Features and Use of Tag Questions and Invariant Tags by Japanese Speakers of English[1]

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the features and use of tag questions and invariant tags used by Japanese speakers of English in conversations based on corpus analysis. A comparison with English speakers of other Asian countries was also conducted. The results indicated that Japanese speakers of English generally follow the typical construction pattern of tag questions although they do not produce tag questions frequently. Tag questions were most frequently used for the purpose of facilitating interaction. Invariant tags, 'ok' and 'right' in particular, were more commonly observed. Most invariant tags were used for confirming the understanding of the interlocutor. The results showed that Japanese speakers of English prefer to use invariant tags over tag questions as pragmatic devices to facilitate communication. They only use a limited range of such devices when compared with English speakers of other Asian countries. As these devices are useful for communication, a communicative activity to teach tag questions and invariant tags is suggested at the end.

Key words: tag questions, invariant tags, Japanese speakers of English, corpus analysis, and Asian Englishes

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Johnstone (2008), people make use of a variety of small linguistic markers to convey information on how their utterances should be interpreted by their interlocutors (p. 238). Pragmalinguistic features of foreign languages can be difficult to learn (Cutting, 2008, pp.65-74; S. Takahashi, 2005). English tag questions and invariant tags are two of such pragmalinguistc features. Both can appear in the same syntactic position, that is, mainly at the sentence-final position, and they can have overlapping functions (e.g., Columbus, 2010b; Takahashi, 2014a, 2014b). English uses a variant tag question system (Kimps, 2007, p.271), and tag questions are acquired in the last stage of the acquisition of interrogative structures after invariant tags are acquired (Brown, 1973, p.103). In addition, previous studies have pointed out that non-native speakers do not use tag questions frequently (e.g., Cheng & Warren, 2001). Accordingly, this study aimed to investigate the features and use of tag questions and invariant tags used by Japanese speakers of English in conversations.

English tag questions refer to a category of interrogative constructions consisting of a main clause (anchor) and a questions tag (tag) as in "You are a student, aren't you?"

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(Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, pp. 891-894). Any type of sentence can become an anchor, and tags can be positive or negative. Each tag includes an auxiliary verb and a personal pronoun. The auxiliary in the anchor and the tag are typically the same (or a form of the dummy auxiliary "do" when a main verb is used in the anchor), and the subject of the anchor and the pronoun in the tag typically refer to the same thing. These are typical tendencies, and tag questions do not necessarily have this agreement (see also Bieber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, & Finegan, 1999, pp. 208-210; Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, & Svartvik, 1985, pp. 810-813).

Researchers have extensively investigated tag questions in native varieties of English (e.g., American English) including their phonological, syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, sociolinguistic, and historical aspects (e.g., Algeo, 1988, 1990, 2006; Coates, 1996, pp. 175-202; Holmes, 1995, pp. 79-86; Kim & Ann, 2008; Kimps & Davidse, 2008; Násslin, 1984; Stenström, 1997; Tottie & Hoffmann, 2006, 2009). There are some studies on tag questions in non-native varieties of English as well (e.g., Borlongan, 2008; Cheng, 1995; Razali, 1995; Takahashi, 2014a; Wong, 2007; Zhang, 2010). Takahashi (2014a), for example, pointed out that speakers of Asian Englishes use tag questions somewhat differently from native speakers (to be discussed more below). However, most studies on tag questions used by non-native speakers have focused on English as a second language (ESL) varieties, and not on English as a foreign language (EFL) varieties.[1]

English invariant tags refer to tags whose form remains the same regardless of the main clause to which they are attached. They can be used to extract feedback or responses from the listener, and they add attitudinal information to the propositional meaning of the utterance (see Algeo, 2006, pp. 302-303; Bieber et al., 1999; Columbus, 2009, 2010a, 2010b; Norrick, 1995; Stubbe and Holmes, 1995; Takahashi, 2014b). Examples of invariant tags are 'right' as in "You went home early yesterday, right?" and 'you know' as in "I went shopping with him yesterday, you know."[2]

Previous studies have mainly focused on describing and analyzing invariant tags in a single variety of English [e.g., Gold (2004) on eh-tags in Canadian English; Norrick (1995) on huh-tags in American English; Wee (2004) on Singapore English]. Looking at comparative studies, Takahashi (2014b) built on to Columbus (2009) and analyzed invariant tags in four Asian Englishes. The study found that speakers of Asian Englishes use various indigenous invariant tags and non-indigenous invariant tags. Indigenous tags derive from indigenous languages of the area and thus unique to the variety. Non-indigenous invariant tags are shared across varieties.

