

Italian tag questions and their conversational functions

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Abstract

This study examines the use of tag questions in Italian conversation. We propose a classification of their discourse functions, and provide an account of their syntactic and discourse contexts. The data used are recordings of conversation in several settings: experimental game settings, a reality TV show, and TV and radio talk shows, for a total of 60.4 h. The analysis uncovered seven main functions, some of which do not conform to existing classifications in the literature. We explore the relationship between these functions and the conversational settings in which they are used, their placement within the utterance, and their relationship with asymmetries in participants' leadership roles in specific settings.

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1. Introduction

Like many other languages, Italian has a class of tag questions (TQs). A TQ is made up of two parts: a declarative or imperative statement, sometimes called the 'anchor', followed by an interrogative 'tag' (e.g., [Tottie and Hoffmann, 2006](#)).¹ From a formal perspective, TQs can be categorized cross-linguistically as variant or invariant. In variant systems, the tag displays some degree of grammatical dependency on the anchor, so that it changes as a function of the anchor's features, for example, its polarity and/or number. In English, variant TQs are canonical. Typically, the tag contains an auxiliary followed by a pronoun, which must agree with the verb and subject of the host clause (i.e., the anchor; [Kimps, 2007](#)), as shown below.

(1) She wouldn't call, would she?

Furthermore, the polarity is normally inverted with respect to the anchor, in the attached tag, to give 'reversed polarity' ([Kimps, 2007](#), p. 270–271). This can be positive–negative, as in (2), or negative–positive as in (3):

(2) He went, didn't he?

(3) He didn't go, did he?

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¹ In what follows, we use 'TQ' to refer to the entire tag question; the term 'tag' is reserved for the portion of the TQ identified as the tag, excluding the anchor.

Reversed-polarity tags are the more frequent in English (Huddleston and Pullum, 2002), but ‘positive constant polarity’ is also possible, especially with imperatives, as in (4), taken from Holmes (1995), and although rare, ‘negative constant polarity’, as in (5), has also been found in speech (Tottie and Hoffmann, 2006, p. 284).

(4) Make a cup of tea, would you?

(5) They don't come cheap, don't they?

As noted by Axelsson (2011a), claims to the effect that English variant TQs have “unique” formal properties (e.g., Ultan, 1969) are arguably incorrect, insofar as several languages exhibit TQ structures in which the tag does display grammatical dependencies on its anchor; for example, Meiteilon (Manipuri) has variant TQs with reversed polarity that are formally very similar to the English case (Singh, 1996). Nevertheless, it is also evident that, in contrast to English, in many languages, including Italian, TQs are mainly or exclusively invariant. In such cases, a set of words or phrases are used as tags without exhibiting grammatical dependencies on the anchor, as shown by the following examples from Italian (6), French (7), Polish (8) and German (9). Languages of India have also been characterized in this way (Nair, 1991).

(6) *Ci sono otto finestre, giusto?*
There are eight windows, aren't there?

(7) *Il est nerveux ce matin, non?* (Morin, 1973)
He is nervous this morning, isn't he?

(8) *Zamknij drzwi, dobrze?* (Wierzbicka, 2003)
Close the door, would you?

(9) *Wir gehen heute abend, nicht (wahr)?* (Rottet and Sprouse, 2008)
We are leaving tonight, aren't we?

The number of words or phrases which can be used as tags varies from language to language. Italian appears to have no predefined set, whereas Polish only has six forms (Wierzbicka, 2003) and Mohawk only one (Mithun, 2012). While the canonical TQ system in English is variant, it actually exhibits both variant and invariant TQ systems, as does Welsh, though Welsh places restrictions on which tags can be used with different sentence types.

In terms of their discourse functions, TQs are extremely versatile, and despite several classifications (e.g., Holmes, 1995; Algeo, 1990, 2006), the range of their use remains difficult to pin down because their form under-determines the range of functions they exhibit. An additional source of difficulty is the relative paucity of cross-linguistic research that investigates the generalizability of the functions of TQs that have been posited in the literature. As noted above, most pragmatic classifications of TQs that rely on significant samples of empirical data have focused on English. Furthermore, with some exceptions (e.g., Cuenca, 1997; Stenström et al., 2002; Columbus, 2010; Mithun, 2012) the majority of such classifications has focused on variant TQs. The primary aim of this paper is to investigate (invariant) TQ use in Italian based on a large dataset, arriving at a classification that is compared to others proposed for English and other languages.

A second reason why delimiting the range of uses of TQs is challenging is that the extent to which their pragmatic functions correlate with sociolinguistic variables remains understudied. For example, TQs have been claimed to be associated with asymmetries in the status, conversational or social, of interlocutors, in particular, the notion that speakers in a position of ‘low power’ tend to be more likely to use TQs. This position was advanced by Lakoff (1973, 1975) on theoretical grounds, and was primarily concerned with its implications for the possible status of women as ‘low-powered’ individuals. These claims have since been challenged, with empirical research presenting a more nuanced picture (e.g., Cameron et al., 1989), especially in relation to the interaction of such sociolinguistic variables as age, gender and speakers’ interactional roles (e.g., Stenström et al., 2002; Tottie and Hoffmann, 2006). A second aim of the present paper is to investigate some potential sociolinguistic correlates of TQ use in Italian, in particular, the effect of speaker role and communicative setting. Our analysis is based on a large corpus of conversation in different contexts from free, unscripted conversation to task-oriented dialogs and television interviews, varying in their degree of formality. Thus, we seek a typology of TQ functions that cuts across different conversational settings.

From a methodological perspective, our analysis has both a qualitative and a quantitative component. We rely on an inductive approach adopted from Conversation Analysis (CA) to annotate our data, identifying TQs and their communicative functions. Subsequently, we explore the nature of TQs, including their position in an utterance and the extent to which they result in turn-yielding, by looking at their distribution as a function of several different variables, including speaker role and communicative setting.

The rest of this paper is structured as follows. Section 2 discusses classifications of TQ functions proposed in the literature. Section 3 describes the corpus data used in this study, while Section 4 describes the annotation of TQs and their various functions. This is followed (Section 5) by a statistical and qualitative analysis of these functions and their relationship to various non-linguistic features of the discourse situation, for example the type of conversation, as well as the role of the interlocutors in a conversation. Where relevant, transcriptions of examples are given in notation adapted from CA.

2. Previous work on Tag Questions

2.1. Introduction

Within the literature on TQs, three currents can be discerned. First, a number of descriptive approaches seek to establish pragmatic functions of TQs on the basis of their formal (that is, lexical, syntactic and phonological) properties; this trend has been referred to as the *grammar-based tradition* by Kimps et al. (2014). For example, Quirk et al. (1985) have argued that English TQs with reversed polarity are a type of yes/no question, albeit conveying information about a speaker's orientation toward the proposition in the anchor via intonation: A rising tone on the tag indicates doubt and invites verification, whereas a falling tone invites confirmation. Thus, such questions do not merely seek to fill an information gap. A similar position is put forward by Huddleston and Pullum (2002). For example, the TQ 'Jean was late, wasn't she?' suggests that the speaker is aware that Jean may indeed have been late and is seeking confirmation, in contrast to the classic yes/no question 'was Jean late?', where, all other things being equal, the speaker would appear to be genuinely inquiring whether this was the case, without conveying any prior knowledge to this effect.

A second perspective on TQs focuses on classifying their pragmatic functions, usually based on conversational data (Holmes, 1982; Algeo, 1990, 2006; Tottie and Hoffmann, 2006). While much of this work has focused on British and/or American English, there have also been contributions seeking to evaluate and extend such classifications against data from other languages (e.g., Cuenca, 1997; Mithun, 2012), although exhaustive cross-linguistic studies remain relatively scarce.

Finally, authors such as Axelsson (2011b) and Kimps et al. (2014), following earlier precedents (e.g., Brazil, 1984), have sought to formulate such pragmatic typologies not only on the basis of the conversational context in which a TQ is used, but also on the basis of assumptions about the knowledge states of the interlocutors involved. In particular, these authors make extensive use of 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 and Fanshel, 1977). In addition, these classifications are couched within the functional grammar perspective of Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), wherein the primary functions of an utterance are reduced to the giving or receiving of goods-and-services or information.

In most of the work cited above, classifications often encompass both the stance conveyed by the speaker in relation to the proposition expressed in the anchor, and the impact of the use of a TQ on the interaction itself, for example, whether the speaker, in using a TQ, seeks to include their interlocutor in the conversation and invite a response, or pre-empt such an event. In this connection, it is worth noting that TQs also play a role in turn allocation, as they provide a transition-relevance place (TRP; Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson, 1974), a point in conversation where the hearer may intervene felicitously. Insofar as TQs may be used to encourage a listener to join in the conversation, they are associated with positive politeness (cf. Brown and Levinson, 1987); on the other hand, insofar as they serve to attenuate the force of opinions or imperatives, they have a negative politeness function. They may also be used aggressively, for example to convey sarcasm. Although "tag questions are generally aimed at eliciting a response, however minimal, from the addressee" (Holmes, 1982, p. 44), this is not always the case; the speaker may not be seeking a response, especially if the TQ occurs mid-utterance:

- (10) I think mid-fielder Martin Cool got in a very good volley **didn't he** from some distance, but it really was whistling toward goal? (Tottie and Hoffmann, 2006, p. 285)

In the following sub-section, we first give an overview of how TQs have been categorized in the literature, cutting across the three approaches we identified above. We focus on classifications of TQs in English (see Kimps, 2007, and Kimps and Davidse, 2008, for a discussion of constant-polarity TQs), comparing existing classifications with data from other languages where applicable. Subsequently, we turn to an overview of the literature on TQs in Italian, the main focus of this work, followed by a brief outline of the role of TQs in relation to politeness and uncertainty, in the context of a discussion of their relationship to conversational role asymmetries.

2.2. The functions of TQs

Depending on discourse context, TQs with the same form can have different functions. Most research on TQ functions has focused on English, though this section will also deal with related work on other languages.

