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Tag questions across Irish English and British English: A corpus analysis of form and function

Abstract: The present study, situated in the area of variational pragmatics, contrasts tag question (TQ) use in Ireland and Great Britain using spoken data from the Irish and British components of the International Corpus of English (ICE). Analysis is on the formal and functional level and also investigates form-functional relationships. Findings reveal many similarities in the use of TQs across the varieties. They also point, however, to a lower use of TQs in Irish English and in a range of variety-preferential features on both the formal and functional levels. The paper shows how an in-depth analysis of form-function relations together with a fine-tuned investigation of sub-functions gives an insight into formal preferences.

Keywords: tag questions, Irish English, British English, variational pragmatics, regional pragmatic variation

DOI 10.1515/multi-2014-0099

1 Introduction

Across the varieties of English, contrasts of British English (BrE) and American English (AmE) have been a primary focus of cross-varietal research on tag questions (TQs) of the type *It's not raining, is it?*, *It's a nice day, isn't it?* (cf. Algeo 1990; Allerton 2009; Tottie and Hoffmann 2006). Studies have focused on the syntax and pragmatics of TQs and have reported variation on the level of frequency of use, on the formal level, particularly with regard to differences in operator use and polarity preferences, and on the functional level. A

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study by Tottie and Hoffmann (2006) using the British National Corpus (BNC) and the Longman Spoken American Corpus (LSAC), for instance, found BrE to use TQs to a greater extent than AmE (cf. Tottie and Hoffmann 2006). On a pragmatic level, they found tag function preferences to diverge, with confirmatory tags (speaker unsure of truth of proposition and therefore requires confirmation) and attitudinal tags (emphasize content of speaker's utterance and do not demand a reply) being slightly more frequent in BrE, and facilitative tags (employed to involve the listener despite the speaker being sure of the truth of the proposition) considerably more frequent in AmE (cf. also Algeo [1990: 448–449] on peremptory and aggressive tags). Other studies of TQ use across the varieties of English have revealed similar variation. However, to date these studies are limited to research on Philippine English (PhilE) and Hong Kong English (HKE). Borlongan (2008), an analysis of TQs in the Philippine component of ICE (ICE-PHI), for instance, records a low frequency of TQs in PhilE relative to Tottie and Hoffmann's (2006) findings for BrE and AmE and also relative to Wong (2007) on TQ in the Hong Kong component of the ICE (ICE-HK). In terms of pragmatic function, Borlongan (2008) also found attitudinal tags to be more frequent in both HKE and PhilE relative to BrE or AmE. The facilitative function, on the other hand, was employed to a larger extent in BrE and AmE relative to PhilE. Such cross-varietal findings point to the need to intensify research into TQ use across the varieties of English, contrastive research on further Inner and Outer Circle varieties remaining a research desideratum. This is also the case for Irish English (IrE), to which we now turn.

Systematic contrastive analyses of TQs involving IrE and further Inner or Outer Circle varieties are lacking, as are systematic analyses of TQs confined to IrE itself. Indeed, the study of TQs in IrE is a very young endeavour. The majority of analyses focus on the level of form only (cf. Hickey 2007 and Hickey 2008; Kallen and Kirk 2012; Lucek 2011). Barron (forthcoming a), an analysis of TQ form and function in a specialised corpus of retail service-encounters, is an exception. Existing studies have reported reversed polarity between anchor and tag to be most frequent in IrE (cf. Barron forthcoming a; Hickey 2008: 242), a finding which is also reflected in BrE and AmE (cf. Tottie and Hoffmann 2006). However, Barron (forthcoming a), a study of a retail corpus of IrE, also finds positive constant polarity TQs to be particularly common relative to reference corpora of BrE and AmE. In addition, this study reports a comparatively high use of interrogative anchor constructions in IrE relative to BrE and AmE. Finally, on the level of function, Barron (forthcoming a) finds the confirmation-eliciting function (functionally equivalent to questions in the present analysis) to be the most frequent TQ function in the IrE retail corpus. However, in the absence of functional analyses of general corpora of IrE, she calls for further research to

investigate whether this feature is a variety-specific or a genre-specific feature in IrE.

The present paper contrasts the use of TQs in Ireland and Britain. The study is situated in the field of variational pragmatics, a research area concerned with systematically investigating intralingual pragmatic variation according to the macro-social factors of region, gender, social class, age and ethnic identity (cf. Barron this issue and Barron forthcoming a; Barron and Schneider 2009; Schneider 2010, Schneider 2012a and Schneider 2012b; Schneider and Barron 2008). It represents a study of regional variation on the level of national varieties of pluricentric languages. The analysis takes the formal and functional levels of analysis into consideration and also examines form-function correlations. As such, the present study addresses the need outlined above for research on TQs across the varieties of English, while at the same time adding to the variational pragmatic scholarship and also to pragmatic research on IrE. These are both research areas in which Klaus P. Schneider, to whom this paper and Special Issue is dedicated, has produced ground-breaking scholarship (cf. Barron this issue).

Variational pragmatic analyses abide by the principles of empiricity, contrastivity and comparability (cf. Schneider 2010 and Schneider 2014: 362–365). In other words, not only is research empirical, but in line with the contrastivity principle. That is, linguistic features are only considered variety-specific or variety-preferential if the variety under study is contrasted with at least one other variety of the same type and language, since a mere recording of a feature or pattern in a particular variety in the absence of comparative research on further varieties does not warrant statements as to the distinctiveness nor relative saliency of that feature in the variety at hand. Finally, the principle of comparability underlines the need for comparable data sets in variational analyses. The present study follows these three principles.

Data for the empirical study is from two corpora comparable in design, the Irish and British components of the ICE, ICE-Ireland and ICE-GB (<http://ice-corpora.net/ice/design.htm>). Since TQs are predominantly a feature of spoken, dialogic discourse (cf. e.g. Allerton 2009; Holmes 1995; Kimps et al. 2014; Tottie and Hoffmann 2006), the present TQ analysis focuses on the text types private face-to-face conversations and telephone calls. The research questions posed are the following:

- a. What TQs are used by IrE and BrE speakers and what formal features do these TQ have?
- b. What functions do the TQs identified serve in each of the two varieties?
- c. Can form-function correlations be identified in IrE and BrE?

The paper first provides a description of TQs from a formal and functional perspective. Attention then turns to the data and methodology, followed by the findings. The paper concludes with a discussion and suggestions for further research.

2 Tag questions

This section describes TQs from a formal (2.1) and functional (2.2) perspective and outlines the categories employed in the empirical analysis to follow.

2.1 Tag questions: A formal description

In the present context, a TQ is defined as a combination of two clauses, an anchor and a tag uttered by the same speaker, as in examples (1–4).

- (1) You were dreaming that were you
(ICE-Ireland, S1A-078\$A)
- (2) There're remarkable stories aren't there about these people
(ICE-GB, S1A-063#129:1:A)
- (3) So that was <,> I wasn't I mean you always learn don't you every time you see something but I but uhm and I did did learn some oh bits on language
There were some bits in their uhm <,> uh a little bit on the on N L P
(ICE-GB, S1A-060#75:1:B–#76:1:B)
- (4) You mean about Felicity and her achievements is it
(ICE-GB, S1A-010#215:1:B)

The anchor can be a declarative, imperative, exclamative or interrogative clause (cf. Axelsson 2011: 30). The tag hosted by that anchor, on the other hand, is a clause with interrogative syntax, consisting of an auxiliary verb operator and a pronominal subject. In the prototypical TQ, the so-called canonical TQ, the tag takes the form of a “concordant mini clause” (Allerton 2009: 310). Here, as can be seen in examples (1) and (2), the anchor subject and the tag subject are co-referential. In other words, the tag subject is either expressed by a matching anaphoric pronoun (1), or in the case of existential constructions, by existential *there* (2). Furthermore, the tag operator corresponds to the finite verb in the

anchor in number, tense and person. If the finite verb is lexical, as in (3), the dummy auxiliary *do* is used (cf. Axelsson 2011: 33; Quirk et al. 1985: 810). Lastly, canonical TQs may exhibit reversed polarity, as in (2) and (3), or constant polarity, as in (1). The following anchor-tag combinations are possible, although negative-negative combinations are known to be rare (cf. e.g. Allerton 2009; Axelsson 2011: 33–35):

