

## Tag Questions in Persian: Investigating the Conversational Functions

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### Abstract

This article intends to identify the use and typify the functions of tag questions (TQs) in Persian everyday conversations and dialogic interaction. The analyses were made based on two data sources: A documentary film titled *Commander* in which the participants are engaged in free interactions, and an audio-recorded instrument named *CALLFRIEND* which consists of Iranian native speakers' communication on the phone. The datasets were transcribed using CHAT conventions by the researcher. Also, two raters were involved in the coding process and several rounds of coding and discussions were carried out in an effort to fine-tune the functional classification. This study found some overlap between Persian TQs and the ones from other languages, which confirms speakers' presupposition accounting for the largest portion of the corpora. However, there have been found some functions, namely *holding the floor*, *scorning hearer*, and *ordering or encouraging*, which do not conform to any existing classifications of tag questions. The study was implemented within the principles of Conversational Analysis, and the researcher has explored the relationship between the functions and their settings in which conversations were uttered, the expected response, and any other influential sociolinguistic factors.

**Keywords:** Tag questions; Conversational Function; Persian TQs; Conversational Analysis; TQ Classifications

### Introduction

It is generally accepted that tag questions, frequently used in spoken language, signify interactional relations and interpersonal posture (e.g., Axelsson, 2011; McGregor, 1995). A tag question (TQ) comprises of two clauses: a declarative or imperative statement, sometimes called the anchor, followed by an interrogative tag (e.g., Tottie & Hoffmann, 2006). Understanding TQ is important in that it provides a means of turn-allocation and evidential or attitudinal modification (Kimps, 2007). Also, drawing upon TQs in conversation, EFL learners can assume the speaker's interactional position in the dialogue to provide proper responses (McGregor, 1997), which helps code what Halliday (1994, p.69) calls the "speech function" of the utterance.

In English, there are strict rules for using subjects and verbs in both parts: The subject in the anchor can take any forms of full noun phrases, a pronoun such as *I*, *you* or *they*, or it can be *there*, but in the tag, it must be either a personal pronoun, *there*, or *one*, often agreeing with the subjects in the anchor. A lexical verb, an auxiliary, or a modal one can be used as the verbs of the anchor; on the contrary, the verb in the tag must be an auxiliary or a modal. TQ is used for the combination of anchor and tag (Tottie & Hoffmann, 2006).

Formally, based upon the anchor, TQs are classified cross-linguistically as variant or invariant ones. In variant systems (canonical), the tag grammatically, in an extent, depends on the anchor insofar as that it changes as a function of the anchor's features, namely its polarity and/or number of changes. The polarity can be reversed (positive–negative or negative–positive) in the anchor clause and the following question tag, as the examples of (1) and (2) provided in Table 1,

or it can be constant positive or constant negative, often used with imperatives, as in (4) (Tottie & Hoffmann, 2006, p.283) (See Table 1).

**Table 1. Polarity of TQs**

Anchor	Question Tag	Polarity
(1) Makes you really think, (+/-)	doesn't it. (LSAC)2	Positive–Negative
(2) Oh it's not very valuable /+)	is it? (BNC-S)	Negative–Positive (-)
(3) So this is the letter he sent you (+/+)	is it? (LSAC)	Positive–Positive
(4) Yes, they don't come cheap /-)	don't they? (BNC-S)	Negative–Negative (-)

Invariant structures, nevertheless, common in some languages including Italian, Polish, German, and French, refer to the systems in which TQ does not entirely exhibit grammatical dependencies on the anchor. A couple of words or phrases used as tags are shown in the following examples (Nair, 1991, cited in Tomaselli & Gatt, p.55).

(1) *Ci sono otto finestre, giusto?* (Morin, 1973)

There are eight windows, aren't there?

(2) *Il est nerveux ce matin, non?* (Morin, 1973)

He is nervous this morning, isn't he?

(3) *Zamknij drzwi, dobrze?* (Wierzbicka, 2003)

Close the door, would you?

(4) *Wir gehen heute abend, nicht (wahr)?* (Rottet & Sprouse, 2008)

We are leaving tonight, aren't we?

Concerning the discourse functions, researchers have provided several classifications of TQs (e.g., Algeo, 1990, 2006; Holmes, 1995). However, TQs are so versatile that their forms undermine their functions; therefore, it is problematic to identify the range of TQs. A secondary source of difficulty is the insufficient number of comparative cross-linguistic studies to pin down the extent to which TQs are generalizable; those studies in this field are most limited to English or its varieties such as northern American English, Irish English or the like (Axelsson, 2011; Kimps & Davidse, 2008; Tottie & Hoffmann, 2006). So, this makes it difficult to embrace a one-to-all conception regarding the forms and functions of TQs in all languages. As formerly mentioned, most efforts, predominantly, have been devoted to classify TQs and delineated their semantic and pragmatic functions mainly in English (variant TQs).