In line with the distinction between the speaker's stance on a proposition and the interactional impact of a TQ, Holmes (1995) divides TQs into 'epistemic modal' and 'affective' types. Epistemic modal TQs "express genuine speaker uncertainty rather than politeness" (p. 80), as in (11) below. Examples (11) to (15) come from Holmes (1995), where a downward slash indicates falling intonation, and an upward slash rising intonation.

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

Affective TQs are subdivided 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):

(12) You've got a new job Tom \haven't you?

Softening TQs, on the other hand, serve a negative politeness function and are used to attenuate the force of negatively affective utterances, for example, directives and criticisms (Holmes, 1995, p. 81):

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

(14) 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):

(15) 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, 2006) proposes a different classification, and divides 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). In fact, in (16) the speaker's presupposition turns out to be false.

(16) 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 difference is that the speaker assumes that the addressee will agree with the statement, so this type of TQ does not seek information, as shown in (17) where the speaker is teasing. Some responses listed by Algeo are 'of course', 'yes, certainly', 'that's right', or a nod of the head (p. 446).

(17) 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 response is required in this type of TQ, which simply demands the hearer's attention, without necessarily participating.

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

Algeo's peremptory TQ follows a statement whose truth is universally acknowledged, so that "even someone of the limited intelligence of the addressee must be presumed to recognize it" (Algeo, 1990, p. 446):

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

The use of an aggressive/antagonistic TQ does something very similar, except that the 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 addressees ought to know something they cannot actually know, as in (20).

- (20) A: I rang you up this morning, but you didn't answer.
Q: Well, I was having a bath, *wasn't I?*

There is much overlap between Holmes's (1995) and Algeo's (1990, 2006) classifications: Informational TQs correspond to epistemic modal TQs, as they demand verification of an assumption. Confirmatory TQs correspond to facilitative TQs, drawing the hearer into the conversation (although in the case of confirmatory TQs, the hearer's contribution is usually limited to a minimal response, without taking necessarily taking the turn). There is no equivalent of Holmes's softening TQs in Algeo's classification, and there is no equivalent of Algeo's punctuational TQs in Holmes's. Algeo's remaining categories (peremptory and antagonistic TQs) are subsumed in Holmes's challenging tag, all sharing the purpose of putting down the hearer in some way. Punctuational TQs can in certain cases be challenging in their pointing up what the speaker has said, but they are not restricted to that use.

Tottie and Hoffmann (2006) propose their own classification based on corpora of British and American English, which includes all the functions covered so far except softening TQs. Like Holmes (1995), they distinguish between confirmatory and facilitative uses, with the further addition of an 'attitudinal' category that broadly coincides with Algeo's (1990, 2006) punctuational tag, and is also claimed to be a sub-class of Holmes's challenging type. Interestingly, they observe that confirmatory, attitudinal and facilitative TQs account for around 90% of occurrences in their corpora, with a much lower percentage (3%) of informational uses. Roesle (2001) also adds categories: 'Involving' TQs, roughly coinciding with Holmes's facilitative uses, and 'hoping/fearing' and 'conspiracy', under the affective macro-category. The conspiracy category accounts for cases in which both speaker and listener are aware of the truth of a proposition, and are using the TQ for the benefit of a third party. By contrast, hoping/fearing uses express a speaker's hope or fear that the proposition carried by the anchor might be true, for example:

- (21) I didn't offend you, did I?

Table 1 below summarizes the primary functions discussed so far.

As noted at the start of this section, TQ classification has also been carried out within a functional framework, based on Halliday and Matthiessen's (2004) classification of primary speech functions as involving the exchange of goods-and-services or of information. Using spoken data from the London-Lund corpus of spoken English and the Bergen Corpus of London Teenage Language, Kimps et al. (2014) find evidence for the use of TQs on both sides of such exchanges, that is, such TQs are used to both initiate and respond to an exchange, though initiation is the more frequent function. Table 2 below

Table 1
Canonical TQs identified in English by various authors.

Algeo (1990)	Holmes (1995)	Roesle (2001)	Tottie and Hoffmann (2006)
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

Table 2
Functions of English Canonical TQs identified by Kimps et al. (2014).

	Initiation			Response		
	Give	Demand	Other	Give	Demand	Other
Desired action	Offer	Command		Undertaking	Refusal/contradiction	
Information	Statement	Question	Statement-question blend	Acknowledgment	Answer /disclaimer	Contradiction

summarizes the classification offered by Kimps et al., based on an orthogonal classification in terms of whether a desired action or information is being given or demanded, and also as a function of whether the conversational turn involves an initiation or a response.

By far the most frequent arena of use of initiating TQs is in the exchange of information, where three sub-functions are distinguished, namely, the giving of information, where the TQ has the flavor of a statement; the demand for information; and cases which involve elements of both. Strikingly, the latter is the most frequently attested use, where speakers both give information and expect a response. Kimps et al. argue that these are usually A-events, with speakers positioning themselves as more knowledgeable; they are characterized by a falling tone and usually have positive–negative polarity. Given their status as both statements and questions, it is perhaps unsurprising that they are often turn-final and initiate an adjacency pair.

Within the same theoretical framework, Axelsson's (2011b) analysis of TQs in English fiction also finds evidence for TQs initiating or responding to information exchange requests, as well as drawing the hearer into a new conversation or topic. However, she also distinguishes a class of 'rhetorical' TQs, in which the speaker's utterance is not really intended to elicit a response. Such TQs are often speaker-centered, in which case they may serve to put in focus the speaker's own convictions, somewhat like Algeo's (1990) punctuational category, or function as routine markers 'indicating a negotiation which does not seem necessary' (Axelsson, 2011b, p. 83). By contrast, addressee-oriented rhetorical TQs are characterized as AB-events, indicating the speaker's willingness to negotiate should the assumptions they are making prove incorrect.

The categorizations discussed so far have focused largely on variant TQs in English. Much of the literature on TQs in languages other than English falls within the grammar-based tradition (e.g., Rottet and Sprouse, 2008, on Welsh; Morin, 1973, on French). This is also true of comparative studies, which usually target morpho-syntactic or phonological generalizations (e.g., Uitan, 1969; Axelsson, 2011a).

Nevertheless, there are a number of studies that have focused on the pragmatic functions of invariant TQs. In a comparison of invariant tags in British, New Zealand and Indian English, Columbus (2010) identifies 17 pragmatic functions of tags, which can be divided into five macro-categories, though the extent of their use differs across the three varieties studied. Columbus's work includes tags with non-question uses, and as a result, some of her categories extend beyond those identified for TQs in the literature. Nevertheless, there are substantial overlaps between the five macro-categories and other classifications. In particular, tags are claimed to have uses for 'confirmation/affirmation', 'checking' (overlapping with Algeo's, 1990, confirmatory use), 'force' or 'emphasis', and a number of politeness functions that include softening. Columbus also includes a number of 'stylistic' functions, which include 'narrative uses' for the purposes of conveying humor or sarcasm and signaling a new topic.

With the possible exception of humor/sarcasm, which overlaps at least in part with the peremptory or challenging function of variant TQs, the narrative functions identified by Columbus do not seem to have been highlighted in the literature on canonical (i.e., variant) TQs in English. Mithun (2012) reports related findings using data from Mohawk, which has a single invariant TQ. One use of the Mohawk tag involves a speaker appealing for acknowledgment (rather than agreement) on something about which they have little doubt – this use is classified by Mithun as being concerned with 'shared knowledge, experience and values' and may be related to some sub-categories of Columbus's affirmation/confirmation functions, which are distinct from information checking. A further type is the 'proposal for joint action', where a tentative proposal is made by the speaker, with a concomitant appeal for confirmation by the listener. Both Kimps and Davidse (2008) and Axelsson (2011b) identify a similar interactive function in English, but characterize it as more directive. Finally, Mithun, like Columbus, observes that Mohawk tags have narrative functions, in contrast to previous claims that TQs will be relatively infrequent in this genre of discourse, owing to the fact-laden nature of narrative (e.g., Coates, 1987). Here too, TQs serve both an epistemic and an affective or interactional role, since the narrator can use a TQ to inform a listener of facts they may not have known, and to emphasize known facts while at the same time inviting the listener to participate and confirm. These observations relate to those made by González (2005), following Cuenca (1997), on the invariant tags *eh* and *no* in Catalan, which are studied in the context of oral narratives. While both Cuenca and Gonzalez, in line with Holmes (1995), highlight the modal and interactional dimensions of TQ uses, Gonzalez, like Mithun (2012) finds evidence that in narrative, the tags are especially used to emphasize and highlight salient pieces of information and share mutual knowledge or background information.

2.3. TQs in Italian

As we noted in the introduction, Italian has only invariant tags, and many different expressions can be used. Rossano (2010) states that in Italian, "TQs are usually produced with either rising intonation on the tag or at least not falling intonation" (p. 2764). Bazzanella and Fornara (1995) refer to TQs in their study of discourse markers as *richieste*

di attenzione e accordo, i.e., requests for attention and agreement. They give the examples of *vero?* ('true?'), *no?* ('no?'), and *giusto?* ('right?').²

Bazzanella (1994) describes a subset of discourse markers that appear in final position, often with rising intonation, functioning as exit devices (see Section 3) and sometimes simultaneously as requests of confirmation.³ These can be compared to Holmes's (1995) epistemic modal and Algeo's (2006) informational tags, as seen in example (22), taken from Bazzanella. All subsequent examples in this section are taken from Bazzanella, with original notation.

- (22) *sono tre giorni – no?*
it's three days – right? (p. 153)

This is an example where the speaker is unsure of the truth of his or her statement, but under the same category, Bazzanella (1994) also includes cases where the speaker expresses an idea, and asks for confirmation that the addressee agrees with that idea, because he or she is not sure, as in (23).

- (23) *allora dovete farvelo poi dire – però in questo caso siete più scusati perché*
then you will have to inquire – but in this case you are more excused because
era un'altra questione se eravate in gita, no?
it would have been different if you were on a fieldtrip, no? (p. 155)

This is the only example provided by Bazzanella (1994); it is difficult to put into context without knowing who the interlocutors are, but presumably the speaker is giving his or her opinion on a situation that happened, but wants to hear what the addressee has to say as well (who may or may not be more aware of the situation).