There are only a limited number of studies which looked at tag questions and invariant tags used by Japanese speakers of English. Nii (2004) investigated their ability to produce tag questions in written and spoken English. Her study used the JAWS Tag Test (Dennis, Sugar, & Whitaker, 1982), which assessed the ability to produce tag questions in isolation, or without contexts. She concluded that Japanese learners of English have the grammatical knowledge to produce tag questions, yet they have difficulty producing them when it comes to speaking (Nii, 2004, p.147). Although her method was effective in analyzing Japanese speakers' ability to produce tag questions, it remains to be seen how tag questions as well as invariant tags are used by Japanese speakers of English in sufficient amounts of actual conversations.

The present study aims to address this point. Specifically, there are three objectives:

(1) To describe the features and functions of English tag questions used by Japanese speakers of English in conversations.

(2) To describe the features and functions of English invariant tags used by Japanese speakers of English in conversations.

(3) To compare the features of tag questions and invariant tags used by Japanese speakers of English with those used by other Asian speakers of English.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 The Corpus

The present study used the NICT Japanese Learner English Corpus [The NICT JLE Corpus, book version: Izumi, Uchimoto, & Isahara (2004); online version: Izumi, Uchimoto, & Isahara (2012)]. The NICT JLE Corpus consists of transcribed data of a speaking test taken by 1281 Japanese learners of English of varying English levels. The corpus contains approximately 2.1 million word tokens.[3] The examinees took a speaking test called the Standard Speaking Test (SST), which is a 15-minute interview test consisting of five parts: warm-up questions, a picture description task and follow-up questions, a role play and follow-up questions, a story construction task, and closing questions. Interviewers were highly proficient Japanese speakers of English, and their data are also included in the analysis because they qualify as highly advanced Japanese speakers of English. The interviewers assigned one of the nine levels to the examinees holistically based on the test results: level 1 to level 3 are beginner levels (3, 35, 222), level 4 to level 6 are intermediate levels (482, 236, 130), and level 7 to level 9 (77, 56, 40) are advanced levels. The numbers in the parentheses

indicate the number of examinees assigned to each category. One main limitation should be noted with regard to the use of this corpus for the analysis. As the corpus is based on the data obtained in speaking tests, there is likely to have been more pressure to produce "correct" forms than in actual natural conversations. Indeed, it is debatable to what extent the data in the corpus can be treated as "actual conversations." However, the conversations in the data were not pre-planned, and this corpus was the only available corpus of this large size at the time of this research. Therefore, even with this limitation, the NIST JLE corpus has provided an organized and sufficient amounts of data for corpus analysis.

2.2 The Method of Extraction

For extraction of the data, I mainly used the concordance tool of the analysis software distributed with the book version of the corpus (Izumi, Uchimoto, & Isahara, 2004). I also used the word list function of the software called AntConc (Anthony, 2011) when necessary. To extract tag questions, I conducted a search on all possible combinations of auxiliaries and pronouns that can become tags.[4] The tags and their anchors that fit the definition of tag questions were then finalized as tag questions used for the analysis. To extract invariant tags, I looked for invariant tags which have shown to be used across speakers of different varieties of English (see, Columbus, 2009, 2010a, 2010b; Takahashi, 2014b), namely, 'eh', 'huh', 'no', 'ok/ okay', 'right', 'see', 'yeah', 'yes', 'you know', and 'you see'.[5] I also included invariant tags typically used in Japanese conversations (see, Tsuchihashi, 1983), namely, 'ne', 'yo', 'ka', and 'na' in the search.