Notwithstanding much research on tag questions around the world, it has not taken much consideration in Iran and other Persian-speaking countries. So far, few attempts, if any, have been made to characterize the speech functions of TQs in Persian everyday conversations. As formerly mentioned, a majority of the pragmatic classifications of TQs have been specified to English and its varieties, in particular Irish and Scottish ones. Thus, this study primarily sought to explore the functions that tag questions serve in Persian spoken language based on two large datasets and provide a pragmatic typology of Persian tag questions. The second aim of the present study is to make a comparison between the identified functions of TQs in Persian, a language with structural differences with European languages, and the functions of TQs in English and investigate their form-function correlations.

This study enjoys significance in its theoretical contribution to TQs and providing deeper understanding of the nature and functions TQs of Persian. Most of the works on TQs are based upon introspection, and some, particularly more recently, on corpora of various sizes. Some of the focus has been on structural features of the constructions, some on their functions and uses. However, this research gains significance in uncovering the functions of tag questions in spoken languages based on using informal real-life conversions. The other pedagogical implication of the present study lies in proposing a typology of the functions of tag questions in Persian that would be new in a number of ways.

The rest of this paper is structured as follows. Section 2 will be further elaborated by more papers in both English and Persian. Section 3 describes the corpora used in this article, while Section 4 describes and elaborates on the use and functions of TQs in everyday conversations and their relationship to various non-linguistic features of the discourse situation. This is followed by Section 5 where a conclusion and any other necessary information on the pragmatic functions of TQs accompanied by a table of equivalent terms in the previous works are provided.

### **Literature Review**

Three perspectives can be highlighted regarding the literature on TQs. First, the grammar-based tradition concerns the formal properties (that is, lexical, syntactic and phonological) to investigate the pragmatic functions of TQs (Kimps, Davidse & Cornillie, 2014). The aim is to discern the illocutionary force and pragmatic functions of TQs based on intonation (rising tone, expressing doubt, and enquiring verification) and polarity. They view TQs as basically a “further type of yes-no question which conveys positive or negative orientation” (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech & Svartvik, 1985, p. 810). They focus on TQs with reversed polarity, the most common type, which can have either positive—negative (5) or negative—positive (6) polarity.

(1) He likes his J\OB, D/OESn’t he? (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 811)

(2) He doesn’t like his J\OB, D/OES he? (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 811)

However, the falling tone invites confirmation (7):

(3) She was A\NGry, W\ASn’t she. (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 811)

A second perspective on TQs draws on categorizing their pragmatic functions, usually based on conversational data (Algeo, 1990, 2006; Holmes, 1982; Tottie & Hoffmann, 2006). This perspective has been employed by researchers to identify the forms and functions of TQs mostly for British and/or American English; however, the number of works implemented for evaluating and extending data from other languages still remains rare (e.g., Cuenca, 1997; Mithun, 2012).

The third perspective concerns what Brazil (1984), Axelsson (2011) and Kimps et al. (2014) followed for formulating pragmatic typologies based on the conversational contexts in which a TQ is used and the interlocutors’ knowledge states. The followers of this perspective have drawn upon Labov’s distinction between A-events (in which the speaker’s knowledge is not assumed to be completely shared with the listener); B-events (in which it is the listener who has more complete knowledge); and AB-events (where the knowledge states are assumed to be symmetrical) (Labov & Fanshel, 1977).

### **TQs Functions in English**

Researchers interested in this field have proposed different classifications that will be discussed below:

Holmes (1995) classified TQs into “epistemic modal” and “affective” types. Epistemic modal TQs “express genuine speaker uncertainty rather than politeness” (p. 80), as in below.

(8) Fay Weldon's lecture is at eight/isn't it?

Affective TQs have been sub-classified into "facilitative", "softening", and "challenging". Facilitative TQs ". . . are examples of hedges which serve as positive politeness devices. They invite the addressee to contribute to the discourse" (Holmes, 1995, p.81):

(9) You've got a new job Tom/haven't you?

Softening TQs acts a negative politeness function and are applied to mitigate the force of negatively affective utterances, for example, directives and criticisms, and save the addressee's negative face (Holmes, 1995, p.81):

(10) Make a cup of tea/would you?

(11) That was a really dumb thing to do/wasn't it?

Challenging TQs are "confrontational strategies [which] may pressure a reluctant addressee to reply or aggressively boost the force of a negative speech act" (Holmes, 1995, p.80):

(12) A: . . .you'll probably find yourself in front of the Chief Constable, /okay?

B: Yes, Sir, yes, understood.

A: Now you er fully understand that, \don't you?

B: Yes, Sir, indeed, yeah.

Algeo (1990) provided a different classification and divided TQs into "informational", "confirmatory", "punctuational", "peremptory", and "aggressive" (renamed "antagonistic" in Algeo, 2006). When using informational TQs, "the speaker has an idea about something (the statement preceding the tag), but asks for information without presuming to know what the answerer will say" (1990, p.445), as in the following example (13):

(13) Q: You don't have to wear any sort of glasses or anything, do you?

A: Well, I wear glasses for reading sometimes.

Confirmatory TQs are used to "draw the person addressed into the conversation (. . .) [asking]for confirmation of what the speaker has said" (Algeo, 1990, pp. 445-446). The purpose behind using this kind of TQs is not to seek information, but to attract the addressee's agreement. Some responses "of course", "yes", "certainly", "that's right", or a nod of the head are common on the side of addressee (p.446).