- positive anchor – negative tag – positive anchor – positive tag
- negative anchor – positive tag – negative anchor – negative tag

The second group of TQs covered by the present definition comprises so-called invariant TQs which also contain an interrogative tag consisting of an operator and a pronominal subject (e.g. *is it?*). Unlike canonical TQs, here the tag is “non-concordant” (Allerton 2009: 310), i.e. it is not dependent on the syntactic properties of the anchor (cf. Andersen 2001: 104). For instance, in example (4) a concordant tag would take the form of *don’t you?* or *do you?*. What we find, however, is the tag *is it?*, in which neither the anchor subject *you* is picked up, nor the lexical verb *to mean* replaced by the auxiliary *do*.¹

Finally, a note on turn position and the role of TQs in turn-taking organisation is in order. Traditionally, TQs have been discussed as turn-final devices signalling that the speaker is yielding the conversational floor and projecting a response by the addressee (cf. Sacks et al. 1974). Example (5) below is a case in point. Here speaker B stops talking after uttering the TQ, provoking speaker A’s response. However, recent empirical research reveals a more complicated picture: not all TQs are turn-final, some also being embedded as in example (9). In addition, not all (final or non-final) TQs function to project a next turn (Andersen 1998; Axelsson 2011; Kimps et al. 2014). For instance, in (10) speaker A’s TQ itself functions as an acknowledging response to speaker C’s preceding assertion. After uttering it, A does not appear to expect a response to the TQ and, indeed, the speaker continues talking. We will turn to the relationship between turn position and function in Section 4.2.

2.2 Tag questions: A focus on function

The semantics and pragmatics of the TQs under investigation in the present study have been the subject of a number of analyses and various

¹ Other invariant tags, which are not discussed in this study, include single-word tags such as *right*, and *okay*, phonological sequences, such as *eh* and *huh*, and fixed phrases containing lexical material, such as *(do) you know/see* and *I think*. The tag *innit?* – the coalesced form of *isn’t it?* – is also excluded.

categorisations have been put forward, notably by Algeo (1988, 1990, 2006), Axelsson (2011), Holmes (1982, 1995), Tottie and Hoffmann (2006, 2009), and, most recently, by Kimps et al. (2014). While there is considerable overlap among the categories identified (for an overview cf. Axelsson [2011: 41–58]), there are differences particularly in the type of analytical unit selected, whether tag or anchor and tag. Holmes (1995), for instance, only considers the tag (cf. also Allerton 2009; Andersen 2001; Holmes 1982), while Axelsson (2011) and Kimps et al. (2014) focus on the whole TQ (cf. also Kimps 2007). Others, such as Algeo (1988, 1990) and Tottie and Hoffmann (2006), appear to oscillate between the pragmatic functions of TQs and tags (as also discussed in Axelsson [2011: 57]).

In the present study, the unit of analysis is the TQ. The functional model employed is an extension of recent work by Kimps et al. (2014), itself building on Axelsson (2011). Kimps et al.'s (2014) goal – and that of the present study – is to investigate specifically the speech and interactional functions of TQ utterances, as well as the relationship between function and surface characteristics (e.g. TQ polarity, anchor mood, position within the conversational turn and, in Kimps et al.'s study, intonation). The main strengths of the model lie in the robustness and clarity of the criteria differentiating the various interactional functions (cf. below for details) and in the fact that it is driven by naturally-occurring dialogue data (Kimps et al. employed data from the Bergen Corpus of London Teenage Language [COLT] and the London-Lund Corpus of Spoken English [LLC]).

Following Kimps et al. (2014), two overarching categories are distinguished in the present study, namely information-oriented TQs and desired action-oriented TQs (cf. Figure 1). Desired action-oriented TQs cover TQs used to give or demand goods and services and include requests, offers and suggestions (Axelsson 2011; Kimps et al. 2014: 81–82). Information-oriented TQs, on the other hand, are involved in the exchange of information between speaker and addressee. These latter TQs are further sub-differentiated according to two chief interdependent criteria put forward by Kimps et al. (2014): a) the relative knowledge status of the interlocutors and b) adjacency. With regard to the relative knowledge status, Kimps et al. (2014: 69) apply Labov and Fanshel's (1977) distinction between A-events, B-events and A-B events. Thus, A-events are those in which the information contained in the TQ is already in the possession of the speaker, who is the "primary knower". B-events involve events in which "the one who utters the TQ is a secondary knower seeking information" from a more knowledgeable addressee. Lastly, AB-events relate to shared knowledge and are those in which "the speaker projects that s/he finds it relevant that the co-participant also has access to the knowledge territory".

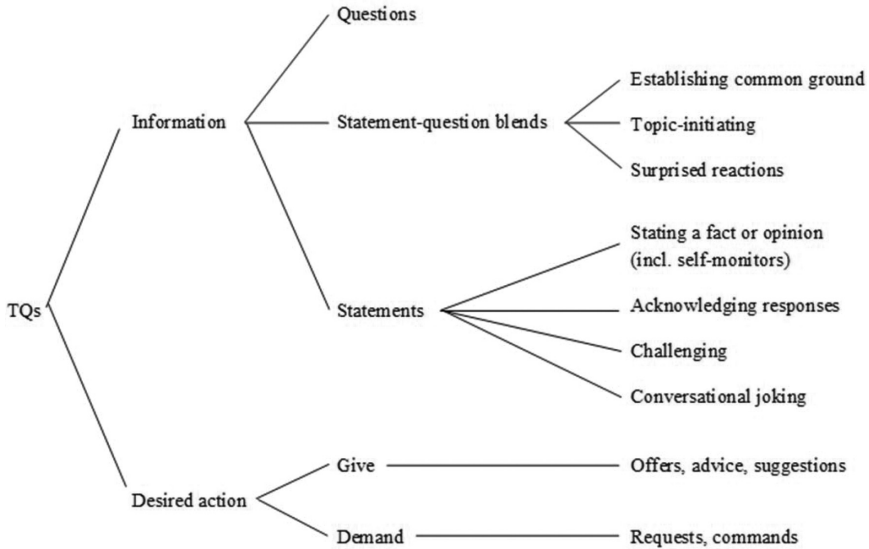


Figure 1: The functional classification of TQs adopted in this study.

The second criterion, adjacency, pertains to whether or not a TQ forms part of an adjacency pair. As Kimps et al. (2014: 70–71) demonstrate, TQs may represent the first part of an adjacency pair, projecting a response from the hearer. They may also function as second parts, i.e. as responses to a preceding utterance. Finally, some TQs do not expect a response at all. Based on these two primary criteria of knowledge status and adjacency, three types of information-oriented TQs are differentiated in the present analysis, namely questions, statements and statement-question (S-Q) blends. Each category is detailed in Sections 2.2.1–2.2.3 (cf. Kimps et al. 2014: 75–81). Kimps et al. (2014: 75–81) differentiate a further category of responses, which is not adopted in the present study. Rather, responding TQs are treated as either questions, statements or S-Q blends because, as Kimps et al. (2014: 70) themselves also point out, “the essence of adjacency lies in ‘the ‘power’ of a turn to mobilize a next’ (Drew 2012: 65)”. This turn-mobilising power is a major force driving our classification, irrespective of whether a particular TQ is itself responding to a previous turn or not. Apart from this modification, the present study also extends Kimps et al.’s model. When dealing with actual examples in the data, we found that statements and S-Q blends (2.2.2–2.2.3) are not uniform categories but that several subtypes may be distinguished. These are displayed in Figure 1 and discussed below.