2.3 Functions

To analyze the use of tag questions, I classified the tag questions identified in the corpus based on the functional categories used in Takahashi (2014a). Seven categories were used for classification, but only the following four categories appeared in the data (the labels and description are cited from Takahashi, 2014a, p.105):

(1) Informational tag questions – genuine request for information; equivalent of open questions or yes-no questions; making a request

(2) Confirmatory tag questions – the speaker has some knowledge about what she or he says, no matter how little that knowledge is; elicitation of confirmation

(3) Facilitative tag questions – the speaker is certain about the truth of his/her utterance; elicitation of agreement; invitation for the address to participate in the interaction

(4) Attitudinal tag questions – emphasizing the speaker's utterance; asking for the addressee's attention; reply from the addressee is not expected; stance-making

As for the analysis of the use of invariant tags, I decided to look at functions qualitatively rather than quantitatively. It is because the literature has shown that speakers of different varieties of English prefer to use different invariant tags and that differences can be quite subtle (Columbus, 2009, 2010a, 2010b; Takahashi, 2014b), so the quantitative analysis is likely to be unreliable in this case. The analysis on functions should be regarded as preliminary because the corpus does not have audio data.

3. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

3.1 Tag Questions

Frequency

First of all, the search identified 80 instances of tag questions in the corpus. Among these, 21 tag questions were produced by examinees (level 1~3: 0, level 4: 6, level 5: 3, level 6: 3, level 7: 4, level 8: 1, level 9: 4), and 59 tag questions were produced by interviewers. Given that the corpus consists of approximately 2.1 million words, this indicates that Japanese speakers of English do not produce tag questions frequently in conversations. The number of examinees assigned to each level category was different as described in Section 2.1. Even taking this into consideration, it seems that beginning level Japanese speakers of English rarely use tag questions. Interviewers (Japanese) used tag questions more frequently than examinees. This could partly be due to their role as the examiner, but also could be due to their English proficiency.

Polarity

The polarity of tag questions refers to the combination of the polarity of the anchor and the polarity of its tag. This means that tag questions can be divided into the following four categories. Textual mark-ups are not included in the examples for the sake of clarity.

(1) Positive-negative

[1] Interviewer (I): I see. Well. You can leave your cat at home, can't you?

<File00269.stt line106>

(2) Negative-positive

[2] I: You're not going to work late today, are you?

<File00679.stt line173>

(3) Positive-positive

[3] Examinee, level 9 (E9):

    I think you have the same experience in the past, have you?   <File00978.stt line68>

(4) Negative-negative

[4] E4: So, you don't have black one, don't you?

<File00152.stt line109>

    Tag questions can further be classified into reversed polarity tag questions [(1), (2)] and constant polarity tag questions [(3), (4)].

    Among the tag questions identified in the corpus, 92.5% were positive-negative, 1.3% were negative-positive, 5.0% were positive-positive, and 1.3% were negative-negative. This means that 97.5% of the tags were anchored on positive forms. From the perspective of two polarity types, 93.7% were reversed polarity tag questions, and only 6.3% were constant polarity tag questions. The results indicate that Japanese speakers of English dominantly use reversed polarity tag questions, positive-negative tag questions in particular.

    Figure 1 and Figure 2 show the proportion of tag questions of each polarity type compared with that of other Englishes, namely, Hong Kong English, Philippine English, Indian English, Singapore English, and Canadian English. The data on tag questions in these Englishes are from Takahashi (2014a). It should be noted that Takahashi (2014a) used different corpora from the project called the International Corpus of English (see, Greenbaum, 1996) for the analysis, so the data on the other Englishes are included for reference purposes. Among the five additional varieties, Singapore English and Hong Kong English contained a significantly higher proportion of constant polarity tag questions than Philippine English, Indian English, and Canadian English (Takahashi, 2014a, p.110). The figures indicate that the polarity patterns of tag questions used by Japanese speakers of English are similar to Philippine, Indian, and Canadian English speakers than to Singapore and Hong Kong English speakers. In addition, Japanese speakers of English stand out in that they prefer to use positive-negative tag questions and reversed polarity tag questions over tag questions of the other polarity patterns.