A different category of TQs involves those which assume agreement on the part of the addressee (unlike (23) where the addressee was not necessarily expected to agree). Example (24) is a teacher addressing students:

- (24) *è stato detto che è stato un genio dello spettacolo – del teatro e del cinema – no?*
it has been said that he was a genius of show business – of theater and cinema – no? (p. 154)

Here the statement is factual ('it has been said that...'). Following a TQ which assumes agreement, the addressee is not really expected to make an important contribution, if any at all. These are often used in narrative, as a way to keep the hearer's attention.

The final group of TQs is used to check that the addressee has understood the information given. Example (25) is a nurse confirming an appointment with a patient:

- (25) *allora alle otto – eh?*
so at eight – okay? (p. 155)

There is no equivalent of this function in either Holmes's (1995) or Algeo's (1990, 2006) classifications, because they consider only auxiliary tags, which do not really have a way to convey this function (cf. 'so the appointment is at eight, isn't it?' which would transmit something very different).

So far, all the TQs discussed were intended to elicit some sort of response from the addressee. Used by a teacher or professor in a classroom, however, a TQ aimed at checking the hearer's understanding might receive no response (with silence implying that no clarifications are necessary), whereas in a one-on-one conversation with a student, a minimal response would be expected (Bazzanella, 1994, p. 153). A different type of TQ which Bazzanella identifies as a subcategory of 'checking understanding' is one that is checking for understanding in a situation where there is nothing difficult to understand, so the TQ is used more for emphasis:

- (26) *scusa – sai – ma non ce la faccio proprio – capisci?*
sorry – you see – but I really can't – you know? (p. 155)

² "—'giusto?/vero?/no?' e simili richieste di attenzione/accordo possono essere confrontate con le tag-questions, in particolare nella loro funzione di 'facilitators'" (p. 79). ('Right?', 'true?', 'no?', and similar requests of attention/agreement can be compared to TQs, particularly in their function of 'facilitators'.)

³ "In posizione finale, spesso con intonazione ascendente, possono essere usati alcuni segnali discorsivi per cedere il turno, alcune volte chiedendo contemporaneamente conferma" (p. 153). (In final position, often with rising intonation, some discourse markers can be used to yield the turn, sometimes simultaneously requesting a confirmation.)

Table 3
Italian TQ functions and comparable English classifications.

Macrocategory	Subcategory	English
Italian (Bazzanella, 1994)		
Confirmation	Of own assumption	Epistemic modal (Holmes)
	Of other's agreement	Facilitative (Holmes)
Common ground		Confirmatory (Algeo)
Checking understanding	Propositional: Literal	Punctuational (Algeo) Peremptory (Algeo)
	Propositional: Emphatic	
	Implicature	

This type of TQ functions like Algeo's (1990, 2006) punctuational TQ, which is "the vocal equivalent of an exclamation point or of underlining for emphasis". It also overlaps with Algeo's confirmatory TQ, in that a minimal response would suffice, showing empathy, with the difference that here the speaker may well continue speaking (especially during a rant), whether there is a response or not.

Other TQs identified by Bazzanella, after which the speaker does not actually expect a response, are those which act on the implicature level (27), meaning that the hearer must infer what the speaker is trying to imply. This is opposed to the propositional (i.e., literal) level (cf. 24, 25).

(27) *sono tua madre – capito?*
I'm your mother – you got that? (p. 155)

This particular case is analogous to Algeo's (1990, 2006) peremptory TQ, since it follows a statement of universal truth and is intended to put down the addressee.

Table 3 summarizes the TQ functions identified by Bazzanella (1994) for Italian, and compares them to the classic function classifications proposed for English by Holmes (1995) and Algeo (1990, 2006).

2.4. TQs and sociolinguistic variables

Our discussion so far has centered on the functional classifications of TQs reported in the literature. However, another dimension of TQ usage that has received attention is the relationship with sociolinguistic variables. For example, in British English, the use of invariant TQs has been found to be correlated with age, with younger people using such TQs more frequently (Stenström et al., 2002; Tottie and Hoffmann, 2006).

A lot of attention has also been paid to the impact of asymmetries in interlocutors' conversational roles. In what follows, we use the term 'conversational status' for the extent to which either member of a conversational dyad can take the initiative in directing a conversation. Following Cameron et al. (1989), we consider persons of higher status in a conversation as being those "institutionally responsible for the conduct of talk" (p. 88). The role of conversational status is therefore bound to be influenced by the *setting*, for example, whether or not a conversation takes place in a structured environment that places the onus of directing the conversation on one interlocutor (for example, an interview). Furthermore, conversational status may or may not coincide with higher *social* status or 'power' outside the boundaries of the conversation itself.

It has been claimed that since TQs are often used for confirmation, they suggest insecurity and unassertiveness, as though the speaker were afraid to give an opinion or be direct (e.g., Lakoff, 1973). Lakoff used this presupposition to argue for TQs as markers of gender imbalance, on the grounds that women are frequently in positions of 'low power'. However, later empirical studies (e.g., Calnan and Davidson, 1998) suggest that differences in frequency of use of TQs by male and female speakers are strongly impacted by various aspects of the conversational setting, including, for example, whether the conversation is between mixed genders or not.

In a related vein, the perception of TQs has been argued to depend on the relationship between the speaker and hearer. That is, if TQs are used by a speaker whom the hearer considers a credible source, credibility is strengthened (Blankenship and Craig, 2007). On the other hand, "tag questions may emphasize to people receiving the message from a non-credible source that the person is not knowledgeable and may lack confidence or certainty that the message is correct" (p. 113). These findings therefore suggest that whether or not a TQ gives rise to a perception of credibility is ultimately rooted in the hearer's perception of the speaker in the first place. Hosman and Siltanen (2011) found that TQs reduce speaker credibility and perceptions of message quality, confirming research by Blankenship and Holtgraves (2005). However, all of these studies were experimental in nature, based on the perception of texts representing controlled independent variables, rather than on naturalistic conversation. Furthermore, these studies focused on interpretation.

Nonetheless, two questions arise: First, does the relationship between perceptions of credibility and TQ use carry over to non-laboratory settings? Second, to what extent do speakers in lower-status positions, relative to their interlocutors, demonstrate a greater tendency to use TQs?

To investigate the relation between TQs and conversational status, [Cameron, McAlinden, and O'Leary \(1989\)](#) examined conversations from three broadcast settings: a medical call-in radio show (where the relation between participants was doctor–patient), educational TV (teacher–student), and a general discussion TV show (presenter–audience). In the first two settings, the individual with higher conversational status also had higher social status. The study used the framework proposed by [Holmes \(1984\)](#), dividing TQs into modal and affective types. Cameron et al.'s findings showed that female and male speakers occupying higher conversational status used mostly affective TQs, whereas the speakers with lower status used *none* in that way. The audience and callers used few TQs, and when they did use them, they were of the modal type. These findings contradict theoretical speculations (e.g., [Lakoff, 1973](#)) and also challenge results emanating from laboratory-based studies ([Blankenship and Holtgreaves, 2005](#); [Blankenship and Craig, 2007](#); [Hosman and Siltanen, 2011](#)). Indeed, the more recent work of [Tottie and Hoffman \(2006\)](#) has also suggested that, contrary to Lakoff's views, which rely on an alignment between gender and status, the slight differences in frequency of TQ use between male and female speakers in their corpus may ultimately be due to their role in a particular exchange, rather than a socially sanctioned imbalance of power between genders, that is reflected in their linguistic choices. It has also been observed that since TQs are often conducive (i.e., eliciting a yes/no answer), doctors and lawyers may use them to obtain information or control the message recipient ([Harres, 1998](#); [Harris, 1984](#)). [Johnson's \(1980\)](#) study of meetings in an industrial corporation showed that the leader of the meeting contributed a disproportionate amount of questions and over half of all TQs, mainly to sustain interaction.

Hence, it would appear that different contexts directly affect the function and perception of tags, and that TQs can be used as politeness strategies, as well as powerful interactional resources: One can use TQs to strengthen one's position (e.g., by narrowing the range of possible answers), especially in an adversarial setting (e.g., lawyers); one can use them to express politeness if one is not in a position of power; one can also use them to facilitate interaction in non-adversarial settings. As our empirical results show, TQs in Italian also resist a simple categorization in terms of power relations; indeed, like [Johnson \(1980\)](#) and [Cameron et al. \(1989\)](#), we show that the relationship between Italian speakers' use of TQs and power asymmetries among interlocutors strongly depend on the context and purpose of a conversation.

2.5. Summary and outlook

As shown in this section, existing classifications of TQs for Italian do overlap to some extent with those proposed in other languages. The motivation behind the present study is the lack of a broad discussion of TQs in Italian, based on a substantial body of empirical data, as well as the desire to contribute further to cross-linguistic typologies of the functions of TQs, with reference to the many sociolinguistic and discourse-related variables that may influence their use. In previous research on Italian, TQs have been studied only in passing as one of many types of discourse markers, with only a few examples analyzed (e.g., [Bazzanella, 1994](#)). In their study, [Bazzanella and Fornara \(1995\)](#) produced quantitative findings on TQ use in work interviews. Although their findings did highlight the very strong influence of assumed roles and power relations, the social context and interlocutor asymmetries where conversational status is concerned may have affected and restricted the conversational style of the speakers.

The present analysis compares Italian TQs in a broader variety of contexts and seeks to explicitly relate the pragmatic functions of TQs to those uncovered in the literature on TQs in English and other languages. The analysis is couched within a CA-informed framework. Central to this framework is the view that language, as a structured system for the production of meaning ([Hutchby and Wooffitt, 2008](#)), needs to rely on cues for interlocutors to alternate in speaking in an ordered manner (see also [Clark, 1996](#)). Insofar as they may elicit a response from the listener (depending on their pragmatic function), TQs may serve to mark a 'turn-constructional unit' (TCU; [Sacks et al., 1974](#), p. 703; [Selting, 1998](#)).

