seminar. After completing a teamwork-based activity, the students began summarizing the lessons they had learned. They suggested dividing into two smaller groups to discuss separately and then combining as one. This approach, however, was not what the teacher had anticipated. In response, the teacher used a tag question to express surprise at the group's decision to split into two, employing two "how did..." structures to highlight the disparity between his own expectations and the group's actions. The subsequent question, which sought to clarify how the situation unfolded, indicated the teacher's intent to gather information from the students. This interaction was aimed at renegotiating and restoring a shared understanding where a gap had emerged.

4.3.3. Tag Question for Counter-Expectation

Counter-expectation refers to a situation where an event's outcome contradicts the initial assumptions or expectations of those involved in the discussion. Similar to tag questions expressing doubt, tag questions for counter-expectation indicate skepticism about a previously held assumption. Both types reveal a breach in common ground and signal the speaker's hope that the listener will supply additional information to help restore mutual understanding. However, a key distinction is that counter-expectation tag questions reflect the speaker's uncertainty about their own statements, acknowledging that the current proposition conflicts with their assumptions. For example:

10) *pssem001*

S1: We are talking about the T-I-O-2, I mean, talk about the semi... Semiconductor promotes the electron.

T: Oh.

S: It's the electron forms the semiconductor, isn't it? That's promoted.

T: Well... The... Well, the question A was why... Why is the rithian complex a

better oxidant and a better reductant and it's no mention of semiconductors, okay?

This instance comes from a physical science seminar. After a student made a statement using a tag question, it conveyed an expectation contrary to the teacher's presupposition. This implied that the student's statement had unintentionally disrupted the shared foundation of understanding. The teacher's hesitant response, beginning with "Well...The...Well," further illustrated the misalignment between the teacher's and student's expectations.

4.3.4. Tag Questions for Questioning

Tag questions with a questioning, potentially interrogative tone signal that the speaker disagrees with the listener's stance or actions, particularly when the two perspectives differ substantially or even conflict entirely. This divergence from the speaker's expectations disrupts shared understanding, as the speaker perceives the listener's stance to be misguided or even objectionable. In expressing dissatisfaction, the speaker strongly asserts their own position, challenging both the listener's role as a reliable source of information and the validity of their viewpoint. For example:

11) *sssem002*

S1: But it's not just... It's just they can't go on with such a debt. It's not because of western, western imperialism or anything. It's just they can't go on, but it isn't economically. It's not possible.

*S2: **But this is the whole point of the drop, the debt campaign, isn't it?** It's that the campaigners in the west who will say don't when they're still being held up for owing the west huge amounts of money that the westerners still, you know.*

This example is drawn from a social science seminar where students were debating why the United Nations and various NGOs have struggled to enact structural changes that would effectively improve women's lives. The discussion centers on two perspectives: Western imperialism and economic debt. S2 disagrees with S1's political explanation, arguing instead that economic factors related to debt are the real issue. To emphasize his stance, S2 employs tag questions to challenge S1's reasoning, expressing opposition and initiating a debate with a distinctly questioning tone.

4.3.5. Tag Questions for Stating the Obvious

Tag questions used to "state the obvious" function to reflect a position that the speaker considers self-evident, often reinforcing this stance with a tone of authority or certainty. In these instances, tag questions are not posed to genuinely seek agreement or clarification but instead to signal that the speaker's perspective should be considered a given, something beyond question or challenge. This type of tag question is frequently used to accentuate a strong contrast between the speaker's view and what they perceive to be an ill-informed or uncertain stance by the listener. It can have a confrontational edge, especially when the speaker views

the listener's response as misguided or lacking awareness. Importantly, the speaker does not necessarily dispute the facts presented by the listener; rather, they challenge the implications or conclusions the listener has drawn. When a speaker uses a tag question to state the obvious, they are often asserting a fact or viewpoint as indisputable, making it clear that no further debate or questioning is expected. The underlying message is that the current position is irrefutable, implying that any alternative stance would be seen as incorrect or misinformed.

12) *sssem006*

S: (er) I'm not really sure.

*T: **They're linked, aren't they?** Would you say that robbing the bank was dangerous?*

In this scenario, the teacher and students were discussing two actions—committing a bank robbery and pushing someone from a car—to explore which behaviors might legally qualify as both illegal and dangerous. When the teacher asked the class which of the two actions would be classified as illegal, S1 admitted uncertainty, indicating a lack of clarity on this point. The teacher responded with the tag question, “They’re linked, aren’t they?” to emphasize that these two actions are fundamentally connected. The tag question here conveyed the teacher’s belief that this connection should be apparent and understood without needing further clarification. In the teacher’s view, this connection was so obvious that it warranted no negotiation or alternative interpretation. The student’s uncertain answer did not meet the teacher’s expectations, so the teacher used a tag question to further strengthen the tone of questioning and strongly advocate his position.