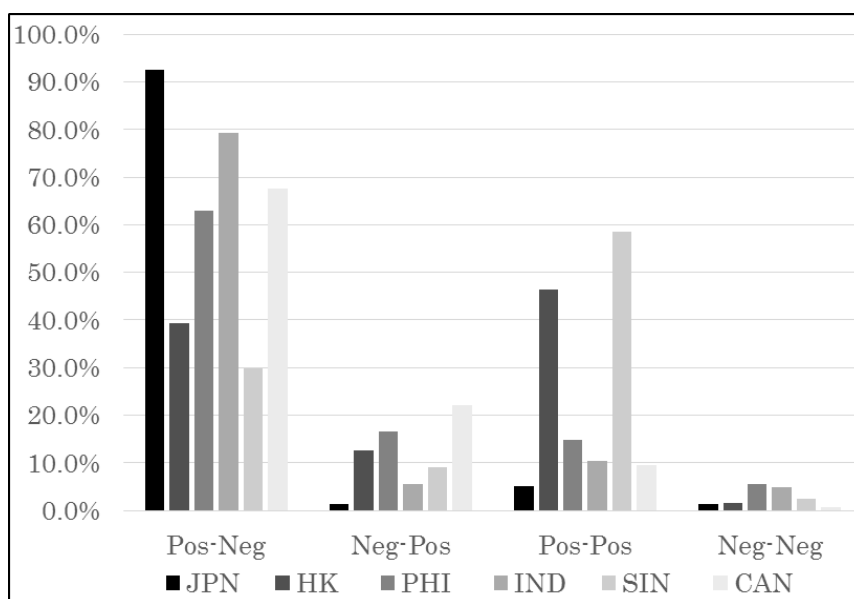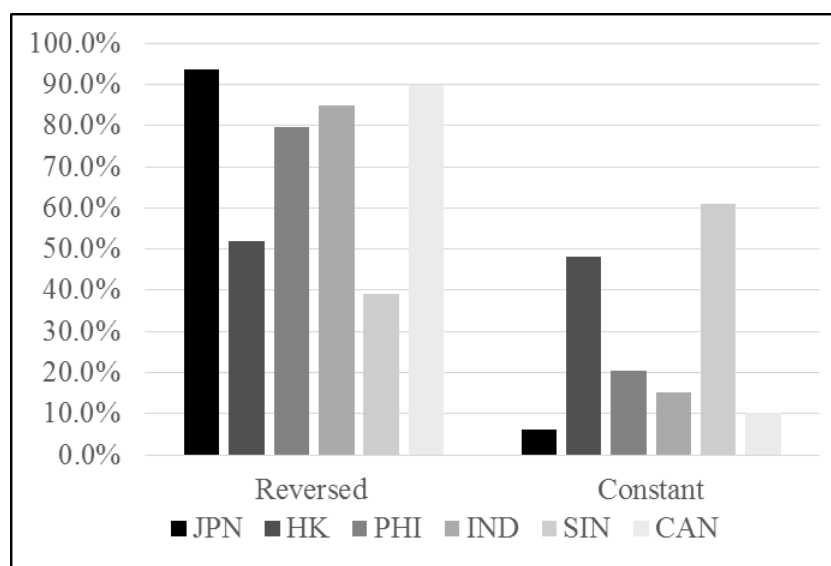**Figure 1: Polarity Types and Tag Questions Across the Corpora**

Figure 2: Reversed and Constant Polarity Tag Questions Across the Corpora

Features of tags

Features of tags, or features of the tag part of tag questions, refer to auxiliaries in tags, pronouns in tags, and their combinations (e.g., 'don't you', 'isn't it'). I grouped auxiliaries into broader categories for the analysis: BE (am, are, is, was, were), DO (do, does, did), HAVE (have, has, had), WILL (will, would), CAN (can, could), and SHALL (shall, should). Only the auxiliaries appeared in the corpus at least once were included in the analysis. In the

corpus, 88.8% of tags had BE as the auxiliary, 6.3% had DO, 1.3% had HAVE, 1.3% had WILL, 1.3% had CAN, and 1.3% had SHALL. In the NICT JLE Corpus, only 4 types of pronouns were identified in tags: It (83.8%), You (13.8%), We (1.3%), and I (1.3%). The first letter of the pronoun types are in capital to show that these are category labels. There were 11 combinations used as tags: 'isn't it' (82.5%), 'don't you' (5.0%), 'are you' (2.5%), 'aren't we' (1.3%), 'aren't you' (1.3%), 'can't you' (1.3%), 'didn't you' (1.3%), 'have you' (1.3%), 'shall I' (1.3%), 'wasn't it' (1.3%), and 'would you' (1.3%).