[Schegloff \(1996\)](#) observes that following a TCU, "transition to a next speaker becomes *relevant* (although not necessarily accomplished)" (p. 88). Hence, the end of a TCU constitutes what is called a 'transition-relevance place' (TRP) where the hearer may or may not take a turn. At such points, 'triggers' are often employed by both the speaker and hearer to signal who should be speaking next. [Sacks et al. \(1974, p. 701\)](#) distinguish two classes of such 'turn-allocation techniques' (p. 701): those in which the hearer selects himself or herself as the next speaker and those in which the current speaker selects the next speaker. Tags in TQs often form part of this second group, functioning as 'exit devices' of the current turn. Such devices help in sustaining the sequential structure of spontaneous conversation, particularly since specific devices raise expectations as to possible responses and continuations⁴ which, together with the devices

⁴ Of course, such expectations can be violated. Nevertheless, as [Pomerantz \(1984\)](#) observes, the second utterance in an adjacency pair can be relevant to the first in more than one way, for example, an offer can be followed by an acceptance or a rejection. However, acceptance/agreement is normally a preferred response, whereas rejection or disagreement is the dispreferred response.

themselves, form ‘adjacency pairs’ (Sacks, 1995). TQs are no exception: as we have seen, they can be conducive to responses such as agreement or confirmation. In summary, turn, sequence, and preference organization are central to the study of how people create meaningful talk-in-interaction, and the guiding theoretical principle underlying the present work is that TQs should be analyzed as contributing to the meaningfulness of such interactions. We adopt the ‘next-turn proof procedure’ (NTPP) for the identification of pragmatic functions of TQs, that is, the evidence for a specific pragmatic function of a TQ is found in the following turns which form part of the sequence, rather than on the basis of speculations about speaker intentions.

These assumptions from CA have been used in previous studies of TQs (e.g., Axelsson, 2011b; Kimps et al., 2014) and are applied to the analysis in this study. We do however depart from the CA framework in that we follow up the inductive NTPP-based method with statistical analyses in order to establish where apparent differences in frequency are reliable, and which variables impact such frequency differences.

3. Data sources

The data used in this study come from two sources: an available corpus of spoken Italian (CLIPS) and a new corpus of transcriptions of spoken conversation from an Italian television show (*Grande Fratello*), both described below.

3.1. CLIPS

CLIPS (Corpora e Lessici dell’Italiano Parlato e Scritto; Sobrero, 2007) is a publicly available⁵ corpus of spoken Italian. Audio files and transcriptions are downloadable, with a detailed user manual and documentation. Recordings were made in 15 Italian cities, selected on the basis of linguistic and socio-economic principles of representativeness, with an equal representation of female and male voices. The full CLIPS corpus consists of about 100 h of speech; however, this study used only those parts of the corpus containing ‘unscripted’ conversation, that is, conversation in which language has not been pre-written, though it may be structured by the constraints of the task at hand. This section of the corpus has been divided into a total of four datasets, representing different settings: (a) the map task game (hereinafter, MapTask; 23 h 24 min), (b) ‘Spot the difference’ game (hereinafter, DiffGame; 24 h 12 min), (c) TV/Radio (9 h 31 min).

In MapTask (cf. Anderson et al., 1991), two participants are in a room where they can hear each other but a screen separates them. They are both given a sheet of paper with 12 objects on it; some are the same for both participants, some are different. Each participant has a path traced around these objects, with a starting point and an end point. Taking turns, one describes the path to the other, who draws it on his or her own map.

In DiffGame too, a screen separates participants, who have in front of them a sheet of paper with objects almost the same as their partner’s, except for a few details. The task is to describe all details to discover what these minor differences are.

Television and radio both consist mostly of talk shows, where there are normally one or more hosts directing conversation between guests on the show, or audience calling in from home. Others are radio broadcasts in which the radio host is alone.

One might argue that Radio and TV shows are scripted, but this is only in the sense that the topic is chosen in advance, and hosts must follow a certain schedule. The same can be said for MapTask and DiffGame, which are task-oriented and structured so that all participants will at some point or another talk about the same objects and describe similar paths, and conclude the conversation within a given timeframe, but in which the linguistic devices used to achieve the task are entirely up to individual preference.

3.2. *Grande Fratello*

Another set of video recordings used in this study are from the *Grande Fratello* corpus (Tomaselli, 2011; hereinafter, G.Frat) collected from the TV show *Grande Fratello*, the Italian equivalent of ‘Big Brother’, a reality show in which a group of participants live together in one house. They engage in free interaction and are filmed by television cameras twenty-four hours a day for over four months, during which time they are forbidden to leave the house. Although the total number of participants involved per edition may reach almost 50, there are usually not more than 15 people living together at the same time (as some are evicted, and others are introduced further on in the program). Viewers observe how their friendly, romantic, or antagonistic relationships develop.

Each participant is made to wear a microphone at all times, with the exception of swimming, bathing, and sleeping. No camera men are present; all filming is done by remotely controlled cameras that are placed in several locations in order to

⁵ <http://www.clips.unina.it> (accessed 25.04.15).

Table 4
Speaker roles annotated by dataset.

Dataset	Leading role	Follower role
MapTask	Person describing path	Person receiving directions
DiffGame		No leader/follower roles
TV/Radio	Host	Guest/caller
G.Frat		No leader/follower roles

capture every angle of the house. The channel's website⁶ and YouTube, where videos streamed, were the main sources for data collection. The larger part of the data used consists of dyadic conversation; 20 participants (10 men and 10 women) interacting in mixed-sex and same-sex conversations. This corpus was originally collected in order to study discourse markers as a function of regional variation in Italian, since participants in the show come from all over Italy. A total of 3 h 42 min of video recording were analyzed.

4. Data coding

This section describes in detail the way TQs were identified in the sub-corpora under consideration, and which of their features were annotated. Annotation was done manually by the first author; uncertainties were discussed between the two authors until a consensus was reached.

In what follows, we first describe the features annotated in the corpora, followed by a detailed description of how TQs were identified and how their functions were defined.

4.1. Definition of annotated features

For each occurrence of a TQ we coded speakers' given roles, to enable an investigation of the relationship between TQs and conversational status, which is linked to speaker role insofar as, if an interlocutor is in a leading position in the conversational setting (for example, by being assigned the role of leader in a task-oriented dialog), then they are institutionally responsible for the conduct of talk (Cameron et al., 1989). We also recorded what function the TQs carry out in conversation, and their position, i.e., whether they were used in the middle or end of the utterance, or as a separate utterance; we also wanted to investigate the relevance of TQs in conversation management, so we coded whether or not a TQ produced a change of turn.

4.1.1. Speaker role

Speaker role refers to the assumed role of the participant who used the TQ. It varies across datasets, depending on the conversational setting and communicative task as shown in Table 4.

Leader/follower roles are relatively straightforward to discern in MapTask, where the person giving directions is in a position of privileged knowledge and responsible for directing the conversation. Participants in MapTask switch roles throughout the game, depending on whose map is being described. In TV/Radio discussions, the host is by default the person charged with staking out the conversational territory. By contrast, both DiffGame, where participants interchangeably take turns at describing objects and asking questions, and G.Frat, which features mundane conversation among housemates, do not have pre-specified leadership roles.

4.1.2. Tag position

Tag position refers to the position of the tag in relation to its anchor (e.g., a declarative or imperative statement). In the literature, the canonical TQ is one where the tag follows the anchor, but its position is often medial. Furthermore, the corpora also show that it can constitute an utterance in its own right. There are three criteria which help to determine position: content (is what precedes the tag a TCU?); intonation (does a TRP, indicated by falling or rising intonation, precede or follow the tag?); and context (discussed below). The exchange in Excerpt 1⁷ comes from MapTask, and is an example of a final position tag. The leader checks the follower's position on the map:

⁶ <http://www.video.mediaset.it/programma/gf/grande-fratello.html> (accessed 20.07.11).

⁷ In the titles of excerpts, the first bracketed part (in this case 'DGmtB04V') is the recording title, while the second part (in this case '4.09') is the time at which the TQ occurred in the recording, in minutes and seconds. In G.Frat excerpts, line numbers are the same as in the original transcriptions. Bold text in excerpts represents the TQ (anchor and tag); inline translations of tags in excerpts and examples are idiomatic, depending on context.

Excerpt 1 [DGmtB04V:4.09] Final position

- 1 A: **adesso tu sei sopra la sedia no?=
 1 A: now you are above the chair, right?
 2 B: =sì
 2 B: yes**

In this case, the anchor ('now you are above the chair') has unchanged intonation (not rising or falling), which anticipates that the utterance, although grammatically complete, is not finished. In fact, it is followed by *no?* with rising intonation, which marks a question. The anchor and tag as a whole may be considered a complete utterance because (a) it contains a TCU, and (b) intonation creates a closing and TRP (discussed in Section 2.5) where the hearer can take the floor. This can be contrasted with Excerpt 2, which exemplifies a tag constituting a separate utterance.

Excerpt 2 [DGtdA02O:17.53] Separate utterance

- 1 A: il quadrato interno (0.8) e:::m c'ha l- la-la riga::: a destra::: praticamente:::
 1 A: the inner square (0.8) u:::m has t- the- the line to the right practically
 2 A: parallela al bordo: del::: del disegno.- del foglio proprio.
 2 A: parallel to the border o:::f the drawing- of the paper actually.
 3 (1.0)
 4 A: **lgiusto**
 4 A: right?
 5 B: la riga /destra...?
 5 B: the right line...?

The sole difference lies in the intonation. In the example above, there is a full stop (indicating falling intonation, and the end of an utterance) following the anchor, *before* the tag. This is in contrast with a tag considered to be in final position, where the anchor has continuing intonation, not falling, making the tag part of the utterance. Therefore, the anchor is a separate utterance when it contains a complete TCU and its intonation creates a TRP, where the hearer could potentially take the turn (e.g., A: 'the inner square has the line to the right practically parallel to the border of the drawing- of the paper actually. – B: yeah, mine is the same'). In fact, a pause or micro pause normally comes between the anchor and tag. This contrasts with the third type, the medial tag, which is found within the anchor, as in Excerpt 3.