5. Discussion

This section will present a brief discussion based on the detailed analysis of examples in the previous section from two aspects: a typology of stance conveyed by tag questions in seminar discussions and the ways in which interactional dynamics (Jones et al., 2006) in seminar discussions is achieved through various stances conveyed by tag questions.

5.1. A Typology of Stances Conveyed by Tag Questions in University Seminars

The classification and analysis presented above demonstrate that tag questions in university seminars serve as a continuum of stance expression, ranging from agreement to disagreement, depending on how much common ground participants establish or challenge in their interactions. This continuum aligns with Kimps’s (2018) findings, though some minor differences emerge in the subtypes identified. Based on data from the BASE seminars, a typology of tag question stance types is outlined in Figure 2.

It is worth noting that the boundaries between tag question sub-types are sometimes blurred, with certain patterns gradually shifting from alignment to disalignment along the continuum. The stance progression can be visualized as follows:

acknowledging > confirming > joking > informing > doubting > unexpectedness > counter-expectation > questioning > stating the obvious.

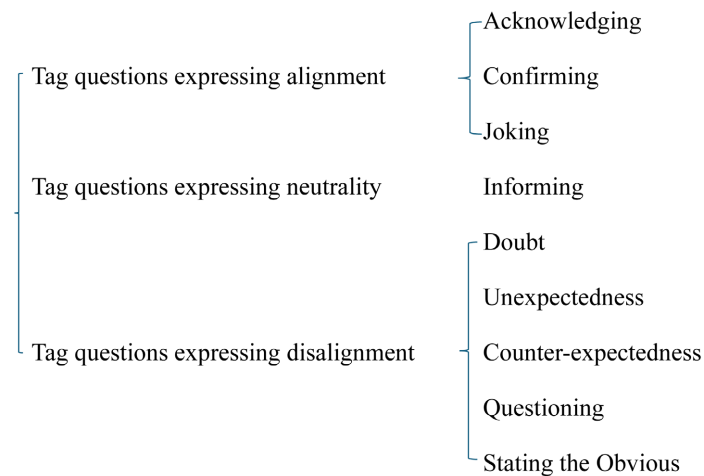


Figure 2. A typology of stance types of tag questions based on the BASE seminars.

Compared with *Kimps's* (2018) typology of tag questions, a neutral stance is emphasized in the typology of stances conveyed in the seminar data. This subtype of tag questions for informing is mainly used by teachers to provide new information to students, which does not need a response or confirmation from them. This sub-type is also in consistency with “punctuation tags” (*Cheng & Warren, 2001*, p. 143), functioning to “emphasize or underline what is being said by the speaker” (*ibid*), thus highlighting the role of primary knower (*Berry, 1981*) of teachers in the context.

On the other hand, a more varied picture of stance types is revealed in the data, expressing both alignment and disalignment. This enriches the interactions between teachers and students, teachers and teachers as well as students and students in specific contexts.

5.2. Interactional Dynamics Achieved by Tag Questions in British University Seminars

In the specific context of university seminars, each type of tag question performs a distinct function, contributing uniquely to classroom interactions. Tag questions used for joking, for instance, help create a relaxed and open environment, making students feel more at ease. Confirming tag questions, on the other hand, encourage students to reflect more deeply and expand their perspectives, stimulating critical thinking. Informative tag questions enable the teacher to provide additional context or background knowledge, fill in implicit information and guide students' understanding. Tag questions expressing unexpectedness enhance the dynamism of classroom discourse by prompting students to clarify or elaborate on their thoughts. Finally, when teachers use tag questions to state the obvious, it often reflects their authoritative role, asserting the teacher's viewpoint as a foundational fact within the class discussion.

Thus, by varying their use of tag questions, both instructors and students can take a more active role in guiding seminar interactions. Selecting an appropriate tag question based on the classroom context allows teachers to enhance engagement and adapt the discussion to the immediate needs of the learning environment. Each type of tag question offers a specific tool to either align with students or subtly challenge their assumptions, thereby enriching the overall discourse and promoting a more interactive classroom experience. In this way, flexible use of stances conveyed through tag questions helps achieve interactional dynamics (Jones, et al., 2006) in the context of seminar discussions, which is continuously emerging, changing and co-constructed by both teachers and students.