2.2.1 Questions

TQs in this category (cf. Figure 1) seek information and “project a next turn, in which the information sought after will be provided” (Kimps et al. 2014: 67). They constitute B-events, i.e. the addressee is deemed to be the primary knower (Kimps et al. 2014: 75). Example (5) illustrates this category. Here, speaker B’s turn demands A to respond and communicate information sought after by B.

- (5) B: Pauline your tea’s not too hot is it
 A: That’s lovely <#> No it’s fine it’s lovely
 (ICE-Ireland, S1A-008)

2.2.2 Statements

Statement TQs do not expect a response from the addressee as questions do but are used to give information (Kimps et al. 2014: 77–78). As such they represent an A-event, with the speaker being the primary knower. In the present data, statement TQs were found to directly or indirectly communicate factual information, personal beliefs, assessments and positive or negative attitudes towards a certain topic or towards the addressee. This broad category is roughly equivalent to Axelsson’s (2011) rhetorical TQs. Statement TQs appear frequently in turn-embedded position (Kimps et al. 2014: 77), where the speaker continues to talk, thus closing down the possibility of negotiation (cf. examples [3], [7] and [9]) (cf. Axelsson 2011: 75–81). Nevertheless, backchannels or unsolicited responses may occur. Such responses may signal listenership (Kimps et al. 2014: 77) or function to reinforce (7), qualify or cancel (11) a proposition in the anchor (Axelsson 2011: 77–78).

In the present data four subcategories of statement TQs are distinguished: *stating a fact or opinion* (including *self-monitors*), *acknowledging responses*, *challenging* and *conversational joking*. These are illustrated in the following:

TQs stating a fact or opinion are concerned with communicating facts (6) or expressing the speaker’s own convictions, assessments or evaluations (7).

- (6) A: Where did I leave my phonecard <,>
 B: Uhm you brought it up did you not with a bit of paper
 A: Uh there it is <,,>
 (ICE-GB, S1A-039:#129:1:B-#130:1:A)
- (7) A: It needs <,> It does need the individual to set the whole <,> <[1> <[1> thing doesn’t it </[1> because it’s only the individual who can do it on <,>

You can't have a group feeling the same thing always expressing the same thing <,>

B: <[1> It does

It does </[1> </{1>

(ICE-GB, S1A-045#16:1:A-#22:1:B)

Such TQ uses are reminiscent of Algeo's (1990: 446) punctuational tags and Tottie and Hoffmann's (2006: 300) attitudinal tags, both of which function to emphasise and draw attention to what the speaker has said in the anchor without expecting a response. Within this stating a fact or opinion category, a special type of TQ, which we term *self-monitor*, was identified which to our knowledge has not yet been noted in the literature. In these TQs, information is shared with the addressee while at the same time signalling that as a result of self-monitoring, the speaker has detected trouble with the content/wording of the anchor and is not committed to the precision of the utterance. Such TQs look very much like the first and second parts of a self-repair, where the anchor, a statement, represents the *original utterance*, and the tag represents the *editing term*, a vocal signal of trouble detection (Levelt 1983). In (8), for instance, A has difficulty recalling the exact number of table companions and tentatively offers an approximate number (signalled by *I think* and *about*), the level of accuracy of which s/he immediately questions. The speaker self-supplies the TQ with a response (*Seven*), which in Levelt's (1983) terminology can be said to function as the *repair proper* of the self-repair. This repair, frequently but not always present, may represent a more accurate formulation of the anchor or anchor element.

(8) B: How many's at your table now for the ball

A: Uhm <,> how many's at our table now for the Ball

About seven I think <,> is it

Seven <,>

B: Very good

(ICE-Ireland, S1A-099)

Acknowledging responses represent another subtype of statements. Here, the speaker acknowledges the addressee's preceding assertion, thus signalling interpersonal accord (cf. example [9]).² As is the case with all statement types, the

² Acknowledging responses would be considered responses in Kimps et al.'s (2014: 79–81) categorisation, as they function as the second part of an adjacency pair.

speaker is giving information and does not expect a response. Accompanying clues are expressions, such as *yeah* and *oh yeah*.

- (9) C: She always gets out of everything
 A: Yeah she does doesn't she
 She's always complaining
 (ICE-Ireland, S1A-075)

The third subcategory is comprised of *challenging TQs*. This category embraces Axelsson's broad view of *challenging TQs*, "where the speaker questions the 'truth, value, or authority' (Collins COBUILD 2001: 241) of the addressee" (2011: 86). It involves direct attacks where the addressee is teased or mocked (10), contradicted (11), threatened, accused or reproached (12). Included are also Algeo's (1990) patronising *peremptory* (13) and *aggressive* categories.³ The main purpose of challenging TQs is to undermine the addressee's positive face and gain power. Hence, they are not response-eliciting (cf. also Alexsson 2011: 161–167). Responses may, however, follow, for instance when the addressee reacts to a verbal attack in an attempt to either counter it, as in (12), often with justifications.

- (10) C: Mm
 What have you been doing
 Working away
 A: Well I have been working cos I do <,> <{> <[> I do loads of kind of </[>
 B: <[> You're a slogger aren't you </[> </{>
 Slog slog slog
 A: Uhm
 (ICE-Ireland, S1A-016)
- (11) C: Oil on my jeans you mean
 A: Your jeans were they
 B: They weren't your jeans
 What are you talking about
 C: Don't get ratty now
 (ICE-Ireland, S1A-080)

³ Peremptory tags follow "a statement of obvious or universal truth, with which it is practically impossible to disagree", with the intention of insulting the addressee's intelligence and rendering him/her speechless (1990: 446–447). The insulting or provocative effect of aggressive tags in contrast arises from the fact that they follow statements that "the addressee cannot be reasonably expected to know" (1990: 447).

- (12) B: It isn't broken at all
 Have you any brain in your head at all have you
 A: Who
 B: You
 A: I bet you I've more of a brain
 I might have bigger than yours
 (ICE-Ireland, S1A-087)
- (13) Well <.,> if there's anything if there's anything in one of the letters that I think is vaguely chatty I'm obviously David I'm not going to give him any of the personal stuff am I
 (ICE-GB, S1A-092:#323:1:A)

A final subcategory of statement TQs, *conversational joking*, is illustrated in (14), where speaker A jokingly justifies the departure of B's visitors. Such TQs are not aggressive but allow the speaker to "present a personality, share experiences and attitudes, and promote rapport" in an entertaining fashion (Norrick 2003: 1345). Such TQs may be ironic or understating and are often accompanied by laughter. They do not expect a response but rather punctuate the conversation.

- (14) A: How long were they here for
 B: Oh they stayed for weeks
 A: Right
 B: Finally they got tired and wanted to go back to their city life you know
 A: Yeah
 Suppose it would be quiet <.,> would it <&> laughter </&>
 So did you ever keep in touch with them or
 (ICE-Ireland, S1A-029)

2.2.3 Statement-question blends

These TQs are employed when the speaker is certain of the truth of the proposition but nevertheless requires a response from the addressee. Kimps et al. (2014: 74) define S-Q blends as follows:

[S-Q blends] have some recognizable features of both statement and question, but cannot be reduced to either. Labelling them as a question would be stretching the limits of the category since the speaker is not seeking information, but is a primary knower making an assertion or evaluation. Categorizing them as a statement, on the other hand, is also problematic since these TQs intrinsically expect a response from the co-participant(s).

S-Q blends involve either an AB-event, where the knowledge of both participants in the dialogue is relevant, or an A-event, where the speaker “projects that s/he expects the co-participant(s) to catch up with this information and reduce the knowledge imbalance” (Kimps et al. 2014: 77). In the present data, three types of S-Q blends were distinguished: TQs *establishing common ground*, *topic-initiating* TQs, and TQs expressing a *surprised reaction* (cf. Figure 1).