Excerpt 3 [1.3:3.10] Medial position

- 77 M: non lo so:: non lo so:: perché ti dico **stamattina no, .hh appena si**
 77 M: I don't know:: I don't know:: because I'm telling you this morning right, .hh
 78 M: **è svegliato così: .hh gli ho detto subito Amo': vie:ni:**
 78 M: as soon as he woke up like that .hh I immediately told him Ho:n co::me

This TQ is defined as medial because what precedes the tag is only part of the whole utterance. As in the two previous examples, this is determined by content, intonation, and also context. First, for content, an anchor like 'this morning' contains no predicate, so on its own in this context it cannot constitute a TCU. Second, the anchor has continuing intonation (neither rising nor falling), which normally indicates that the utterance is not yet completed. In fact, what follows is a tag with half-rise intonation (after which the hearer may insert a minimal response, but not take the turn), which keeps the utterance open for the predicate. The segment before the tag, together with the segment following the tag, now constitute a TCU; therefore, the tag is medial.

Another possible scenario for a medial tag is where it follows an utterance which is a TCU and has unchanged or continuing intonation (similar to final position tags) but where the tag *also* has continuing intonation. This indicates that although the first utterance is potentially a complete one, content wise, there is a second part to the utterance that was planned, as in Excerpt 4.

Excerpt 4 [DGmtA02F:17.46] Medial position

- 1 A: dovrebbe fa' cos- cioè (.) **passa sotto l'arri**vo, no, la linea;
 1 A: it should do like- I mean (.) it passes under the end point, right, the line;
 2 (0.8)
 3 B: **po[i va] alla macchinina, ...**
 3 B: then it goes to the toy car, ...
 4 A: [s i]
 4 A: yes

Note that this type of ‘no’ (line 1) is not to be mistaken with a self-repair, e.g., ‘it passes under the end point – no – the start point’. Compare Excerpt 4 to Excerpt 5, where the anchor is a TCU and the tag does provide a TRP (i.e., has a rising question intonation):

Excerpt 5 [DGtdB03P:6.54] Final position

- 1 A: **c'è una conchiglia o- s:- sembra sembrerebbe con due asticine no?**
 1 A: *there is a shell o- s:- it seems it would seem with two spikes right?*
 2 (0.5)
 3 A: *sulla destra.*
 3 A: *to the right.*

By all criteria this utterance is closed after the tag, but it is followed by an additional part of the utterance, ‘to the right’. Given that intonation marks the end of the utterance at line 1, line 3 appears to be added as an afterthought, hence, is not part of the originally planned utterance. That is, A’s decision to specify ‘to the right’ came after sensing hesitation from the hearer (0.5 s silence, line 2), or it might not have been uttered otherwise. Therefore, this tag is final, not medial.

It is also very common for the hearer to respond to a tag, whether the speaker has completed the utterance or not, as in Excerpt 6.

Excerpt 6 [1.3:0.14] Minimal responses

- 1 M: *è salito e::: (1.2) ma anche quando è salito no, (0.4)*
 1 M: *he came upstairs a:::nd (1.2) but even when he came upstairs, right, (0.4)*
 2 F: *eh*
 2 F: *uh huh*
 3 (.)
 4 M: **da un Nello (0.3) io mi aspettavo: (1.8) per come è fatto lui tipo casi:no;**
 4 M: *from someone like Nello (0.3) I expecte:d (1.8) for how he is like a fu:ss*

Following a tag with continuing intonation, the hearer may insert a minimal response (as above), but this does not influence the categorization of a tag as being medial, since the focus is on the speaker’s projected utterance. Sometimes, the hearer responds before the speaker even utters the tag, as in Excerpt 7:

Excerpt 7 [1.3:3.44] Minimal responses

- 86 M: *cioè lo senti è una cosa che senti tu.=*
 86 M: *I mean, you feel it it's something you feel*
 87 F: *=sì.*
 87 F: *yeah*
 88 (.)
 89 M: **no?**
 89 M: *right?*
 90 M: *.hhhhh (.) e tipo è arrivato sotto la doc- io ero sotto la doccia*
 90 M: *.hhhhh (.) and like he came under the sho- I was under the shower*

The response solicitation, i.e., the tag, is “produced post-completion of response [. . .] The response solicitor occurs after that token” (Jefferson, 1980, pp. 59–60), which is normally a minimal response. In fact, there is no gap between M’s tag (line 89) and her inbreath (line 90), since she already got the feedback she wanted from F. Returning to the topic of TCUs and intonation, F naturally placed a minimal response right at the end of the anchor because she saw in it a TRP. Because it follows a TRP, this tag is considered a new and separate utterance.

4.1.3. Turn change

We consider there to be a change of turn any time the hearer speaks directly following a tag. There must be no other words between the tag and the hearer’s utterance. The point of differentiating here is to make sure that when we talk about there being a change of turn it can be considered a consequence of the actual tag, and not something else in the utterance. Excerpt 8 shows a change of turn (and other examples are found in Excerpts 9, 11, and 13).

Excerpt 8 [DGtdA03O:0.58] Change of turn

- 1 A: **ce l'hai l'albero no?**
 1 A: *you have the tree right?*
 2 (0.3)

- 3 B: mhm
3 B: *mhm*

If following the tag there is an overlap of turns, as in Excerpt 9, this still counts as a change of turn, since what is of interest for this variable is whether the tag caused to the hearer to respond, not whether the speaker finished the projected turn.

Excerpt 9 [DGtdB04T:12.48] Change of turn

- 1 A: **e::h attorno alla barca no**, (0.4) **[ha] un'onda**
1 A: *u::h around the boat right*, (0.4) *it has a wave*
2 B: [si]
2 B: *yes*

4.2. Criteria for identifying tag questions

Tags can come in the form of a single word or a phrase; a finite list cannot be made of all possible tags, since they are defined more by function (their conversational purpose, e.g., request confirmation of assumptions) than by form (the actual word or phrase of choice, e.g., *okay*). We define a tag as an interrogative particle appended to a declarative or imperative utterance, which does not alter its propositional meaning, but may alter its illocutionary force (cases exist where it does not). The substitution test, described in the next section, is one tool to distinguish between ambiguous cases.

[Appendix A](#) contains the list of tags found in our corpus, with glosses.

4.2.1. Substitution test

In a TQ, the form of a tag should be almost irrelevant (since it carries little or no semantic information) and therefore replaceable. One can test whether a word or phrase is a tag by substituting different tags for it and checking whether any meaning is lost. A similar test was proposed by [Columbus \(2010\)](#) for invariant TQs in English, following [Fuller's \(2003\)](#) claim that the semantic relationship between elements in the utterance should remain unchanged if the tag is removed. In Excerpt 10, the tag *no* is used in final position to confirm information. In (28) and (29), *no* is substituted with two different tags, *eh* and *giusto*, without any (a) loss, or (b) alteration, of propositional meaning:

Excerpt 10 [DGtdA03O:0.58] Substitution test

- 1 A: **ce l'hai l'albero no?**
1 A: *you have the tree, no?*

(28) **ce l'hai l'albero eh?**
you have the tree, eh?

(29) **ce l'hai l'albero giusto?**
you have the tree, right?

In Excerpt 11, from *DiffGame*, *ci sei* ('are you with me?') is used to request a confirmation of the hearer's understanding, i.e., that *B* has found the dog on her paper, since she hesitates to respond (line 3) and then fails to give a confirmatory response (line 4).

Excerpt 11 [DGtdA01L:0.09] Substitution test

- 1 A: e:::h io parto col cane.
1 A: *u:::h I'll start with the dog*
2 B: [mm.]
2 B: *Mm*
3 (0.6)
4 B: il cane.=
4 B: *the dog*
5 A: =**ci lsei**
5 A: *are you with me?*
6 B: (.) sì.
6 B: (.) *yes*

The tag *ci sei* could be replaced with *okay?* or *va bene?* ('all right?') all to mean 'have you found it?'. However, in the case of (30) this would not work:

- (30) e:::h io parto col cane. **ce l'hai**
 u:::h l'll start with the dog. do you have it?

This is no longer a TQ since *ce l'hai?* ('do you have it?') contains a referent: *hai il cane?* ('do you have the dog?'). Therefore, *ce l'hai?*, which cannot be replaced by a tag without loss of meaning, is just a regular yes/no question.

4.3. Functions

There are 7 primary functions that have been identified in the corpora, together with an 'other' category that groups secondary functions. We focus primarily on the 7 primary ones, though we give a brief description of the two 'other' functions as well.

We approached the data inductively, not attempting to map TQs to functions identified a priori, although some of our functions do correspond to [Bazzanella's \(1994\)](#) and those proposed in the literature for other languages. Indeed, not all of the functions described in the literature feature in the corpus data (such as those of the confrontational type, like challenging/antagonistic TQs). On the other hand, extra categories have been created to describe in detail specific functions that were very characteristic of the different datasets. All functions are described below. The labels we have selected are intended to highlight what the TQ as a whole is intended to achieve in the conversation. We take the position that the communicative function is carried by the TQ, not by the tag in isolation.

4.3.1. Confirm speaker's assumption

When a speaker has made an assumption about something but is not completely certain, TQs are often used to confirm this assumption with the hearer. This function, often cited as one of the canonical functions of TQs (e.g., [Huddleston and Pullum, 2002](#); [Columbus, 2010](#)), is comparable to [Algeo's \(1990\)](#) informational TQ, and has also been identified by [Bazzanella \(1994\)](#) in Italian. Excerpt 12 provides an example from MapTask.

Excerpt 12 [DGmtB02D:3.24] Confirm speaker's assumption

- 1 A: **quindi devo salire io /giusto**
 1 A: so I have to go up, right?
 2 B: (0.4) sì
 2 B: (0.4) yes

4.3.2. Check hearer understanding

In this case, the speaker wants to make sure that the hearer has understood the information given, and prompts a confirmation using a TQ. Excerpt 13 is an example from MapTask. Note that no assumption appears to be made by the speaker that the knowledge is shared with the hearer (by definition, since the hearer lacks the knowledge being given by the director in MapTask).

[Bazzanella's \(1994\)](#) equivalent is the function of checking understanding, on the propositional (and literal, as opposed to emphatic) level; this appears to be the only instance in the literature of such a function.