Figure 3 shows the distribution of auxiliaries in tags across the six varieties of English, and Figure 4 shows the distribution of pronouns in tags [the data on the other varieties are from Takahashi (2014a, pp.111-113)]. As Figure 3 illustrates, auxiliary types used in tags concentrated on BE and DO across the varieties. However, the proportion of BE tags in Canadian English is significantly lower than that in the other Englishes. This indicates that speakers of non-native varieties (ESL and EFL) tend to choose a tag with a BE auxiliary when producing tag questions. Pronoun types in tags also concentrated on certain pronouns, namely, It and You across the varieties as Figure 4 illustrates. I, He, She, and There were infrequent across the varieties, and none reached 5% of the tags in each variety except for He in the Hong Kong corpus (6.1%). The results indicate that English speakers tend to use tags with It or You frequently regardless of the variety. However, native speakers seem to use more types of pronouns more frequently in tags compared to non-native speakers. In the Hong Kong corpus, 41 different combinations were identified as tags, the Philippine corpus I had 18 combinations, the Indian corpus had 24, the Singapore corpus had 46, and the Canadian corpus had 54. This means that the combinations used by Japanese speakers of English are rather limited compared to speakers of other varieties of English.

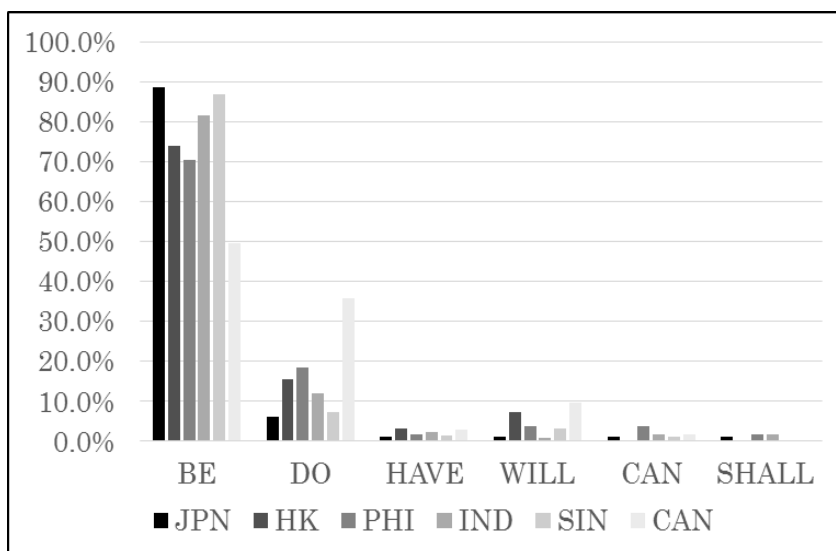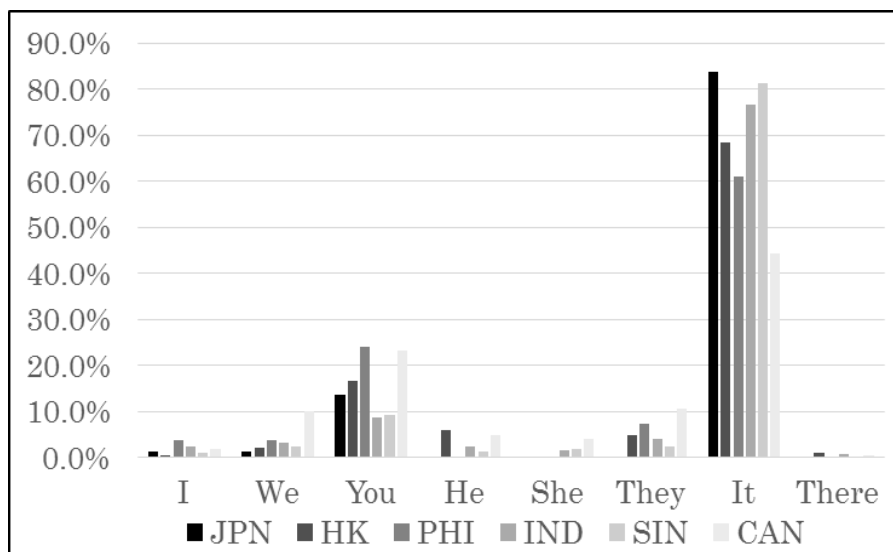**Figure 3: Auxiliaries in Tags Across the Corpora**