(14) Q: You have some pull with the management, do you?

A: [laugh]

Punctuational TQs "point up what the speaker has said [and] are the vocal equivalent of an exclamation point or of underlining for emphasis" (Algeo, 1990, p.446). No verbal participation is expected from the addressee, but the aim is to draw the hearers' attention.

(15) You classicists, you've probably not done Old English, have you? Course you haven't.

Algeo's peremptory was dedicated to those universally accepted statements, so that "even some one of the limited intelligence of the addressee must be presumed to recognize it" (Algeo, 1990, p.446):

(15) I wasn't born yesterday, was I?

The use of an aggressive/antagonistic TQ follows a statement that is not obvious and couldn't possibly be known to the addressee. Algeo (1990, p.447) argues that "this is insulting and provocative, because it implies that addressee sought to know something they cannot actually know", as in (16).

(16) A: I rang you up this morning, but you didn't answer.

Q: Well, I was having a bath, *wasn't I?*

The summary of the classifications made by different researchers have been presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Canonical TQs identified in English in different studies (Tomasselli & Gatt, 2015, p.58)

Algeo (1990) (2006)	Holmes (1995)	Roesle (2001)	Tottie and Hoffmann
Informational	Epistemic modal	Confirmatory	Confirmatory
Confirmatory	Facilitative	Involving	Facilitating
Punctuational	Challenging	Punctuational	Attitudinal
Peremptory	Challenging	Peremptory	Peremptory
Aggressive	Challenging	Aggressive	Aggressive
	Softening		
		Informational	Informational
		Hopeful/fearful	Other types
		Conspiracy	Other types

### TQs Functions in Persian

Question forms are employed when the speaker is unaware of the matter of question. In Persian, question can be formed by either use of question words such as why, when, where, how, how often, etc. or raising the tone and intonation of the text. They can also be employed for different functions. Question forms, in particular tag questions, are widely taken by Persian speakers and writers to utter the figurative and secondary meanings of sentences to enhance their words power. Zomkhshari was the first to talk about the use of question forms and tag question in Persian and the Koran (Shoghi Zaif, 2003).

As mentioned above, tag questions in Persian can be used for a wide range of functions. To name but a few, some of them are as follows:

#### 1. Informational tag questions:

These kinds of questions are used when the speaker has an idea about something, without any idea about what the hearer's answer would be, in the first part of the sentence, but use the positive phrase/sentence to get information from the addressee. In contrast to the speaker's presupposition, the addressee's answer is negative.

هیچ کسی نیست که موافق این موضوع باشه، هست؟ (A)

*There is no one ok with this topic, is there? (shemisa, 1993)*

#### 2. Confirmatory tag questions:

In this type of tag question, the addressee confirms the accuracy and veracity of the speaker's speech. Whereas the Informational TQs, Confirmatory TQs do not pursue any information and the speaker presumes that the addressee would agree with him/her.

باید به حال او گریه‌تس، نیاید؟ (A)

*We should feel sorry for him, shouldn't we? (Reza 'i, 2003)*

#### 3. Aggressive tag questions:

Tag questions are also employed to humiliate the hearer and condemn the addressee. This is insulting and provocative, and usually followed by no answer.

لا لا لا لا لا لا لا لا که بعد گرفتن این مقام همه مشکلاتو حل می‌کنه، درستته؟ (A)

*You have previously said that after reaching this position, you would solve all the problems, haven't you? (shemisa, 1993)*

#### 4. Imperative tag questions:



## Data resources

The data of the current study have been obtained from two sources: an available online Persian spoken corpus dataset *CALLFRIEND*, and an Iranian TV documentary titled *Commander*.

### CALLFRIEND

The corpus consists of 60 unscripted telephone conversations, totaling 80,345 words, with a detailed user manual and documentation, lasting between 5-30 minutes. The corpus also includes documentation describing speaker information (sex, age, education, callee telephone number) and call information (channel quality, number of speakers). The conversations were not pre-written in advance. For each conversation, both the caller and callee are native speakers of Persian. All calls are domestic and were placed inside the continental United States and Canada. A total of 220 TQs based on the framework of Labov (1972) were identified. The researcher listened to the talks (for several times not to miss the important points), and transcribed the TQs when necessary.

### Commander

A set of video recordings which were used in this study are from *Commander*, a TV military-documentary series, prepared by a governmental sector in Iran. In this documentary, the participants, divided into a group of five members, compete against each other and engage in free interactions. The participants are supposed to successfully pass the obstacles and barriers such as swimming finding targets shooting jumping and so on which were designed by the judges. The reason for which this series has been chosen is that the participants' actions and reactions are so unpredictable that they can even overshadow the rest of the documentary. This can provide original and authentic data for the study. Seasons 1-4, totaling 545 minutes and 352,978 words with 730 TQs, were watched, transcribed when necessary, and analyzed by the researcher. Several cameras were present in different locations during the filming to record any details of the members' interactions and talks. Viewers can observe how their friendly, aggressive and even romantic relationships develop.