Excerpt 13 [DGmtA02B:3.20] Check hearer understanding

- 1 A: fai una::: una leggera::: .hh e:::h >una leggera curva.<
 1 A: make a::: a sli:::ght .hh e:::h >a slight curve.<
 2 (0.7)
 3 so- **sul camion, /capito**
 3 o- on the truck, okay?
 4 A: (.) sì
 4 A: (.) yes

4.3.3. Close a topic

Sometimes the speaker seems to be confirming the hearer's understanding even though the hearer has already shown that he or she has understood. This actually functions to close that part of the conversation in order to move on to a new topic, giving the hearer a final chance to ask for clarifications. Therefore, the TQ is used in relation not only to its anchor, but to the previous topic as a whole. Excerpt 14 comes from MapTask.

Excerpt 14 [DGmtA04F:0.11] Close a topic

- 1 A: hai /visto dov'è il televisore
 1 A: *you see where the television is*
 2 (0.8)
 3 B: mhm sì.
 3 B: *mhm yes*
 4 (0.3)
 5 A: ce l'hai il televi- in basso a sin[i]stra.]
 5 A: *do you have the televi- at the bottom to the left.*
 6 B: [sì s]ì sì l'ho [visto.]
 6 B: *yes yes yes I saw it*
 7 A: [va /be]ne
 7 A: *all right?*
 8 A: .hhhh allora te devi andare un pochino più:: (0.3) in::: (0.8) diciamo- ...
 8 A: *.hhhh so you have to go a little mo::re (0.3) towa:::rd (0.8) let's say- ...*

The hearer, *B*, confirms his understanding in line 3 and again in line 6. In line 7, *A* asks *va bene?* ('all right?') more as a signal that he is going to continue, and in fact he does not wait for a response from *B* to do so.

For this analysis to apply, the hearer must have clearly expressed understanding. If the hearer sounds unsure (e.g., responding with *m:hm::...*), then it becomes legitimate for the speaker to ask for confirmation more than once, and this is considered confirming hearer understanding. Both of these functions fall under [Bazzanella's \(1994\)](#) checking understanding on the propositional (literal) level. [Carletta et al. \(1997\)](#) have identified this type of function in a MapTask setting which "is for the transferer to know that the information has been successfully transferred, so that they can close that part of the dialog and move on" (p. 17). They give the example of "OK? [after an instruction and an acknowledgment]" (p. 18). However, Carletta et al. also give further examples that suggest that their definition is somewhat broader than the one adopted here (i.e., including requesting confirmation of hearer understanding, or the follower confirming an assumption before the leader moves on).

4.3.4. Emphasize the topic

When the speaker uses a tag in medial position, following an utterance without a predicate, it is often to give the hearer a chance to envision what it is the speaker is referring to, before going on to talk about it. This tag works similarly to [Jefferson's \(1980\)](#) description of the German discourse marker *ne*, which "can occur as a pivot between two utterance components, marking that a prior component was point-laden, and prefacing a next component which brings home the point" (p. 61). The pivot occurs between common ground and focus. Excerpt 15 is taken from DiffGame.

Excerpt 15 [DGtdB04T:12.48] Emphasize

- 1 A: e::h attorno alla barca no, (0.4) [ha] un'onda
 1 A: *u::h around the boat right, (0.4) it has a wave*
 2 B: [s]ì
 2 B: *yes*

What is characteristic of this function is that there is a pause following the tag, which allows time for the hearer to think of (or in this case, find) the object of the conversation. As [Schegloff \(1980\)](#) suggests, this gives the hearer an opportunity to raise problems of understanding, recognition or correction. Schegloff notes that such problems are typically absent, and this is acknowledged by the recipient, who uses a 'continuer', thereby also acknowledging that a larger unit is in progress.

In Excerpt 15, *A* continues to talk after 0.4 s, assuming that by that time *B* has found the picture of the boat. This is confirmed in line 2, but *A* would have likely continued anyway unless *B* expressed uncertainty at some point (e.g., *hmmm*). This is a way of establishing common ground, so this is yet a different subsection of [Bazzanella's \(1994\)](#) checking understanding, on the propositional (literal) level, and is related to what [Mithun \(2012\)](#) labels 'orientation' within the proposition.

4.3.5. Prompt agreement

During small talk, or while reporting an event that happened to the speaker, TQs are very commonly used to highlight what is mutual knowledge, or what isn't yet known to the hearer, but which the speaker assumes they will empathize or agree with. In Excerpt 16, from G.Frat, what *M*'s tag (line 6) is implying in this case is 'you know how Nello is, so you agree with me on this', to which *F* replies *yeah*.

Excerpt 16 [1.3.545.0.21] Prompt agreement

- 4 M: **da un Nello, (0.3) io mi aspettavo: (1.8) per come è fatto lui tipo casi: no;**
 4 M: *from someone like Nello (0.3) I expecte:d (1.8) for how he is like a fu:ss*
 5 (0.6)
 6 M: **no?**
 6 M: *you know?*
 7 (0.4)
 8 M: [**cha:os**] che arriva A::H (1.2) ts (0.5) e invece:: n- /no;
 8 M: *chaos when he comes A::H (1.2) ts (0.5) bu::t n- no*
 9 F: [s i]
 9 F: *yeah*

This type of TQ falls under [Algeo's \(1990\)](#) confirmatory TQs, as it is “an invitation to express agreement, to confirm the opinion of the speaker. The person addressed is asked to participate in the conversation, albeit more passively than actively”, (p. 446) giving minimal responses. Also, since these TQs underline mutual knowledge, they can be considered a subcategory of [Bazzanella's \(1994\)](#) TQs which assume agreement from the hearer. In some cases, agreement is so taken for granted that the hearer does not feel the need to intervene at all, as in Excerpt 17. This is a recording taken from G.Frat, where A is a man who has been in the house for several months, and B is a woman who joined the previous week. A knows that B knows he can relate to what she's saying, and allows her to continue talking after the tag (line 7). Only after a long 3.4 s pause between A's turn he utters a minimal response, in overlap with A, who by then felt that she should carry on.

Excerpt 17 [1.11:0.17] Prompt agreement

- 1 A: .hh come ti stai \trovando?
 1 A: *.hh how are you getting on?*
 2 (0.4)
 3 E: ((nodding, laughing)) \$bene.\$
 3 E: *fine*
 4 (4.0)
 5 E: [no mi se]nto un po': (1.3) m:: **inizio a sentire un pò la mancanza:: delle**
 5 E: *no I feel a bi:t (1.3) m:: I'm starting to miss the*
 6 A: [e come ti]
 6 A: *and how do you*
 7 E: **cose insomma che si hanno fuori no?**
 7 E: *things that you have outside you know?*
 8 (3.4)
 9 E: pe[r s on e] anche.
 9 E: *also people*
 10 A: [capisco.]
 10 A: *I see*

These TQs may also be similar to Bazzanella's checking understanding on the propositional, but emphatic, level, in that they check the reception of what has been said, even when there is nothing complicated to understand. These are very commonly used in G.Frat:

Excerpt 18 [2.10:0.17] Prompt agreement

- 2 M: io mentalmente di mio; (1.0) so già che (.) io mi sento che questa mia fase
 2 M: *introspectively (1.0) I already know that (.) I feel that this phase of mine*
 3 M: così durerà un botto.
 3 M: *like this will last for ages*
 4 (0.7)
 5 M: **icapito**
 5 M: *you know?*
 6 (0.5)
 7 L: però ti fa comunque piacere che ci s- che lui abbia delle attenzioni nei tuoi
 7 L: *but it makes you happy that there is- that he shows interest*
 8 L: confronti di questo genere.

- 8 L: *in you that way*
 9 (1.2)
 10 L: *quello che senti tu dentro. non [quello]-*
 10 L: *what you feel inside, not what-*
 11 M: [sì:, e] *no.*
 11 M: *yes and no*

The function is in part similar to Algeo's (1990) punctuational TQ, which points up what the speaker has said for emphasis, without any real need for a response. In fact, in line 7, *L* does not address the TQ with a minimal response because she does not need to; she begins her turn with *però ti fa comunque piacere* ('but it makes you happy anyway'), which in itself signals that she has understood the proposition and is making a counterargument. Mithun (2012) identified a comparable function in Mohawk, which she labels 'shared knowledge, experience and values.'

4.3.6. *Involve hearer*

This function is well established in the literature, coinciding with Holmes's (1995) facilitative TQ. Excerpt 19 is taken from a radio show where *A*, the host, discusses a game won by the caller's team.

Excerpt 19 [RDit_08Z:1.31] *Involve hearer*

- 1 A: **e ieri è stata una grande gioia eh?**
 1 A: *and yesterday was a great joy eh?*
 2 (0.3)
 3 B: *eh!*
 3 B: *yeah!*
 4 (.)
 5 B: *proprio >mol[to molto gra]nde.<=*
 5 B: *really very very great.*
 6 A: [Lei s- eh-]
 6 A: *you s- eh-*
 7 B: *=debbo dire- (0.5) le /posso dire una /cosa*
 7 B: *I must say-< (0.5) can I tell you something*

By asking the caller to confirm something that was already mutual knowledge (since the caller was a fan of the winning team), this was a clear invitation to elaborate. In fact, this is very similar to Holmes's (1995) example, 'you've got a new job Tom haven't you?'. These TQs are hearer-oriented, unlike those used solely for the purpose of highlighting mutual knowledge.

4.3.7. *Request opinion/permission*

TQs are sometimes used to mitigate impositions on a hearer, for example, when stating a personal opinion, or proposing an action. As Lakoff (1975) stated, "a tag gives the addressee leeway, not forcing him to go along with the views of the speaker" (p. 288). This is the function of the TQ in Excerpt 20, taken from DiffGame. *A* does not think that they should look for differences in the stripes, but uses a TQ to elicit an opinion from *B*, who, however, does not confirm. *A* laughingly requests agreement a second time in line 8, and again in line 13, unsuccessfully. He finally gives up (line 11, smiling to himself), and they move on.