Figure 4: Pronouns in Tags Across the Corpora

Agreement

"Agreement" here refers to the agreement between anchors and tags, that is, whether the auxiliary and pronoun in the tag agreed with the auxiliary and pronoun in its anchor. In the NICT JLE Corpus, 92.5% of the tag questions showed this agreement, while 7.5% did not show this agreement. As mentioned in Section 1, tag questions "typically" have agreement between the anchor and its tag. The result indicates that Japanese speakers of English generally follow the typical construction pattern of tag questions. Integrating data from Takahashi (2014a, p.113), tag questions in the Canadian corpus had the highest rate of agreement between anchors and tags (95.2%), followed by the NICT JLE Corpus (92.5%). Among the rest of the varieties, tag questions in the Philippine corpus (77.8%) and the Hong Kong English corpus (74.6%) had such agreement at a significantly higher rate than those in the Singapore corpus (59.2%) and the Indian corpus (49.6%). The comparative data indicates that Japanese speakers of English produce "typical" tag questions more frequently than speakers of ESL varieties.

Functions

Informational, confirmatory, facilitative, and attitudinal tag questions were identified in the corpus (see Section 2.3). This is consistent with other Asian Englishes (Takahashi,

2014a, p.115), and these four functions seem to be the basic functions of tag questions in Asian Englishes. [5] to [8] show examples of each category.

(1) Informational

[5] E6: I can exchange it to the urr non-reserved one much cheaper than urr urr actually I urr the one I got. So maybe it's it's pos it's possible, isn't it?

    I: Urm OK, but can I ask why you missed the train?

<div align="right"><File00139.stt lines87-88></div>

This was a part of a role-play, and the examinee (customer) asked the interviewer (station staff) to exchange his ticket because he had missed his train. Here the examinee asked by using the tag question whether he could exchange his ticket, and therefore, this is an informational tag question.

(2) Confirmatory

[6] I: Ahh. It's rather late for exam week, isn't it?

    E5: Yeah, but […]

<div align="right"><File00525.stt lines179-180></div>

In this example, the context indicates that the interviewer already had some knowledge on when examinations were generally held. She tried to confirm her information by asking the examinee, and therefore, this is a confirmatory tag question.

(3) Facilitative

[7] I: OK. Thank you. How are you today, […]?

    E5: Er I'm so fine, thank you.

    I: Good. But it's very hot outside, isn't it?

<div align="right"><File00557.stt lines26-28></div>

This tag question was used as part of the greeting at the beginning to involve the examinee, so this is a facilitative tag question.

(4) Attitudinal

[8] I: Oh. Just so many things I have to take care of.
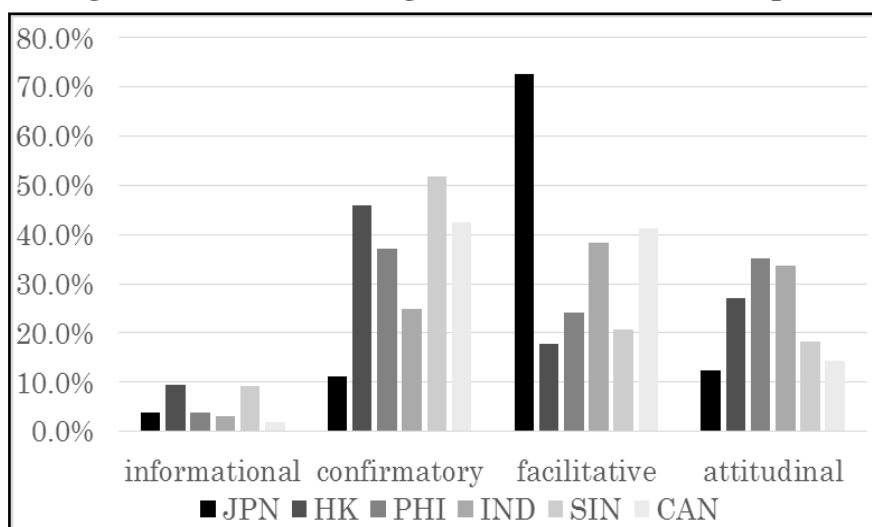
  E9: Come on. You're a landlord. You you are responsible for this, aren't you? I'm paying a rent for it, too.

<File00319.stt lines129-130>

This example is from a role-play. The examinee had asked the interviewer (landlord) to come fix the window. After she refused the request, the examinee used a tag question to emphasize his point, and therefore, this was an attitudinal tag question.