When uttering a TQ *establishing common ground*, the speaker asserts a fact (15), makes an evaluation or expresses an opinion (16), and invites the addressee’s confirmation in order to verify or explicitly establish common ground.

- (15) A: And if I remember rightly you had jaundice didn’t you
Trust him to stay longer
B: I had had
I was getting over it
(ICE-GB, S1A-028#51:1:A-#54:1:B)
- (16) D: I mean it’s fabulous to get hold of a book and you just don’t want to put it down
It’s it’s wonderful isn’t it when you just want uh it to go on and on forever and never finish
?: Yes yeah
D: Uh is is marvellous <,>
(ICE-GB, S1A-016#231:1:D-#234:1:D)

Topic-initiating TQs focus in the first instance on involving the addressee in conversation and allow confirmations and rejections. They are largely comparable to Axelsson’s (2011: 69) conversation-initiating TQs. A typical example is shown in (17). Here, speaker B’s TQ initiates a new topic, namely speaker C’s visit to London. After C has provided an initial confirmatory response to the TQ, B develops the topic by posing a subsequent question, this time inquiring if C enjoyed the visit. The speaker in topic-initiating TQs is sure of the information contained in the anchor (cf. also Axelsson 2011: 74–75). They are, thus, A-events or AB-events and a response is expected.

- (17) E: Surely they just <,> should just up the prices though <[1> <,> <{1> </[1>
<[2> <[2> Like if everyone paid an extra </[2> ten fifteen p or something <,>
It wouldn’t take much
D: <[1> Yeah
I know </[1> </[1>
A: <[2> It’s very cheap after all </[2> </[2>

- B: You were in London were you
 C: Mm <,>
 D: But the <[1> <[1> person in charge has </[1> an enormous effect <[2>
 <[2> on what is produced </[2> <,> because at <unclear> <unclear-
 words> </unclear> they changed the cook and then got to the point
 where they were virtually thinking of closing the restaurant and it
 changed hands
 B: <[1> Did you have a good time </[1> </[1>
 C: <[2> Yeah very nice </[2> </[2>
 (ICE-GB, S1A-055#67:1:E-#77:1:C)

Finally, a handful of TQs were identified which express surprise and a certain amount of disbelief towards what the addressee has just said without being challenging or impolite (cf. example [18]).⁴ In the present data, the majority of these *surprised reaction TQs* are turn-final, expressing a desire to have the assertion which caused the speaker's reaction or the unexpected inference triggered by it confirmed. Indeed, all of the TQs in this category receive a confirmatory response (cf. also Kimps [2007: 282] for a similar description of declarative constant polarity TQs expressing surprise).

- (18) C: He's probably still in England
 B: Oh I think he's at home
 C: He's at home is he
 B: Yeah I think he's at home
 (ICE-Ireland, S1A-087)

2.2.4 Desired action TQs

The final overriding functional category employed is that of *desired action TQs*. These TQs involve commissives or directives, such as requests, commands, offers, advice and suggestions, employed in the exchange of goods and services. A request is shown in example (19). They correspond with Axelsson's (2011) "exchanging goods and services" category and Kimps et al.'s (2014) "desired action-oriented TQs" category. Their function differentiates them from the other categories discussed in Sections 2.2.1–2.2.3, which are focused on the exchange of information.

- (19) Get on with it will you
 (ICE-Ireland, S1A-051\$E)

⁴ As with acknowledging responses (cf. Section 2.1.2), S-Q blends would be classified as responses in Kimps et al. (2014) due to their reactive nature (cf. 2.2).

3 Data and methods

The present TQ analysis focuses on the ICE text types private face-to-face conversations and telephone calls, totalling 197,115 words in ICE-GB and 190,635 words in ICE-Ireland.⁵ TQs were searched for electronically in both ICE corpora using *Wordsmith Tools 6* (Scott 2012) on the basis of a) the list of tags found in SPICE-Ireland (cf. Kallen and Kirk 2012: 110–113), and b) the comprehensive list of tags provided by Axelsson (2011: 39).⁶ A total of 766 TQs were identified based on this list. The analysis concentrates on TQ polarity, position within the conversational turn and on the mood of the anchor as set out in Section 2. Elliptical anchors, as in *Nice, isn't it?*, were considered to be declarative and of positive polarity. Elliptical anchors containing overt negation, as in *Not a doctor, is he?*, were coded as carrying negative polarity.

For the functional analysis, a sample of 250 TQs from each variety was selected randomly (500 items in total). A range of clues were taken into account in the assignment of function, including propositional content and the wider linguistic context preceding and following a TQ. Based on these clues, two essential criteria were employed in order to determine speech function: the relative knowledge status of speaker and addressee and the power of a TQ to project a next turn (cf. 2.2). The presence of discourse markers provided further clues in elucidating the illocutionary point of the TQ as an assertion or question (such as *you know* and *I mean*) (cf. e.g. Axelsson 2011). Intonation would also have been a valuable clue in the assignment of function. However, it was not possible to take this factor into account due to the lack of full prosodic annotation in the two corpora.⁷ This is recognised as a limitation of the present study.

⁵ These word counts are based on Schweinberger's (2014a, 2014b) word counts per speaker in the ICE corpora. His extraction methods and results can be viewed at <http://www.martinschweinberger.de/blog/codes-tutorials/>. These word counts are slightly lower than those calculated for ICE-Ireland in Kallen and Kirk (2008, 2012) and for ICE-GB Release 2 (Aarts and Wallis 2006) due to the fact that contractions (e.g. *don't* and *I'm*) are counted as one word by Schweinberger and two words by the corpus compilers themselves. Furthermore, Schweinberger discounts corpus mark-up in angle brackets (< and >) and metalinguistic material such as laughter and coughing.

⁶ Despite having a similar design, it was noticed that unlike the Irish component, the British ICE sub-corpus of face-to-face conversations includes some interactions in which the interactants act in a professional role. Further research is required to ascertain whether such differences have an influence on the comparability of the data.

⁷ While the original recordings for ICE-GB are publicly available, this is not the case for ICE-Ireland. SPICE-Ireland, a further development on the transcripts of ICE-Ireland, includes prosodic annotation for about 20% (23) of the text samples categories face-to-face and telephone conversations (Kallen and Kirk 2012: 39). Assuming an even distribution of TQs in this dataset,

Finally, a number of 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. The statistical measures applied are Pearson's chi-squared test and Fisher's exact test. A Bonferroni correction was employed in cases of multiple comparisons.

4 Results

The quantitative analysis yielded 501 TQs in ICE-GB and 265 TQs in ICE-Ireland (766 in total). In terms of relative frequency, TQs in ICE-GB are used approximately 1.8 times more often than in ICE-Ireland (2542 vs. 1401 TQs per million words respectively). This finding reflects previous research which has revealed a relative abundance of TQs in BrE relative to AmE (e.g. Algeo 2006; Allerton 2009; Tottie and Hoffmann 2006) and relative to Outer Circle varieties such as PhilE (Borlongan 2008) and HKE (Wong 2007). We now turn to the formal and functional analysis of the TQs identified (Sections 4.1 and 4.2).

4.1 Formal features of TQs

The formal analysis focuses on the polarity of TQs, on the position of the TQs within the conversational turn, and on the mood structure of the anchor. We turn first to polarity.

The distribution of the four polarity types in BrE and IrE is illustrated in Figure 2. The majority of TQs are of reversed polarity, with positive-negative combinations over three times more frequent than negative-positive ones in both corpora. This is a tendency which is well attested cross-varietally (cf. Axelsson [2011: 119] and Kimps et al. [2014: 72] on BrE; Tottie and Hoffmann [2006: 290] on BrE and AmE; Borlongan [2008: 12] on PhilE; Wong [2007: 51] on HKE). However, while the proportion of negative-positive TQs in ICE-GB and ICE-Ireland is similar (18.36% vs. 15.47%), that of positive-negative TQs is approximately 17% lower in IrE (51.32% in IrE vs. 68.46% in BrE), a highly significant difference ($\chi^2 = 21.7387$, $df = 1$, $p_{\text{bonferroni}} < 0.001$). These differences are explained by observing the distribution of positive constant polarity TQs. The proportion of

however, only 53 TQs would have been available with prosodic annotation. In an effort to ensure comparability between the coding of the BrE and IrE corpora, it was decided to carry out coding on the basis of the written transcripts alone.