Excerpt 20 [DGtdA03L:5.43] *Request opinion*

- 1 A: .hh [poi::] **ah va be' [le strisce] non penso; no?**
 1 A: *.hh then ah ok I think not the stripes, right?*
 2 B: [allora] [h h h h h]
 2 B: *so hhhh*
 3 (0.5)
 4 A: *della panchina.*
 4 A: *of the bench.*
 5 A: *ci /sono strisce a [te dietro]*
 5 A: *are there stripes behind it in yours?*
 6 B: [sì sì c]i sono tante strisce.
 6 B: *yeah yeah there are many stripes*

- 7 (.)
- 8 A: \$(XXX(h)e(h)m(h)o) non penso::: co:n>tarle dai.\$<
- 8 A: XXX I don't think counting them come on
- 9 (0.2)
- 10 B: m- [ci sono tante strisce.]
- 10 B: m- there are many stripes.
- 11 A: [h h h h h h h h h]
- 11 A: hhh hhhhh
- 12 B: .hh [< l a p a n c h i n a s]i ri- [si ripiega]
- 12 B: .hh the bench f- folds
- 13 A: [va be' dai ma sicuramen-] [. h h h h]
- 13 A: all right ok but surely- hhh
- 14 B: sopra le strisce e c'è una piegatura d[ella panchi]na.
- 14 B: over the stripes and there is a fold from the bench
- 15 A: [\$ s i. \$]
- 15 A: yes

Lakoff (1973) mentions this function of TQs: “Cases do, apparently, exist, where it is the speaker’s opinions [. . .] for which corroboration is sought” (p. 55); Bazzanella (1994) describes TQs for confirming the hearer’s agreement; and Columbus (2010) discusses hearer-oriented TQs used post-opinion, “appealing to the other speaker to verify this opinion/ fact” (p. 300).

Whereas in the previous example the speaker opened with ‘I think’, potentially leading to a discussion, in Excerpt 21, A simply states what she is going to do. She advances her intentions in the form of a TQ, asking for hearer’s permission to go ahead.

Excerpt 21 [DGtdB01G:0.04] Request permission

- 1 A: ci /sei /Laura=
- 1 A: are you with me Laura?
- 2 B: =si=
- 2 B: yes
- 3 A: =allora io ti descrivo velocemente la- com'è la vigne[ttà, \okay?]
- 3 A: so I'll quickly describe the- how the drawing is okay?
- 4 B: [s i .]
- 4 B: yes
- 5 (0.2)
- 6 B: s[i.]
- 6 B: yes
- 7 A: [.h]hh allora; ci son due nuvole
- 7 A: .hhh so, there are two clouds

B’s first ‘yes’ in line 4 overlaps with the tag, which means B uttered it in response to ‘so ‘I’ll quickly describe the- how the drawing’, already giving A permission. In fact, the TQ here assumes agreement and is simply a negative politeness strategy in order to legitimize her decision making, which may otherwise come off as inconsiderate. This TQ falls under Holmes’s (1995) softening category. Kimps and Davidse’s (2008) ‘proposals for joint action’ partially overlaps with this type of TQ, which includes, but is not restricted to, joint action.

4.3.8. Other tags

There exists a class of tags which typologically resemble those used to emphasize the topic (Section 4.3.4) but which have a different purpose; it is not to give the hearer time to reflect, but to give the speaker time to formulate the rest of the utterance, as a type of filler. This function is most obvious when the speaker seems to be emphasizing part of an utterance which does not contain anything the hearer needs to recall or envision. Sometimes there are also explicit hints which show that the speaker is stalling. There were 37 cases of such fillers in the data. An example is shown in Excerpt 22, taken from MapTask.

Excerpt 22 [DGmtA03O:5.09] Filler

- 1 A: eh: allora e:::h (.) e::h comunque e::h la macchina che c'hai tu; .hhhh è-
- 1 A: yeah. so u:::h (.) u::h anyway u::h the car that you have; .hhhh is it
- 2 A: più alta di quella:: (0.2) /rossa o più \bassa di quella rossa
- 2 A: higher than the (0.2) red one or lower than the red one

- 3 (0.6)
 4 B: è:: leggermente più alta.
 4 B: *it's:: slightly higher*
 5 (0.6)
 6 A: eh: (0.3) e::mn (.) e:::h si- m- **fa' conto no, e::h [vai]**
 6 A: *uh huh (0.3) u::mn (.) u:::h si- m- imagine right, u::h go*
 7 B: [dicia]mo che il mu:so: (.) è
 7 B: *let's say that the front (.) is*
 8 B: [in linea d'ari]a co:n:: il tetto della mia.
 8 B: *at the same height a:s:: the roof of mine*
 9 A: **[vai verso destra,]**
 9 A: *go toward the right*

Very often the speaker will use the same tag repeatedly within a turn, and throughout a conversation. This idiosyncratic use, discussed in [Bazzanella \(1994\)](#), may come to be perceived as a sort of tic.⁸ An example is the following:

Excerpt 23 [DGmtB02B:7.03] Tic

- 1 A: /destra o a \sinstra
 1 A: *left or right?*
 2 (0.5)
 3 A: <sinstra.>
 3 A: *left.*
 4 A: >però /capito un po' più su-< **non drittto orizzontale; (.) /capito:: in obliqua.
 4 A: *but you know? a bit higher- not straight horizontally (.) you know? diagonally***

In our data, 11 such instances were identified. Finally, there are those TQs which, as in the previous two cases, can be considered optional; that is, they are not responsible for conveying meaning, but are often used to underline a certain point, or simply as a part of the narrative style. The following is an example, out of a total of 238 in the data:

Excerpt 24 [2.3:0.6] Narrative

- 20 G: **e quando l'ho abbracciata, è come se mi fossi:: (0.4) rilassato >no, tipo.<**
 20 G: *and when I hugged her it's as though I (0.4) relaxed, right? like*
 21 (1.6)
 22 G: ((cough))=
 23 M: =e ti ha dato una nuova forz[a no?]
 23 M: *and it gave you a new strength right?*
 24 G: [s i] **però nel momento in cui lei poi::: così:**
 24 G: *yes but at the point at which she then, like that,*
 25 G: **no, e::h mi fa:: .hhh mi fa non ce la faccio no, (0.7)**
 25 G: *right? u::h she tells me .hhh she tells me I can't do this, right? (0.7)*
 26 M: lei ti ha /detto?=
 26 M: *she said?*
 27 G: =si mi fa io [non ce la facc]io- (0.9) perchè::: m:: mi vedeva così..
 27 G: *yes she tells me, I can't do this- (0.9) because m:: she saw me like that*

[Columbus \(2010\)](#) has identified this 'narrative' type of tag in English invariant TQs, where "there is no need or expectation of response but the speaker seems to be trying to hold the listener's attention . . . It has also been called a 'non-turn-yielding' function" (pp. 303–304; citing Andersen, 2001, p. 135).

Although this is similar to [Mithun's \(2012\)](#) tags for 'highlighting crucial points', there is a different class of discourse markers which are dedicated to that function, which are not tags in the sense used here. They are not interrogative, and

⁸ "Mentre l'ascoltatore è disattento a questo tipo di elementi linguistici (che non vengono considerati in quanto non contribuiscono al contenuto proposizionale) in alcuni casi quest'uso idiosincratice è talmente insistito che viene percepito e definito come 'tic'" ([Bazzanella, 1994](#), p. 146). (Whilst the hearer is inattentive to this type of linguistic element (which is not considered since they do not contribute to the propositional content) in some cases this idiosyncratic use is so insistent that it is perceived as a "tic".) However, this was stated in reference to other discourse markers (e.g., *ciò*; 'I mean') and not tags.

Table 5

Summary of TQ functions identified in the Italian corpora, compared to classifications in the literature.

Present study	Bazzanella (1994)	Other corresponding classifications
Confirm speaker's assumption		Epistemic modal (Holmes)
Check hearer understanding	Checking understanding, propositional: literal	
Close a topic		Close part of a dialog (Carletta et al. 1997) ^a
Emphasize the topic		Orientation (Mithun)
Prompt agreement	Checking understanding, propositional: emphatic	Shared knowledge, experience and values (Mithun)
Involve hearer		Facilitative (Holmes)
Request opinion/permission	Confirming hearer's agreement	Softening (Holmes)

^a The label 'close part of a dialogue' is the authors' own as these case are mentioned but not explicitly labeled by Carletta et al. (1997).

act as emphatic markers (e.g., *non tutti gli insegnanti vanno via volentieri, eh*; 'not all teachers are happy to leave, you know'). These can also increase the force of an utterance, as in Excerpt 25, where the speaker has a sarcastic attitude toward someone who didn't greet him. This is consistent with Algeo's (1990) description of 'punctuational' tags.

Excerpt 25 [2.5:0.29] Eh

12 G ((to someone passing by)) **buongiorno eh!**
12 G *and good morning to you!*

Therefore, although they carry out the same functions as certain English and Mohawk tags, these will not be considered in our analysis.

The principal feature which groups these 'non-tags' together is that they do not interact with any specific type of anchor to carry out a function; rather, their role is confined to the tag itself, i.e., a filler, a tic, a non-turn yielding device, and an emphatic marker. This is therefore not a case where the TQ as a whole serves a communicative function. In the remainder of this paper, we exclude these 'other' cases from analysis.

4.3.9. Summary of TQ functions

The functions described above are based only on those TQs which appeared in the corpora, and therefore not all types of TQs described in the literature featured. Table 5 presents a summary of the TQ functions identified above, with related functions in the literature for Italian (Bazzanella, 1994) and for other languages.

Note that some of the types identified here either overlap with more than one type identified in previous work, or do not have a straightforward counterpart. For example, our corpora did not contain cases representative of Bazzanella's (1994) TQs on the implicature level, (e.g., 'I'm your mother, you got that?!') or any of the challenging tags. This is interesting, since on a show like G.Frat, as well as some other types of TV and radio talk shows, some of the dialog is quite confrontational.

5. Quantitative analysis

We now turn to a quantitative analysis of the data. Here, we address statistically a number of the issues raised in Section 2. First, we compare different conversational settings – as reflected by our different datasets – in the extent to which TQs are used. We then turn to a comparison of frequencies of TQ functions, followed by a consideration of the relationship between these and the position of TQs in an utterance and their role in motivating turn change. Finally, we assess the impact of conversational role on TQ use.