In the NICT-JLE Corpus, 3.8% of the tag questions were informational, 11.3% were confirmatory, 72.5% were facilitative, and 12.5% were attitudinal. This indicates that Japanese speakers of English tend to use tag questions in order to involve the addressee into the interaction rather than asking or confirming information or stressing the utterance. The context of the data (interview tests) might have increased the proportion of facilitative tag questions. Even taking this into consideration, the use of facilitative tag questions still stood out compared with speakers of other English varieties (see Figure 5). Figure 5 shows the functional distribution of tag questions in six varieties of English [the data on the other varieties are from Takahashi (2014a, pp.114-117)]. Speakers of Singapore English and Indian English in particular use tag questions differently with significant differences in all the four categories, while speakers of Singapore English and Hong Kong English use tag questions for similar purposes (ibid, p.117). The results indicate that the main use of tag questions by Japanese speakers of English does not follow the pattern of any English. It remains to be seen whether this was due to the context or the facilitative use indeed is a characteristic use of tag questions by Japanese speakers of English.

Figure 5: Functions of Tag Questions Across the Corpora

3.2 Invariant Tags

There were 1583 invariant tags in the corpus, and 8 forms were identified: 'eh', 'huh',

'no', 'ok', 'right', 'yeah', 'you know', and 'ne'. Table 1 summarizes the result. 'Ne' can be classified as an indigenous invariant tag because this form derives from Japanese. Takahashi (2014b) pointed out that ESL varieties of Asian English are characterized by frequent use of various indigenous invariant tags (e.g., 'lah'' in Hong Kong English; 'naman', 'ba' in Philippine English; 'na', 'haan' in Indian English; 'lah', 'leh', 'lor' in Singapore English,), and that the speakers use indigenous invariant tags to express subtle attitudinal stances which are otherwise difficult to express by non-indigenous invariant tags or tag questions. Unlike the other Asian Englishes, the proportion of indigenous invariant tags in the NICT-JLE Corpus was very low (1.3%). The data are based on interview tests, so one of the reasons not many instances of indigenous invariant tags were observed could be due to the avoidance of overtly Japanese forms. As Table 1 shows, 'ok' was the most preferred form (86.9%), followed by 'right' (8.0%). The other forms were low in frequency. The high frequency of 'ok' by the interviewers is likely because it was necessary to confirm if the examinee understood what he or she was asked to do during the examination. In addition, the invariant tag 'right' seems to be preferred among examinees of higher proficiency over the invariant tag 'ok.' Although this point remains to be investigated further, this could be due to their confidence as well as fluency because 'right' can also be used to emphasize the utterance.

Table 1: Forms and Frequency of Invariant Tags

	Interviewer	**Examinee**	**Total**
eh	6	0	6 (0.4%)
huh	6	2	8 (0.5%)
no	1	4	5 (0.3%)
ok	1273	102	1375 (86.9%)
right	82	44	126 (8.0%)
yeah	3	1	4 (0.3%)
you know	12	26	38 (2.4%)
ne	0	21	21 (1.3%)
Total	1383	200	1583

An example of each form is given below with a brief description of its function ([9] to [16], description is at the end). As mentioned in Section 2.3, I will analyze the functions of invariant tags qualitatively. However, as Columbus (2010 a, 2010 b) observed, each invariant tag tends to have multiple functions with subtle differences. Accordingly, the analysis on functions below is not exhaustive, and more detailed analysis will be necessary in future studies.

(1) Eh

[9] I: Wow OK. That's good. Hm Well it's a small world, eh?

<File00356.stt, line182>

(2)Huh

[10] I: Thank you very much. Looks like you like to drink, huh?

<File00703.stt, line100>

(3)No

[11] E9: Erm I'm not good at these. Erm. Isn't the light just broken, no?

<File00253.stt, line131>

(4)Ok

[12] I: […] This is your card, OK?

<File00409.stt line85>

(5)Right

[13]E5: Oh OK. So, maybe, in the in the spring, right?

<File00853.stt line183>

(6)Yeah

[14] I: Hmm. Oh you are a good father, yeah?

<File00431.stt line101>

(7)You know

[15] E7: Well it in real situation, doesn't happen that much, you know?