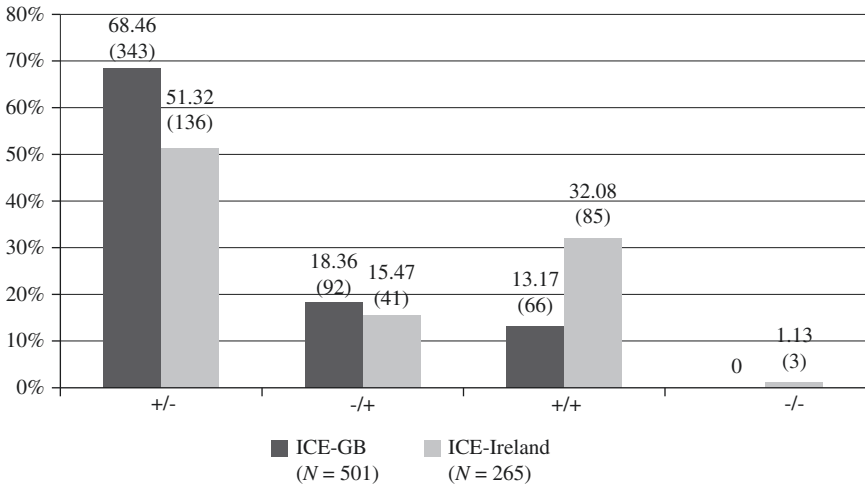


Figure 2: Polarity Types used in ICE-GB and ICE-Ireland (percentages and raw frequencies).

positive-positive TQs in the Irish data is some 19% higher than that in BrE, a figure which reflects the magnitude of the positive-negative differences ($\chi^2 = 39.1262$, $df = 1$, $p_{\text{bonferroni}} < 0.001$). Indeed, positive-positive TQs are the second most frequent polarity type in IrE, amounting to 32.08% of the total TQ use. These findings support those by Barron (forthcoming a), who also found positive-positive TQs to be prominent in the Irish English retail corpus.⁸ Taken together, these findings suggest that the frequent use of positive constant polarity TQs represents a variety-preferential feature of IrE relative to BrE, AmE and PhlE (Borlongan 2008; Tottie and Hoffmann 2006: 290).⁹

The present study also revealed only three occurrences (1.13%) of negative-negative polarity TQs in ICE-Ireland, supporting previous claims by Hickey (2007: 277) for IrE. Negative-negative TQs were not found in ICE-GB, a fact that supports previous research (cf. e.g. Axelsson 2011; Kimps et al. 2014; Tottie and Hoffmann 2006: 290). These findings, as well as others for PhlE and HKE (cf. Borlongan 2008; Wong 2007), underline the infrequent occurrence of negative-negative polarity across the Englishes.

⁸ Barron (forthcoming a) analysed the polarity of canonical TQs only. However, given the limited number of invariant tags in the present study (12 in ICE-Ireland vs. 11 in ICE-GB), these findings are largely comparable.

⁹ Wong (2007: 50–51) also found positive constant polarity TQs to be the second highest-ranking type in ICE-HK after positive-negative ones. However, she considers all such TQs but one to be “ill-formed”, unfortunately without illustrating what is meant by this description.

The analysis of mood revealed that the vast majority of the TQs in the data have a declarative anchor (ICE-GB: 98.6% [494], ICE-Ireland: 92.83% [246]). This finding supports previous research on BrE (cf. e.g. Axelsson 2011: 31). Imperative anchors are rare with only two instances in ICE-GB and one in ICE-Ireland. Interrogative anchors were also employed in the data.¹⁰ In fact, the presence of interrogative anchors in ICE-Ireland is significantly higher at 6.79% (18) compared to 1% (5) in ICE-GB ($\chi^2 = 19.9811$, $df = 1$, $p = 8E-06$), and may as such lend support to findings by Barron (forthcoming a), who reports comparatively many interrogative anchors in her study of TQs in retail service encounters in IrE. These findings are also reminiscent of similar findings for Tyneside English and Australian English (cf. Beal 1993; Cattell 1973; McGregor 1995). The majority of interrogative anchors in ICE-Ireland (77.78% [14]) are of positive-positive polarity.

Turning now to turn position, it was found that the majority of TQs in both corpora occur in turn-final position (cf. Figure 3). The proportion of turn-final

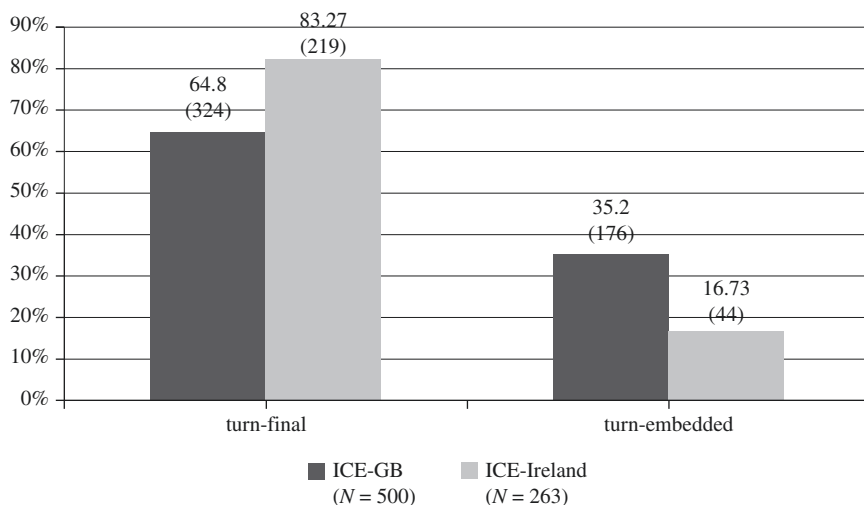


Figure 3: The position of TQs within the conversational turn (percentages and raw frequencies).¹¹

¹⁰ As Axelsson (2011: 202–204) notes, in the absence of prosodic information or standard punctuation, the identification of true interrogative TQs in contrast to repetitious questions is difficult. In the present context, potential interrogative TQ constructions were coded as such without attention to whether the tags were uttered as a unit separate from the anchor or not. As Axelsson emphasises, further research into the status of interrogative TQs is needed.

¹¹ The turn position of three TQs (one in ICE-GB and two in ICE-Ireland) could not be positively determined due to their occurrence at the very end of a transcript or at a point of break in the transcription. They were therefore excluded from the results.

TQs in ICE-GB (64.8%) is quite similar to, though slightly lower than that reported in previous corpus-based studies of BrE conversation (70.4% of declarative TQs in Axelsson [2011: 127]; 73.9% in Andersen [1998: 5]). Interestingly, however, ICE-Ireland exhibits a much larger proportion of final TQs (83.27%) than ICE-GB. The difference is highly significant ($\chi^2 = 28.6523$, $df = 1$, $p = 0$).