6. Conclusion

This study focuses on a detailed description of the typology of tag questions based on the stances conveyed by this form in the setting of British university seminars. It was found that tag questions in British university seminars can convey stances from alignment and neutral to disalignment, and different functions of each type of tag question can be achieved in the interactive space of instructors and students in seminar discussions.

It is hoped that the study could enrich the study of tag questions and provide a more empirical basis for the previous relevant studies. In addition, the findings would give some hints to international students who are not familiar with the context of university seminars and raise their awareness of the role of tag questions in this setting.

It should be noted that this study, due to its limited scope, focuses solely on the qualitative analysis of tag question stances in the BASE seminar data. As a preliminary investigation, these findings provide a foundational framework for further exploration. Future research may benefit from a mixed-methods approach to offer deeper insights and a more comprehensive understanding of the role tag questions play in academic discourse, especially in larger datasets and varied educational settings.

Fund

This work was supported by a grant from the Zhejiang Provincial Philosophy and Social Science Planning Project (No.: 20NDJC202YB).

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

References

- Bakhtin, M. M., & Volosinov, V. N. (1973). *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (Translated by L. Matejka, & I. R. Titunik, pp. 112-114). Harvard University Press.
- Berry, M. (1981). Systemic Linguistics and Discourse Analysis: A Multi-Layered Approach to Exchange Structure. In M. Coulthard, & M. Montgomery (Eds.), *Studies in Discourse*

- Analysis* (pp. 120-145). Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Biber, D. et al. (1999). *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English*. Longman.
- Biber, D., & Finegan, E. (1988). Adverbial Stance Types in English. *Discourse Processes*, 11, 1-34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01638538809544689>
- Cheng, W., & Warren, M. (2001). 'She Knows More about Hong Kong than You Do Isn't It': Tags in Hong Kong Conversational English. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 33, 1419-1439. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0378-2166\(00\)00080-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0378-2166(00)00080-1)
- Conrad, S., & Biber, D. (2000). Adverbial Marking of Stance in Speech and Writing. In S. Hunston, & G. Thompson (Eds.), *Evaluation in Text* (pp. 56-73). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198238546.003.0004>
- Du Bois, J. W. (2007). The Stance Triangle. In R. Englebretson (Ed.), *Pragmatics & Beyond New Series* (pp. 139-182). John Benjamins Publishing Company. <https://doi.org/10.1075/pbns.164.07du>
- Fairclough, N. (1992). Discourse and Text: Linguistic and Intertextual Analysis within Discourse Analysis. *Discourse & Society*, 3, 193-217. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926592003002004>
- Gabriela, B. (2016). *Negotiating Power through Tag Questions in Crisis Negotiations*. Master's Thesis, Georgetown University.
- Haddington, P. (2004). Stance Taking in News Interview. *SKY Journal of Linguistics*, 12, 101-142.
- Holmes, J. (1995). *Women, Man and Politeness*. Longman.
- Huddleston, R., & Pullum, G. K. (2002). *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316423530>
- Hyland, K. (2005). Stance and Engagement: A Model of Interaction in Academic Discourse. *Discourse Studies*, 7, 173-192. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461445605050365>
- Jones, R. H., Garralda, A., Li, D. C. S., & Lock, G. (2006). Interactional Dynamics in On-Line and Face-to-Face Peer-Tutoring Sessions for Second Language Writers. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 15, 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2005.12.001>
- Kimps, D. (2018). *Tag Questions in Conversation: A Typology of Their Interactional and Stance Meanings*. John Benjamins Publishing Company. <https://doi.org/10.1075/scl.83>
- Kimps, D., Davidse, K., & O'Grady, G. (2018). English Tag Questions Eliciting Knowledge or Action: A Comparison of the Speech Function and Exchange Structure Models. *Functions of Language*, 26, 86-111. <https://doi.org/10.1075/fol.18019.kim>
- Lakoff, R. (1975). *Language and Women's Place*. Harper and Row.
- Moore, E., & Podesva, R. (2009). Style, Indexicality, and the Social Meaning of Tag Questions. *Language in Society*, 38, 447-485. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0047404509990224>
- Ochs, E. (1993). Constructing Social Identity: A Language Socialization Perspective. *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, 26, 287-306. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327973rlsi2603_3
- Precht, K. (2000). *Patterns of Stance in English*. Northeastern Illinois University.
- Quirk, R. et al. (1985). *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. Longman Group Ltd.