<File00791.stt line162>

(8)Ne

[16]E5: […] So, cooking is very small ne

<File00153.stt line88>

In [9], the interviewer and the examinee were talking about the experience they had in common. This 'eh' conveyed the surprise of the interviewer and also functioned to facilitate interaction. The example [10] is from the last part of the opening questions. The invariant tag in the interviewer's comment invited the addressee to agree. 'No' in [11] functioned as a question marker. 'Ok' has multiple functions, but in the context of [12], the interviewer confirmed if the examinee understood the instruction, at the same time stressing his or her utterance. "Right" in [13] also functioned to confirm the information. 'Yeah' in [14] and 'you know' in [15] had a facilitative function in these contexts. In the corpus, 'you know' was

more frequently observed as a filler (not counted as invariant tags). 'Ne' in the last example functioned to confirm if the interviewer understood what she meant.

4. DISCUSSION

The analysis indicates that Japanese speakers of English do not use tag questions frequently in test conversations, and that beginners seem to rarely use tag questions. Most tags are anchored on positive constructions, and reversed tag questions seem to be the norm followed by Japanese speakers of English. In fact, they seem to stick to the pattern taught at school as the typical structure of tag questions [see, e.g., Watanuki, Miyakawa, Sugai, Takamatsu, & Petersen (2000, pp. 69-73) for a grammar explanation of tag questions]. This is not unexpected as Japanese people usually study English as a foreign language, and also the data were from test conversations. The range of tags in tag questions actually used in conversations is rather limited compared to speakers of ESL and native varieties of English. This could be due to the cognitive load required in producing tag questions in addition to the pressure of test environments. The results indicated that Japanese speakers of English mainly use tags questions for facilitative purposes although this could be due to the nature of the data used for the analysis. Invariant tags are more frequently used in conversations than tag questions. "Ok" and "right" are two preferred forms of invariant tags used by Japanese speakers of English. Compared with speakers of ESL Asian Englishes, Japanese speakers of English use a narrower range of invariant tags. Moreover, they seldom use indigenous invariant tags.

As mentioned at the beginning, tag questions and invariant tags are both important pragmatic devices which help to facilitate communication. Nii (2004) pointed out that Japanese speakers of English tend to have the grammatical knowledge of tag questions (p. 142). However, this study has shown that there seems to be a discrepancy between their knowledge and the range of tag questions/ invariant tags they actually use in conversations. Accordingly, it will be necessary to teach how to use these pragmatic devices in actual conversations. Explicit grammar exercises such as fill-in-blank exercises are important, but integration of more communicative activities will be helpful.

Here is a brief outline of a possible communicative activity to teach tag questions. First, we can have students listen to a conversation by native speakers/ advanced non-native

speakers that contain tag questions, and the second time, ask students to listen for tag questions. As a class, talk about how tag questions were used in the conversation. We can then have students get into pairs, and have them hold a conversation on a certain easy topic such as hobbies. Ask them to consciously use tag questions- be specific about what auxiliaries you would like them to focus on. Next, we can have them get into groups of preferably three, and have them practice using tag questions that contain third person or plural pronouns. We can also conduct a similar communicative activity on invariant tags by focusing on invariant tags instead of tag questions.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has looked at the use and features of tag questions and invariant tags by Japanese speakers of English. Japanese speakers of English do not use a wide range of tag questions or invariant tags in conversations. The data used in this study were from interview tests, and therefore, more research will be necessary based on data from non-test contexts. It will also be necessary to look at conversations between Japanese speakers of English and speakers of other varieties of English. Tag questions and invariant tags are helpful pragmatic devices to facilitate communication, and it is important to teach how to actually use tag questions and invariant tags in communication.

NOTES

* I would like to thank the audience of my presentation at the sixth N.E.A.R. Language Education Conference for their insightful comments and suggestions.

1 Note that the distinction between ESL and EFL is not always clear-cut. For example, Crystal (2003) pointed out that "the distinction between 'second language' (L2) and 'foreign language' use has less contemporary relevance than it formerly had" (p. 67).

2 Invariant tags are as a subcategory of discourse markers.

3 This was counted by using the word list function of AntConc. I subtracted the number of textual mark-ups from the total count.

4 Specifically, I first searched the following 'auxiliaries' one by one: can, could, may, might, shall, should, will, would, must, ought, need, dare, am, are, is ,was, were, do, does, did, have, has, had, used to. I sorted the results based on the first word after the auxiliary, and looked for the 'pronouns' (I, we, you, he, she, it, they, there, one) to identify tags that constitute tag questions. 'Cannot', 'ain't it', 'innit', and 'i'n'it' were also considered.

5 Only the spelling 'ok' was used in the corpus.

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