4.2 Function

In this section, we explore pragmatic variation within and across BrE and IrE. We examine the communicative goals which TQs realise and also whether any functional similarities or differences are present across the two varieties. To this aim, 250 TQs were randomly selected for analysis from the total 501 TQs in ICE-GB and from the 265 TQs in ICE-Ireland each (500 TQs in total). The overall results are summarised in Figure 4 excluding six TQs in ICE-GB and two in ICE-Ireland, whose function could not be determined unequivocally due to a lack of contextual information. All of the macro-categories distinguished in Section 2.2 are present in both BrE and IrE. The overwhelming majority of TQs in both samples are involved in the exchange of information covering questions, S-Q blends or statements (98.77% in ICE-GB vs. 98.79% in ICE-Ireland). As will be seen in Sections 4.2.1–4.2.4, the two samples are similar in many respects at

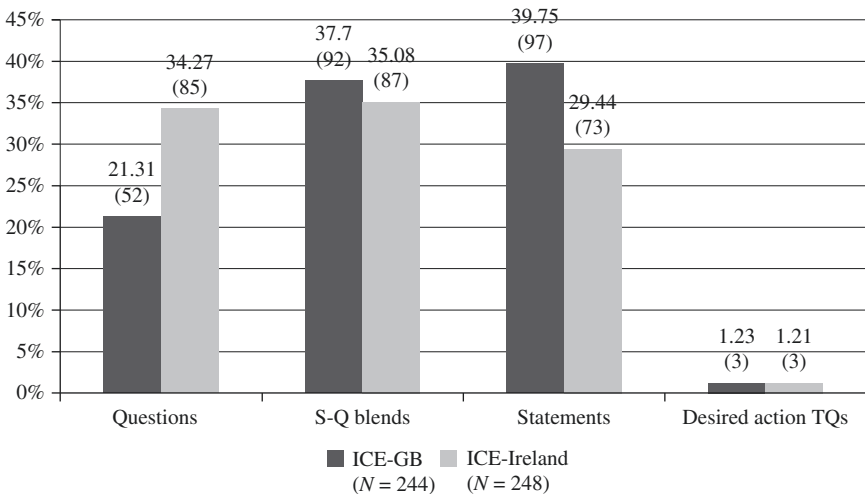


Figure 4: Relative frequencies of speech function types of TQs in face-to-face and telephone conversations in ICE-GB and ICE-Ireland (functional sample).

both the macro- and micro-levels, while also displaying significant differences particularly in the area of questions and statements. The sub-functions and formal features of each macro-category are also examined more closely.

4.2.1 Questions

Figure 4 shows that the BrE sample (21.31%) contains a significantly lower amount of question TQs than the IrE sample (34.27%), IrE speakers employing nearly 13% more TQs to ask a question than BrE speakers ($\chi^2 = 10.2861$, $df = 1$, $p_{\text{bonferroni}} < 0.01$) (cf. also Kimps et al. [2014: 75] for similar findings on the distribution of questions in the LLC and COLT and Axelsson [2011: 134] on the distribution of her confirmation-seeking TQs in the BNC-SDEM). The more extensive use of questions in the ICE-Ireland corpus reflects findings by Barron (forthcoming a), who found the confirmation-eliciting function (functionally equivalent to questions in the present analysis) to be the most frequent TQ function in her service encounter corpus of IrE. She also found its use to be particularly high relative to reference corpora of BrE and AmE.

Turning now to the formal properties of question TQs, we see in Table 1 that positive constant polarity is a common feature, with approximately half of the question TQs in both functional samples exhibiting this polarity (46.15% in ICE-GB vs. 54.12% in ICE-Ireland) (cf. also Kimps et al. [2014: 76] for a similar

Table 1: Raw and relative frequencies of formal features of question TQs in ICE-GB and ICE-Ireland (functional sample).

	ICE-GB		ICE-Ireland	
	<i>N</i> = 52	Percentages	<i>N</i> = 85	Percentages
Polarity				
+/-	19	36.54	22	25.88
-/+	9	17.31	16	18.82
+/+	24	46.15	46	54.12
-/-	-	-	1	1.18
Mood				
Declarative	52	100.00	74	87.06
Interrogative	-	-	11	12.94
Imperative	-	-	-	-
Turn position				
Embedded	9	17.65	7	8.43
Final	42	82.35	76	91.57
Unclear	1		2	

distribution). This finding is supported in particular by the fact that positive constant polarity accounts for only 15.16% (37) of all TQs in the BrE sample (cf. similar findings in Section 4.1 for the corpus as a whole). In the IrE sample, the overall proportion of constant polarity TQs is higher (32.8% [82]) than in the British sample (cf. also Section 4.1 for similar findings for the corpus as a whole). Nonetheless, as Table 2 shows, positive constant polarity is predominantly found in questions in both samples, with 66.67% of all ICE-GB and 56.09% of all ICE-Ireland constant polarity TQs realising a question function. This high use of positive constant polarity in Irish and British questions in the present data supports Kimps' (2007: 289) observation that positive constant polarity TQs "typically exhibit a low degree of commitment towards the truth of the proposition by the speaker and a high degree of responsibility towards the hearer" (cf. also Kimps et al. 2014: 71–72).

Table 2: The functions of positive constant polarity TQs in ICE-GB and ICE-Ireland (raw and relative frequencies) (functional sample).

	ICE-GB		ICE-Ireland	
	<i>N</i> = 37	Percentages	<i>N</i> = 82	Percentages
Questions	24	66.67	46	56.09
S-Q blends	7	19.44	16	19.51
Establishing common ground	4	11.11	12	14.63
Conversation-initiating	1	2.78	1	1.22
Surprised reactions	2	5.56	3	3.66
Statements	4	11.11	18	21.95
Stating a fact or opinion (incl. self-monitors)	2 (2)	5.56 (5.56)	6 (4)	7.32 (4.88)
Acknowledging responses	–	–	–	–
Challenging	1	2.78	9	10.97
Conversational joking	1	2.78	3	3.66
Desired action	1	2.78	2	2.44
Unclear function	1		–	

The second formal variable analysed is mood (cf. Table 1). BrE question TQs always carry a declarative anchor (cf. also Kimps et al. [2014] for similar results), while in the IrE sample, 11 TQs carry an interrogative anchor (12.94%). As noted in Section 4.1, interrogative anchors appear to be a salient dialectal feature of IrE. Here we see that the majority of all 16 interrogative anchors found in the IrE sample (68.75% [11]) are questions. In addition, 10 of these 11 TQs are of positive-positive polarity. It is therefore suggested that a strong correlation exists in IrE

between question function, positive constant polarity and interrogative anchor mood. In BrE, in contrast, the question function is frequently associated with positive constant polarity but does not appear to be realised with an interrogative anchor.

Finally, the majority of question TQs in both the BrE and the IrE samples are turn-final (82.35% and 91.57% respectively). This is not surprising given that when a less knowledgeable speaker requests information or confirmation, s/he will yield the floor in order for the addressee to provide the requested answer so that knowledge balance can be restored before the conversation continues. A closer look at the data reveals that when a question TQ is embedded, the speaker follows the TQ either with a clarifying paraphrase, usually another question, as in (20), or puts forward an alternative proposition to that in the anchor and asks the addressee to decide which of the two applies (21). Indeed, such moves provide an additional clue that the speaker is genuinely uncertain and is requesting information.

(20) Once you have them done then do you sort of do you need to always like you'll probably have those for like ten years or something will you You know do you keep getting topped up
(ICE-Ireland, S1A-007\$F)

(21) E: Her aunt <, > is one of the nuns inside in Saint Mary's
B: By the name of <, > Mullane is it or is it Nolan
(ICE-Ireland, S1A-083)

4.2.2 Statements

Statement TQs are significantly more common in the BrE sample (39.75% [97]) than in the IrE sample (29.44% [73]) (cf. Figure 4 above) ($\chi^2 = 5.7909$, $df = 1$, $p_{\text{bonferroni}} < 0.05$).¹² Comparing their profiles across BrE and IrE, Table 3 shows

¹² The proportions of statement TQs in the present results and Kimps et al.'s (2014: 75) study, where these account for only 20.96% of the total, differ significantly. The higher proportions in ICE-GB (38.8%) and ICE-Ireland (29.2%) are at least in part attributable to the fact that we do not distinguish a response macro-category (9.19% in LLC and COLT) but have subsumed any response TQs which do not expect a further response under the statement category, and any response TQs which require a response under the S-Q category.