The dataset with 950 instances of TQs in both corpora makes it, to a great extent, representative of TQs in Persian dialogic interaction and spoken language.

### Criteria to detect TQs

Tags appear in imperative or declarative sentences either in the form of a word or a phrase which follow the anchor. TQs are classified by the function they express (such as requesting, confirming or derogating) rather than their forms (words such as *right* and *yeah*). TQs as “interrogative particles do not change the propositional meaning of the preceding anchors, but may alter the illocutionary force” (Tomaselli & Gatt, 2015, p.67). Columbus (2010) and Fuller (2003) proposed a substitution test by which one can distinguish whether the word or phrase following a sentence is a tag. They have mentioned that the semantic relationships between the elements should remain unchanged if the tags are omitted from the utterance. Also, according to the test, one can make sure that the word or phrase is a tag when other tags are substituted, and the meaning is not lost. For example, *آره* in the final position is a tag which has been used to confirm information. *آره* and *لا* were substituted without any (1) loss, or (2) alteration, of the propositional meaning. The datasets were transcribed using CHAT conventions (CHILDES, MacWhinney, 2014) by the researcher. Finally, two raters were involved in the coding process

and several rounds of coding and discussions were carried out in an effort to fine-tune the functional classification.

### Excerpt (1)

طنر محکم بسته بودی دیگه، آره؟

You have tightened the rope, *yes*?

Substitution test1:

طنابو محکم بسته بودی دیگه، اوکی؟

You have tightened the rope, *ok*?

Substitution test<sup>۲</sup>:

طنابو محکم بسته بودی دیگه، درسته؟

You have tightened the rope, *right*?

### Excerpt (2)

اول باید به اون هدف شیک کنی، درسته؟

First, we have to shoot at that target, *right*?

Substitution test1:

اول باید به اون هدف شیک کنی، ها؟

First, we have to shoot at that target, *yeah*?

Here again, آره (*yes*) was substituted by لا (*yeah*) which also kept the propositional meaning and it did not change. However, for Excerpt3 it is different because the substitution test cannot be replaced by a tag question:

### Excerpt (3)

لاوسالاه مارولا، لا، لا، لا، لا؟

I bring the luggage. Where is the tent?

Substitution test1:

من وسیله مارو میمرا، اوکی؟

I bring the luggage, *ok*?

## Results and Discussion

### **Research Question One: What are the functions of tag questions in Persian conversations and spoken language?**

There have been identified eight primary functions of tag questions in the corpora which have been listed according to the frequency. A brief description was given for each function with its unexpected response. The findings were investigated using two data sources named *Commander* and *CALLIFRIEND*. Some of the functions correspond to their literature of Persian and other languages provided in this study, while some other functions have been proposed in specific details. The terms proposed for its function are to highlight the communicative functions of tag questions in conversation.

#### **Confirm speaker's presumptions**

This tag question, often used when a speaker is not completely certain about his assumption, is employed to confirm it with hearers. This tag question also corresponds to Algeo's (1990) Informational TQs, Roesle's (2001), and Tottie and Hoffman's (2006) Confirmatory TQs. This group of TQ took up 22.68 % of the whole corpus of this study. This type of function is often followed by a positive or negative response from hearer, and also accompanied by rising

intonation, a rising pitch movement on the tag. The speaker here does not regard the hearer as the source of knowledge or authority. Even, he does not intend to elicit information from the hearer. The speaker's purpose behind using this tentative tag question is to confirm his presumption and get the addressee engaged in the conversation, as was shown below.

#### Excerpt (4)

پس وقتی که رسیدیم (7): A (1)

*So, when we arrive (7)*

اول باید کادو رو بهش بدم درسته؟ A (2)

*First, I have to give the gift, right?*

بله B (3)

*Yes*

دقایق B (4)

*Exactly*

Furthermore, this category of tag questions can be used to prompt agreement with the hearer. Algeo's (1990) stated that this type is used by speakers to invite hearer to agree with the utterance or confirm his opinion, about which there is less doubt, albeit the hearer is predominantly passive. Bazzanella (1994), in a study on Italian tag questions, has mentioned that this kind of tag question is used to assume hearers' agreement. The speaker seeks to establish common ground or reinforce the shared experiences or any other values with the hearer.

#### Excerpt (5)

حریف از ما خیلی قوی تر بود و باهوش تر هم بودند A (1)

*The rivals were stronger and smarter than us*

اونا دو تا نیروی ویژه و تکاور داشتند. اونا از پیش برنده بودند A (2)

*They had two rangers in their group. They were winners in advance.*

درست میگم؟ A (3)

*Am I right?*

بله B (4)

*YES*

As it shows, the hearer is not that much active and prefers not to intervene much in the discourse. While speaker uttered several words, the hearer just used *yeah* to show his agreement. This type of TQ is often followed by acknowledgement from the hearer.

#### Excerpt (6)

هی رفیق، من نباید اینکارو میکردم A (1)

*Hey boy, I shouldn't have done that*

واقعا دست خودم نبود A (2)

*It was not in my control*

شرایط خیلی استرس ای بود میدونی؟ A (3)

*It was a very stressful situation; you know?!*

اره B (1.2)

*Yeah (1.2)*

و لی باید کنترل خود حرف خودمون حفظ کنیم B (5)

*But, we should be able to keep our head*

Bazzanella (1994) also added that the reason for this kind of TQ is to confirm the reception of what was said and nothing is complicated.

### **Check hearer's presumption**

The speaker wants to confirm whether the hearer understood or misunderstood the points uttered. Again, the hearer is expected to respond to the speaker to confirm it with him/her. This type of TQ is hearer-oriented and intends to prevent any misconceptions. This function is primarily interactive.

#### **Excerpt (7)**

پس قرار شد قبل از هر کار . A: (۱)

*So, it is supposed that before anything*

ساعت هامونویا هم ست کنیم. درسته؟ A: (۲)

*We set our time, alright?*

بله درسته B: (۳)

*Yes, right*

The speaker wants to make sure whether the hearer understood the piece of information given about setting the time before the action or not. Bazzanella (1994), and Tomaselli and Gatt (2015) reported similar functions of TQs for Italian language.

#### **Excerpt (8)**

راستی واسه تعطیلات تابستان آماده ایید؟ A: (۱)

*By the way, you are ready for the coming summer holiday?*

آره، دارم واسش لحظه شماری میکنم. دفعه قبل با شما خیلی خوش گذشت B: (۲)

*YES, I am looking forward to that. The last time we greatly enjoyed with you*

خواهش میکنم. طبق برنامه امسالو باید برم سمت غرب. درست میگم؟ A: (۳)

*You're welcome. According to our program, we are supposed to go to the West. Am I right?*

بله B: (۴)

Yes

In the above case, the speaker is trying to facilitate the interaction with the co-participant by asking a question about their next trip. The speaker's aim is to remind the hearer of their joint program and make him/her understood that the plan is fixed and will not change.

### **Emphasize the point**

Sometimes the speaker uses a tag question in the medial position to provide the hearer with this opportunity to follow and imagine what the speaker is referring to. This kind of TQ is followed by a pause to give enough time to the hearer to recognize, understand or correct the mistakes raised by the speaker (Schegloff, 1980). This kind of TQs is also used to establish shared common ground between the participants. Jefferson (1980) described "ne" as a discourse marker in German that has the same function. "[It] can occur as a pivot between two utterance components, marking that the prior component was point-laden and prefacing a next component which brings home the point" (Jefferson, 1980, p.61). These tag questions are used to check the understanding of the hearer at propositional level.

#### **Excerpt (9)**

- اول به اید ایند موانع رو برداریم اوکی؟ اونایی که (۱) A:  
*First, we have to remove the obstacles, ok? Those*  
 سمت راست قرار گرفتند (۲) A:  
*on the right*  
 مطمئنا (۳) B:  
*Sure*

In the example above, the speaker continued to talk after 0.2 second, assuming that by that time the hearer has understood the obstacle removal. The speaker would have probably continued unless the addressee posed some uncertainty.

### Engage hearer in the discourse

This function, as described and investigated in the literature, corresponds to Holmes' (1995) facilitative tag question. The hearer-oriented tag questions are employed by speakers to attract the hearer's attention, and to invite, as in the below example, the hearer to elaborate on the utterances. The TQs of this type serve as "politeness strategy devices" and which "invite the addressee to contribute to the discourse" (Holmes, 1995. p.81). Algeo (1990) characterizes this interactive function as "A more frequent use of tag questions is not to seek information but to draw the person addressed into the conversation. . . . These tags ask for confirmation of what the speaker has said" (p.445).

### Excerpt (10)

- هوای عید امسال خیلی عالی شده (۱) A:  
*The weather of this New Year is so pleasant*  
 نظرت چیه؟ (۲) A:  
*Your idea?*  
 عالی عالی (۳) B:  
 به نظرم نمی تونست بهتر از این بشه (4) B:  
*I think it could not be better*  
 نظرت چیه مسافرت دسته جمعی بریم؟ (۵) A:  
*What is your idea to travel together?*

*Great, great (hhhh)*

As is shown, the speaker's TQ, *your idea*, encourages the hearer to develop the utterance and also invites this speaker to a mutual travel.

### Seek permission

The other function of tag questions relates the time the speaker wants to lessen and attenuate the force of face threatening act. It is a negative politeness strategy taken by speakers to exonerate themselves from being regarded inconsiderate. This function, coinciding with the Holmes' (1995) softening classification, can be used for giving agreement from hearers who can have authority for such permission.

### Excerpt (11)

- ما می خواهیم این مرحله رو اول از (۱) A:  
*We want to start this stage from*  
 شلیک به اهداف متحرک شروع کنیم. اوکی؟ (۲) A:

*Shooting at the movable targets. Ok?*

بله، اوکی (۳) B:

*Yes, ok*

A's *ok* means that if he wants to ask permission for his decision making and it can be followed by a positive or negative answer. Here, B's *ok* implies an affirmative point.