Table 3: Raw and relative frequencies of subtypes and formal features of statement TQs in ICE-GB and ICE-Ireland (functional sample).

	ICE-GB		ICE-Ireland	
	<i>N</i> = 97	Percentages	<i>N</i> = 73	Percentages
Subtype				
Stating a fact or opinion (incl. self-monitoring)	63 (4)	64.95	30 (6)	41.09
Acknowledging responses	7	7.22	14	19.18
Challenging	16	16.49	20	27.40
Conversational joking	11	11.34	9	12.33
Polarity				
+ / -	67	69.07	43	58.90
- / +	26	26.81	11	15.07
+ / +	4	4.12	18	24.66
- / -	–	–	1	1.37
Mood				
Declarative	97	100.00	70	95.89
Interrogative	–	–	3	4.11
Imperative	–	–	–	–
Turn position				
Embedded	62	63.92%	19	26.03%
Final	35	36.08%	54	73.97%

that the most frequent sub-function in both datasets is stating a fact or opinion. However, the proportion of use of this sub-function is much lower in the IrE sample than in the BrE sample (64.95%) ($\chi^2 = 9.564$, $df = 1$, $p_{\text{bonferroni}} < 0.01$). Indeed, viewed as a percentage of the entire functional samples, TQs stating a fact or opinion are more than twice as common in BrE relative to IrE. The remaining differences are not significant.

Differences at the formal level were also observed. BrE statement TQs have almost exclusively reversed polarity (95.88%) (cf. also Kimps et al. [2014: 77] for similar findings on BrE). Of these, some 69% display positive-negative polarity, projecting the assumption that the proposition is true. Positive-negative polarity is also the most common type in the IrE sample (58.9%). However, positive constant polarity statement TQs are much more frequent than in IrE than in BrE (24.66% vs. only 4.12% in BrE; Fisher exact test, $df = 1$, $p_{\text{bonferroni}} < 0.01$). A closer look at these TQs shows that they are frequently associated with three sub-functions: self-monitoring, as in (8) above, where the speaker indicates the statement in the anchor is lacking in precision; challenging, as in (11), where the

speaker echoes a previous statement by the addressee, implying that s/he disagrees with it; and conversational joking, where the speaker B, Philip, pretends he wishes to have a surprise birthday party (cf. also Table 2). As with questions, in all of these cases, the speaker signals a lack of commitment towards the anchor. Hence, Kimps' (2007: 289) observation that positive polarity TQs typically exhibit a lower degree of speaker commitment and a high degree of hearer responsibility is also fitting here.

Statement TQs typically have a declarative anchor in both varieties (cf. Table 3). Interestingly, the distribution of turn-embedded vs. turn-final TQs reveals a reversed tendency in IrE and BrE. As many as 73.97% of all TQs realise a statement in final position in ICE-Ireland in comparison to only 36.08% in this position in ICE-GB (cf. Table 3) (cf. Kimps et al. [2014: 77], who find 20% turn-final in her British data). At the same time, however, embedded TQs, where they are employed, occur comparatively frequently in statements in both IrE and BrE. Indeed, an analysis of turn position by function reveals 67.39% [62] of all BrE embedded TQs and 44.19% [19] of all IrE embedded TQs in the functional sample to be statements.

Turn-embedded statement TQs, which are more frequent in BrE, may be seen as closing off the opportunity for negotiation and alternative viewpoints (cf. example [7]). Turn-final statement TQs, in contrast, involve the speaker yielding the floor to his/her interlocutor, who may then provide an unsolicited response or move to another topic (Kimps et al. 2014: 77; cf. also Section 2.2.2). These are more typical of IrE. Indeed, as seen in Table 4, the higher use of turn-final statement TQs in IrE is particularly prominent in the stating a fact/opinion category. Of all such TQs, 60% were turn-final in ICE-Ireland compared to only 23.6% in ICE-GB.

Table 4: Subtypes of turn-final statement TQs in the ICE-GB and ICE-Ireland samples as a percentage of the relevant statement subtype.

		ICE-GB		ICE-Ireland
		% turn-final		% turn-final
Stating a fact/opinion	15/63	23.8	18/30	60
Acknowledging responses	3/7	42.85	11/14	78.57
Challenging	10/16	62.5	17/20	85
Conversational joking	7/11	63.64	8/9	88.89
Total	35/97		54/73	

4.2.3 Statement-question blends

As Figure 4 shows, the proportions of S-Q blends in the British and Irish subsets are comparable, 37.7% of all TQs in ICE-GB and 35.08% in ICE-Ireland realising this function.¹³ There are no significant differences with regard to the functional subtypes within this category. Table 5 shows that the most frequent TQ function by far in both datasets is establishing common ground (ICE-GB: 92.39%; ICE-Ireland: 88.5%). On the other hand, topic-initiating and reactive TQs expressing surprise are rather rare.

Table 5: Raw and relative frequencies of subtypes and formal features of S-Q blends in ICE-GB and ICE-Ireland (functional sample).

	ICE-GB		ICE-Ireland	
	<i>N</i> = 92	Percentages	<i>N</i> = 87	Percentages
Subtype				
Establishing common ground	85	92.39	77	88.5
Topic-initiating	4	4.34	3	3.45
Surprised reactions	3	3.26	7	8.05
Polarity				
+ / -	68	73.91	60	68.97
- / +	17	18.48	10	11.49
+ / +	7	7.61	16	18.39
- / -	-	-	1	1.15
Mood				
Declarative	91	98.91	86	98.85
Interrogative	1	1.09	1	1.15
Imperative	-	-	-	-
Turn position				
Embedded	20	21.74	17	19.54
Final	72	78.26	70	80.46

The analysis of formal features reveals S-Q blends in both varieties to be primarily used with declarative anchors. In addition, as with questions, S-Q blends mostly occur in turn-final position in both varieties (78.26% in BrE and 80.46% in IrE), meaning that the speaker yields the floor to the addressee to allow him/her to respond. In the remaining cases, the TQ is usually followed by

¹³ The proportion of S-Q blends in Kimps et al.'s (2014: 75) study is slightly higher (44.39%) relative to the ICE-GB figures. This may relate to the different categorization of responses (cf. 2.2).

some clarification or elaboration. Finally, most items in the data are of positive-negative polarity (73.91% in the BrE and 68.97% in the IrE samples). According to Kimps et al. (2014: 79), who arrived at a similar result (79%), positive-negative polarity “[conveys] the assumption that the proposition is true” and is therefore in harmony with S-Q blends’ speech function, i.e. making a confident assertion and asking the addressee to confirm it. The second most frequent polarity type in the BrE sample is negative-positive with 18.48% (cf. also Kimps et al. [2014: 78] for similar findings), while in the IrE sample, positive constant polarity is again more prominent (18.39%). However, as seen in Table 2 above, positive constant polarity TQs share a similar distribution over S-Q blends in IrE and BrE, pointing to the fact that no significant differences exist in the use of positive constant polarity S-Q blend TQs across BrE and IrE.

4.2.4 Desired action

The proportions of desired action TQs are equally low in both functional samples, with only three examples in each (cf. Figure 4) (cf. also Kimps et al. [2014] and Axelsson [2011] for similar findings in BrE). All six desired action TQs are turn-final and project a response. In both data sets, the anchor is either an imperative (cf. example [19]) or a declarative. In addition, one interrogative anchor was found in the IrE sample.

5 Discussion and conclusion

The present variational pragmatic study of TQs highlighted many similarities and differences between TQ use in ICE-Ireland and ICE-GB. The most prominent of these are listed in the following.