### **Excerpt (12)**

پس قراره دور دوم تمرینات از اول هفته شروع بشه (۱) A:

*Then, the second round of training will start next week?*

بله، از اول همین هفته (۲) B:

*Yes, at the beginning of the coming week.*

دوره شامل پنج مرحله ویژه ست؟ (۳) A:

*The training period includes five particular stages?*

و ما میتونیم اعضای گروههارو خودمون ان تخاب کنیم. درسته؟ (۴) B:

*And we can select our group members by ourselves, can we?*

بله میتونید (۵) A:

*Yes, you can*

In excerpt 12, the trainees are asking some questions regarding the details of their training period. By asking about the procedure for shaping the participating groups, the trainees intended to get permission for the system of selecting members.

### **Hold the floor**

There is another category of TQ functions in Persian. Sometimes speakers are used to employing a word or a phrase as a tag while he is, somehow completely, unaware of it. These tags can be regarded as ticks or catchwords. The speaker does not intend to receive any response, just subconsciously he uses it.

### **Excerpt (13)**

به نظرم عوامل زیادی تو موفقیت یک تیم تاثیر داره (۱) A:

*I think a lot of variables affect a team's success*

(.8) اولش اینکه همه بخوان تا موفق بشن. خوب؟ بعدیش اینکه که (۲) A:

*First, all must want to succeed, ok? Then (.7)*

به سرگروه تیم اعتماد داشته باشند، خوب؟ سومیش اینکه (۳) A:

*They have to believe in the team head, ok? Next,*

هرکسی یه چیز خاص مهارت داشته باشه، خوب؟ (۴) A:

*Each must have expertise in one thing, ok?*

البته به شانس هم بستگی داره (۵) B:

*It depends on chance, of course*

In contrast to some functions which are hearer-oriented and are used for turn-taking, Columbus (2010) defined these kinds of TQs when "there is no need or expectation of response but the speaker seems to be trying to hold the listeners' attention.... it has also been called a non-yielding the function" (pp. 303-304; citing in Anderson, 2001. p.135).

**Scorn hearer**

This speaker-oriented tag question is used for blaming hearer for the wrong action. There has been proposed no equivalent in the literature, at least to the knowledge of the researcher, for this tag question in the previous studies. The main purpose of uttering such TQs is not to elicit response, but to undermine the addressee's positive face. This function of TQs mostly results from disagreement with the content of the proposition, irritation with the interlocutor, or disapproval of the co-participant's behavior. This group of TQs implies a more aggressive, non-cooperative manner of interaction. The function may appear in the form of ridiculing the hearer, which can often be accompanied by derogatory words and offensive particles.

**Excerpt (14)**

(1) A: پستو با این کارات میخواستی کل گروه رو زیر سوال ببری، اره؟

*So, you wanted to degrade the whole team by what you have done, yes?*

(2) B: نه، من فقط

*No, I just wanted*

(3) B: نه من فقط میخواستم یه راه جدید آزمایش کنم فقط همین

*No just I wanted to take a new way. Just this*

Such tag questions can be followed by attempts to pose some justification from the addressee or he gets forced to confirm the speakers' humiliating. Below, *B* is trying to exonerate himself from the target of the speakers' antagonist words. This even can take insulting, provocative, sarcastic or ironic linguistic forms. Usually this function is used when the speaker has, or at least thinks, the authority to force, blame or rebuke the addressee.

**Excerpt (15)**

(1) A: من همیشه پیش بقیه ازت تعریف کردم

*I have always complimented on you*

(2) A: ولی تو.....

*But you*

(3) A: این بود جای تشکرم آره؟

*This was my appreciation, yes??!*

(4) B: نه منم نگفتم

*No I haven't said*

The second function of this kind of TQ is for closing the conversation. It also can be followed by a silence from the hearer. The hearer's reaction can be silence. This may signify his acceptance of the mistake, submission to the speakers' blame, or attempts to close the topics.

**Excerpt (16)**

(1) A: نباید اون اشتباه رو انجام میدادی

*You shouldn't have made that mistake*

(2) A: او اشتباه کل مسابقه را تحت تاثیر خودش قرار داد، درستیه؟

*That mistake has overshadowed the whole competition, right?*

(3) B: (Silence)

### Order or encourage hearer

A small number of TQs, 6% in our data, function as ordering or encouraging, arguably the most overlooked type of speech function in this study. Similar to the previous TQs (scorn hearers), no equivalent has been reported for this function of tag questions. This sort of tag question is used to direct the hearers' behavior and attention to a particular point.

#### Excerpt (17)

(۱) A: ما آمديم تا مسابقه رو برنده شيم  
*We have come to win the competition*

(۲) A: جدی بگیريدش  
*Take it serious*

(۳) A: اين يك چالش واقعیه، اوکی؟  
*That's a real challenge, ok?*

(۴) B: بله فرمانده  
*Yes sir*

In this example, the head member of the team, as the guide, intends to stimulate the other members' emotions and encourage them to take the competition serious. The tag *ok* motivates them, for a joint action, to be more active and leads them to more dedication to the group outcome.

In addition, sometimes the speaker intends to use a tag question to implicitly denote an imperative function. This is taken to mitigate the imposition of the speech acts, yet the hearer understands that it has an imperative intention rather than just involving the hearer and getting his opinion. The expected response can be either a positive one or resisting the order and making excuses for not doing.

#### Excerpt (18)

(۱) A: همه دارن تمام سعیشونو ميکنن تا يه محله خوب درست کنن  
*All are trying to make a good neighborhood*

(۲) A: اما تو  
*But you*

(۳) A: همينطور نشستی و هيچ کمکی ن ميکنی  
*Are just sitting and inactive*

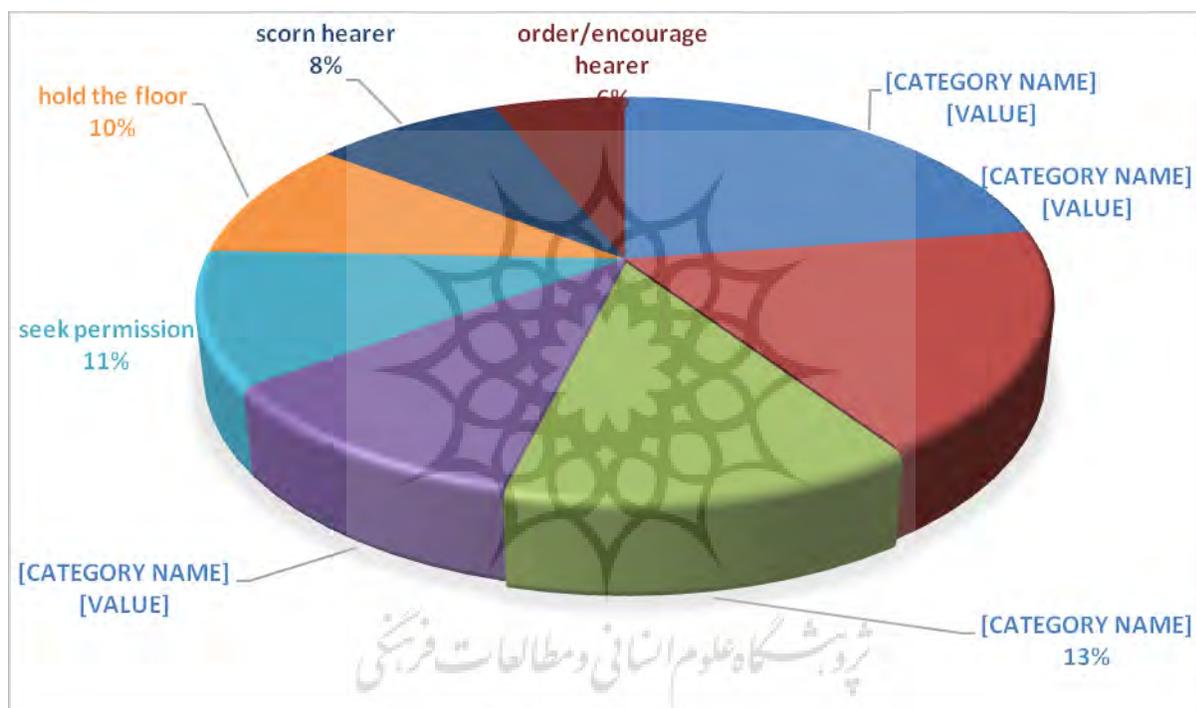
(۴) A: کارت درست نيست، هست؟  
*It isn't good, is it?*

(۵) B: نه حق با توست  
*No you are right*

Table 3 was provided to better illustrate the distribution of Persian TQs. The data analysis has shown that *Confirming speaker's presumptions* was the most frequent function of TQs. This finding, which was to be expected, can be attributed to this fact that Iranians mostly prefer to agree with their hearers and sympathize with their addressees. *Checking hearer's presumption* was the second most frequent function of TQs with a moderate difference to *Emphasize the point* function. Finally, *Holding the floor* and *scorning hearer* were the rare functions, respectively. The Figure below distinctly shows the occurrence of the TQs functions.

**Table 3. TQ Function Distribution**

Functions	Frequency
Confirm speaker's presumption	220 (22.68%)
Check hearer's presumption	175 (18.04%)
Emphasize the point	128 (13.19%)
Engage hearer in the discourse	107 (11.03 %)
Seek permission	105 (10.82 %)
Hold the floor	95 (9.79 %)
Scorn hearer	80 (8.24 %)
Order or encourage hearer	60 (6.18 %)

**Figure.** The frequency and distribution of TQs speech functions

### Research Question Two: What are the similarities and differences in form-function correlations between Persian and English tag questions?

Tag constructions in Persian and other languages, English as an example, hold many overlaps in use. Most of the studies mentioned in the literature have reported several classifications of TQs from their own points of view in which *Confirmatory* was found to be the most common function among all. In some papers, the *Confirmatory* function takes priority: the tag serves principally to confirm his assumptions with the hearer. This function indicates reduced certainty on the part of the speaker to the truth of the proposition. *Facilitative*, a speaker-oriented function, as was reported in others, intends to engage the hearer in the discourse as well as heighten the contribution of the addressee in the conversation. There are also interesting findings obtained in the current study.