- A lower incidence of TQs in ICE-Ireland relative to ICE-GB.
- TQs from all of the functional macro-categories were identified in BrE and IrE. The overwhelming majority of TQs in both samples were involved in the exchange of information covering questions, S-Q blends or statements. However, question TQs were employed to a higher extent in IrE relative to BrE, while statement TQs were used more frequently in BrE.
- A clear preference for the declarative in both varieties. However, there was a higher use of interrogative anchors in IrE relative to BrE. Interrogatives realised all TQ function types in the IrE data in contrast to the BrE data, where they only realised S-Q blends. Also, the majority of the interrogative

anchors employed in IrE were found to be of positive-positive polarity and a strong correlation was suggested to prevail between question TQs, positive constant polarity and the interrogative anchor mood in IrE. In BrE, in contrast, the question function, although frequently associated with positive constant polarity, is not realised with an interrogative anchor.

- A general preference for turn-final TQs over turn-embedded TQs overall. However, a significantly higher use of turn-final TQs was recorded in IrE relative to BrE. Form-functional analyses reveal questions and S-Q blends to be both overridingly turn-final in both varieties. In addition, the higher use of turn-embedded TQs in BrE and the higher use of turn-final TQs in IrE was found to relate to TQ use in statement TQs. Specifically, although overall there were proportionally more embedded than final TQ statements in ICE-Ireland, the cross-varietal distribution revealed a significantly higher use of turn-final statement TQs in IrE. An analysis of the sub-types of statements helped to explain this finding, namely that the British and Irish data differed most in their realisations of stating a fact/opinion TQs, with BrE employing more embedded TQs and thus closing off opportunities for negotiation and alternative viewpoints to a higher extent.
- A preference for reversed polarity between anchor and tag in both varieties. However, there were fewer positive-negative TQs and more positive constant polarity TQs in IrE. Positive constant polarity was frequent in questions in BrE and also – albeit to a comparatively lesser extent – in IrE. In questions, there is a low commitment to the truth of the proposition on behalf of the speaker. Similarly, the comparatively high use of positive constant polarity in the Irish statement TQ data also reveals a similarly low commitment to the truth of the underlying state of affairs. This data lends support to the description of positive constant polarity TQ use put forward by Kimps (2007: 289) (cf. also Kimps et al. 2014: 71–72).

The present findings answer many questions about TQs in IrE and in BrE and also uncover many form-functional issues worthy of more in-depth research particularly on the level of the sub-function. In addition, the higher use of TQs in BrE relative to IrE might be addressed. In this regard, the question might be posed as to whether the lower use of such TQs in IrE points to a preferential use of linguistic forms other than the present TQs in an Irish context. Tottie (2009: 361–362), for instance, discussing the lower use of TQs in AmE relative to BrE, suggests that epistemic particles, such as *probably*, *likely*, *presumably*, may on occasion be used instead of the canonical tag functions. Alternatively/in addition, it is possible that the lower TQ use recorded in IrE is due to an extensive use of TQs other than the clausal TQs containing interrogative tags focused on in

the present study. Examples include concordant TQs with a declarative tag, such as those involving the typically Irish ‘*sure + pronoun + aux + (not/n’t)*’ tag (e.g. *It can’t be right, sure it can’t*, cf. Hickey 2007: 276–277; Pandarova, in preparation) and the ‘*so + pronoun + aux + (not/n’t)*’ tag (e.g. *She’s pretty, so she is*, cf. Asián and McCullough 1998: 49), as well as single-word tags, e.g. the typically Irish tag *like?* (cf. Lucek 2011) or *right?*, phonological tags, such as *eh?* (cf. e.g. Columbus 2010), or fixed phrases containing lexical material, such as *you know?*. Indeed, the functional interplay of the whole range of TQs is an interesting research area, particularly when viewed across cultures, as a single function may be realised preferentially using a canonical tag in one society and using an invariant tag in another. Indeed, Schneider (2014) using production questionnaire data shows how the speech act remark in the context of a conversational opening at a party is overwhelmingly realised using the tag *huh?* in AmE and *isn’t it?* in IrE and in BrE (e.g. *great party, isn’t it?/huh?*) (cf. also Allerton 2009: 320; Barron forthcoming a; Schneider 2012b: 357–358; Tottie 2009: 361–362). Such questions remain ripe for further variational pragmatic research.

Diachronic research into TQs in IrE and BrE would also seem a further productive avenue of research which might shed further light on two possibly related findings highlighted in the present study. The first relates to the question as to the reason for the higher use of constant positive polarity TQs in ICE-Ireland given reports of its use in historical corpora of English. Tottie and Hoffmann (2009: 136), for example, found positive constant polarity to be the second most frequent polarity after positive-negative in a corpus of sixteenth century drama (17%). The results of Hoffmann’s (2006) analysis of a large diachronic corpus of English drama are similar: despite some fluctuations, positive constant polarity was found to be the second most frequent polarity type accounting for 30% of all TQs from the middle of the sixteenth century until the nineteenth century. The higher use of positive constant polarity in present-day IrE TQs might, thus, be hypothesised to result from linguistic conservatism and retention of previous forms (cf. Hickey 2005: 19–20, 32). This is a possible scenario given that the English language entered Ireland in a colonial context in two periods, the first between the late twelfth and the sixteen centuries, the second in the seventeen century. Language shift from the indigenous Celtic language, Irish, spanned the period from 1600 to 1900 (cf. Hickey 2005: 21, 23–25).

The second possibly related question concerns the higher use of question TQs in the IrE context. Tottie and Hoffmann’s historical study of TQs reveals namely that “In the 16CD data, confirmatory uses are the most frequent type, with over 60% of all cases, compared with 30–37% in PDE [Present-day English] (2009: 154). They continue saying “This suggests that confirmation seeking may

indeed have been the original use of tag questions”.¹⁴ Given different text types (natural dialogue vs. drama), such findings remain speculative. However, they do point to an interesting path for further research to investigate whether the higher level of question TQs and the lower level of statement TQs in IrE relative to BrE has historical roots in the contact situation. Likewise, the relationship between constant positive polarity and question function might be investigated in such data.

Finally, the present paper has analysed regional variation on the national level within the framework of variational pragmatics. In addition to regional variation, however, variational pragmatics examines intralingual pragmatic variation across gender, age, socio-economic identity and ethnic identity. Also, as our festschriftee, Klaus P. Schneider, in a handbook article on variational pragmatics notes, “more effort should be invested in examining the interplay of many and, eventually, all social factors, including micro-social factors” (Schneider 2010: 260–261). Of the macro-social factors, tag question research taking a pragmatic perspective has thus far only concentrated on region, the focus of the present paper, and gender, both in isolation (cf. Cameron et al. 1989; Coates 1989; Holmes 1995). Barron and Pandarova (forthcoming) is a forthcoming study designed to analyse both region (on a sub-national level) and gender in a form-function analysis of TQs in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Certainly then, given this general research gap, studies on the effect of macro-social factors on TQ use and also on the interplay of these factors on TQ use remains a research desideratum in IrE, as indeed also across other varieties of English. We await further developments in these areas.

Acknowledgements: The authors wish to acknowledge the support of the Fund for Scientific Research (*Kleinforschungsprojekt*) awarded by the Leuphana University Lüneburg which enabled the research reported in this paper to be undertaken. Special thanks also to two anonymous reviewers for valuable comments, to Martin Schweinberger, who offered advice on statistical measures, and to Kerstin Single for formatting assistance.

¹⁴ Tottie and Hoffmann’s (2009: 142) confirmatory category includes TQs which “clearly seek and receive answers and which do not have any strong affective functions”. They are, thus, equivalent to the present question category.

Transcription conventions

<,>	Short pause
<,,>	Long pause
<{>...</>	Initiation and completion of a stretch of text in which overlapping speech occurs
<[>... </[>	Initiation and completion of an utterance which overlaps with another utterance. Subsequent overlapping utterances are numbered, as in <[1>... </[1>, <[2>... </[2>, etc.
<unclear>...</unclear>	Unclear speech
<&> laughter </&>	Indicates laughter

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