On the one hand, *Confirming Speakers' Presumption* is likened to *Confirmatory* as was observed by Roesle (2001), and Tottie and Hoffmann (2006) in which the speaker intends to confirm his assumption with the hearer. Such functions, which can be attributed to the lower status of the speaker vs. the hearer, would be used by the speaker who is not fully certain about his assumption. Like Bazanella (1994), this function is also employed by speakers to prompt agreement with hearers. We made a distinction between confirmation of speakers' assumption and checking hearers' understanding. The latter as the hearer-oriented function is used to make sure whether the human understood the uttered information or not. The other function which coincides with Mitune's (2012) *Orientation* has been termed as emphasize the points. This function is an opportunity for the hearer to imagine and follow what the speaker is referring to. By the same token, engaging hearer in the discourse and seeking permission conformed to that of facilitative and softening of Holmes (1995).

Speakers tend to establish common ground and share their feelings and values with hearers. And finally, the other tag question, *Scorning the hearer*, prevalently used in Persian dialogic interactions, was also reported by Holmes (1995) and Algeo (1990) as *Challenging* and *Aggressive*, respectively. Speakers use insulting and provocative utterances to degrade the heroes.

On the other hand, there are functions of TQs that have not been unveiled in the previous literature, at least to the knowledge of the researcher. The second function of *Scorning hearer*, in addition to blaming hearer, is using sarcastic words and ironic phrases that the former works have not identified. Such functions can be followed by justification, explanation or silence from the side of the hearer. A second intriguing finding of the current study relates employing utterances to implicitly denote imperative function so as to direct addressee's behavior and draw his attention to a particular point. Analysis on this type of TQs has been absent in the literature as well. Too, the other category of TQs that has not been reported on is that function which is for making sure that the addressee is following the speaker. The speaker may be unaware of it, but, he does not expect any response from the hearer. No equivalent has been identified in the previous works of Persian TQs in this regard (see table 4).

**Table 4. Comparison of the findings**

<b>Present study</b>	<b>Other Corresponding Classifications</b>
Confirm speaker's presumptions (Hoffmann, 2006)	Confirmatory (Roesle, 2001; Tottie and Hoffmann, 2006)
<b>Hold the floor</b>	-----
Emphasize the point	Orientation (Mithun, 2012)
Check hearer's presumption (Bazzanella, 1994)	Checking understanding
Engage hearer in the discourse	Facilitative (Holmes, 1995)
Seek permission	Softening (Holmes, 1995)
Scorn hearer (Hoffmann, 2006)	The first function: Aggressive (Roesle, 2001; Tottie and Hoffmann, 2006)
<b>The second function</b>	-----
<b>Order or encourage hearer</b>	-----

### Conclusion

The overall picture that emerges from this analysis is twofold: first, the functions identified in the present study on Persian have, to an extent, overlaps and commonalities with other languages and English in particular as provided in the literature. However, there have been proposed some functions such as *Scorning Hearer and Holding Floor* that have discussed and elaborated, at least to the knowledge of the researcher, in the previous works. So this study can be regarded as a contribution to the existing works in TQs both at linguistics and cross-linguistic level. Also the identified functions have been analyzed by giving information whether the function is speaker or hearer oriented, and what response is expected when such a TQ is uttered. It was also found that in everyday dialogic settings, the largest proportion of the corpora accounted for confirmation of the speakers' assumptions and checking hearers' understanding. In the meantime, it was discussed that the participants in the conversation with higher social status tend to control the discourse by checking the hearers' assumption and holding the floor. They also use their authority and power to scorn and even ridicule addressees by their tag questions. On the other hand, it was found that interlocutors with lower conversational status prefer to confirm their assumptions with the hearers, and take some strategies to emphasize their points.

The current study can therefore be considered as a contribution to a broader understanding of TQs supported by a relatively large dataset. Also, the present work has provided a comprehensive picture of the speech functions of TQs in spoken utterances through analyzing the interaction between syntactic and sociolinguistic factors.

Like any other studies, this is not free of any limitations. The data used for this research was not completely representative of the everyday conversations which makes it difficult to generalize the findings to other settings and challenging to compare it with the existing or following studies. Second, sociolinguistic variable including gender ethnicity and age were not considered in the current study which could have provided a more comprehensive image of the affective variable in TQs. Third, the data derived from *Commander* and the telephone communications of *CALLFRIEND* to investigate the functions of TQs in the everyday communications of Iranians which would not suffice to take a full picture of the categories and subcategories plus the functions of TQs in Persian.

Regarding the findings and shortcomings of the current study, further avenues can be explored. One can start to investigate the uses and functions of TQs in narratives and poems. These areas, probably because of their extensive fields, have not been well studied. Also, future researchers can insert more variables such as sociolinguistic and individual differences to open new windows in TQs.

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### Transcription conventions

(.) period within parentheses indicates micropause.

(2.0) indicates timed pause in approximate seconds.

ye:s colon indicates stretching of sound it follows.

yes. period indicates falling intonation.

yes, comma indicates relatively constant intonation.

yes? question mark indicates upward intonation.

yes! exclamation indicates animated tone.

YES capital letters indicate increased volume.

hhh indicate audible aspiration, possibly laughter.