5.1. Use of TQs in different conversational settings

The fact that the corpus data under consideration come from different types of settings allows us to investigate whether TQs are distributed differently in each of these. Table 6 shows the number of TQs which appeared in each of the datasets.

Table 6

Distribution of TQs per dataset.

	MapTask	DiffGame	TV/Radio	G.Frat	Total
Length (h)	23.4	24.2	9.5	3.3	60.4
TQ Frequency	1320 (66.5%)	578 (29.1%)	45 (2.3%)	40 (2.1%)	1983

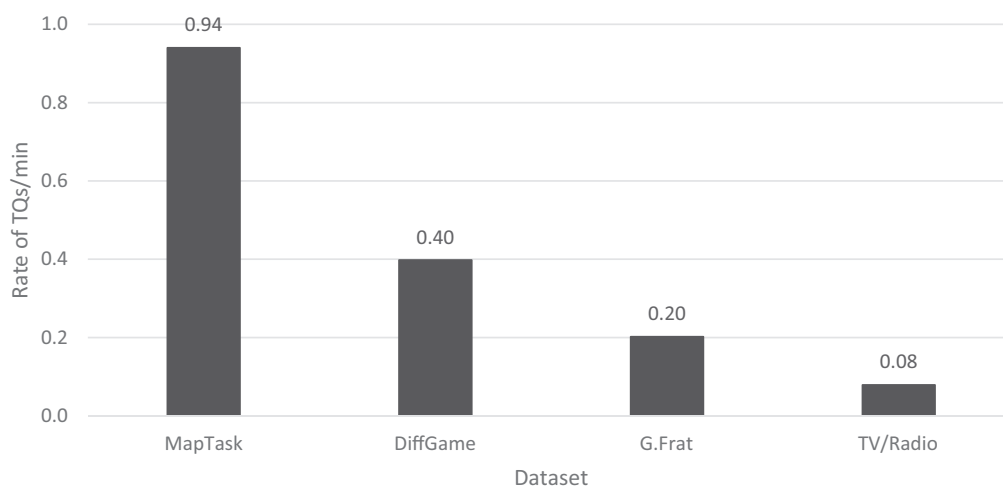


Fig. 1. Average number of TQs per minute by dataset.

Since the durations of the datasets are not balanced, Fig. 1 shows the average number of TQs produced per minute to enable a proper comparison. Clearly, conversational setting affects TQ use, with game settings eliciting most TQs. This could be related to the very frequent fact checking which takes place, a hypothesis which we explore in the next subsection.

5.2. A comparison of functions across conversational settings

Table 7 displays the frequency of TQ functions by dataset. Note that any conclusions drawn from these figures are mitigated by the fact that the corpora are of different sizes. For example, although the most frequent functions in Table 7 are to confirm the speaker's assumptions and check hearer understanding, this is in part because they are heavily represented in the largest of the two sub-corpora, namely, MapTask and DiffGame, which together account for 89% of all TQs found (see Table 6). Thus, it is useful to analyze functions in terms of their correlation with each dataset, given that each dataset represents a different communicative setting.

As the table suggests, one function used exclusively in the games, but especially MapTask, is to close a topic, resulting in the conversation moving on. This can be attributed to the fact that this use of TQs also serves to double-check hearer understanding (see Section 4.3.3), which is important in a task of this sort, but perhaps less so in everyday interaction. Two other functions used primarily in the games is to confirm the speaker's assumptions, and check hearer understanding, once again because they are essential in a task-oriented setting, whereas in normal conversation people presumably do not need to confirm factual information as frequently. This may be due in part to the fact that in everyday conversation, there are other ways to establish common ground and therefore check mutual understanding (c.f. Clark, 1996). By contrast, in these games, lack of mutual knowledge is being manipulated to introduce asymmetry in the interlocutors' knowledge states, necessitating frequent explicit checking. The fact that MapTask contains the highest proportion of TQs whose function is to check hearer understanding is probably also linked to the fact that task success is contingent on achieving a very precise level of alignment, which the speaker must ensure. More generally, it is possible

Table 7
Distribution of TQ functions by dataset. Percentages within datasets are given in parentheses.

Function	MapTask	DiffGame	TV/Radio	G.Frat
Confirm speaker's assumption	343 (46.1%)	383 (51.6%)	16 (2.2%)	1 (0.1%)
Check hearer understanding	542 (86.3%)	79 (12.6%)	2 (0.3%)	5 (0.8%)
Close a topic	373 (88.8%)	47 (11.2%)	0	0
Emphasize the topic	59 (48.4%)	59 (48.4%)	2 (1.6%)	2 (1.6%)
Prompt agreement	0	1 (2.6%)	9 (23.7%)	28 (73.7%)
Involve hearer	0	0	12 (80%)	3 (20%)
Request opinion/permission	2 (17.6%)	9 (52.9%)	4 (23.5%)	1 (5.9%)
Total	1325	578	52	42

Table 8
Frequency of tag positions by TQ function. Percentages are given in parentheses.

Function	Medial	Final	Utterance
Confirm speaker's assumption	40 (5%)	576 (78%)	125 (17%)
Check hearer understanding	14 (2%)	210 (34%)	404 (64%)
Close a topic	1 (0.2)	8 (1.9%)	412 (97.9%)
Emphasize the topic	105 (86%)	10 (8%)	7 (6%)
Prompt agreement	3 (8%)	30 (79%)	5 (13%)
Involve hearer	2 (13%)	10 (67%)	3 (20%)
Request permission/opinion	0	10 (59%)	7 (41%)

that such functions serve to mark the completion of sub-tasks in task-oriented dialogs; similar functions have been identified in such dialogs for other types of expressions, such as referential noun phrases (cf. Jordan, 2002; Jordan and Walker, 2005).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the distribution of the function of prompting agreement, which is often used also to highlight mutual knowledge, is complementary to the functions discussed so far: It is found mostly in G.Frat, the most unstructured of the conversational settings under discussion, followed by TV/Radio. With the exception of one case in DiffGame, it is virtually unattested in the games conversations. One reason for this is that in both G.Frat and TV/Radio, participants are often engaged in a process of sharing opinions, feelings and experiences, thereby necessitating the underlining of common ground. In the same two datasets, another frequent use of TQs is to involve the hearer in the conversation, which once again is never attested in the games sub-corpora. This function occurs most frequently in TV/Radio, something which is to be expected, since hosts often use TQs as cues to elicit responses by their guests at specific times during a show, whereas there is no need for this kind of prompting during the games, given their structured format. Finally, seeking permission and/or opinion appeared only very rarely in all datasets, possibly because speakers resorted to different politeness strategies to fulfill those functions.

5.3. Tag position

A TQ does not always occur at the actual end of an utterance; it can be in medial or final position, or it can itself constitute the whole utterance. In final position, the tag is a planned part of the utterance; utterance type tags are separate and can be attached at a later time, since their intonation is discontinuous with the preceding utterance. Once again, functions seem to influence the position in which tags are placed, as shown in Table 8.

Given that utterance-final tags occur as a planned part of the utterance, it is unsurprising that when requesting confirmation of a speaker's assumption, the tag occurs mostly in utterance-final position. This is because it was with that intention that the utterance was created in the first place. This is in contrast with checking hearer understanding, where the tag occurs more often as a separate utterance. Here, the speaker may utter a statement assuming that it would be understood, and later may check for understanding if the hearer is hesitant. The function of closing a topic is typically characterized as a separate utterance used as a signal that the speaker is about to move on. For related reasons, tags whose function is to emphasize something occur utterance-medially, often just after the subject. Although both appear rarely in the corpora, tags associated with seeking opinion or seeking permission never appear in medial position.

5.4. Turn change

Most TQs produced a change of turn, meaning that the hearer produced an immediate verbal response to the TQ, as opposed to the speaker continuing to talk. Changes of turn occurred over twice as many times as no changes, as shown in Table 9, clearly indicating a significant difference ($\chi^2(1) = 540.46, p < 0.001$). This supports the view defended in Section 2

Table 9
Frequency and proportions of TQs and turn-taking.^a

Turn change	No Turn change
1444 (73%)	536 (27%)

^a The percentages in Table 9 are proportions of TQs estimated on the basis of those instances where turn change could be identified. Some recordings cut off immediately after a TQ, making it impossible to check whether a turn change occurred.

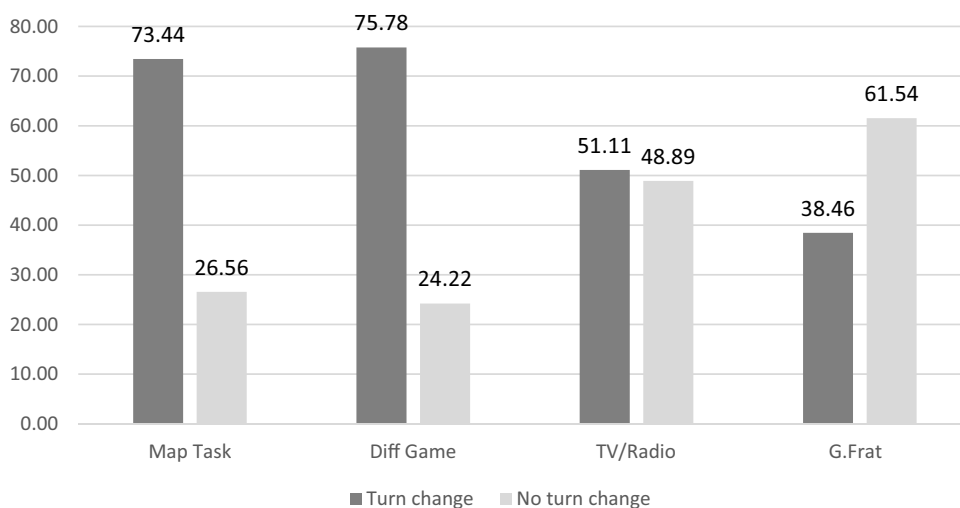


Fig. 2. Distribution of TQs (%) resulting in turn change, by dataset.

that TQs provide a turn-relevance place (TRP), where “that turn might be possibly complete and another speaker might take the turn” (Ten Have, 2007, p. 219). Also, as Holmes (1982) states, “tag questions are generally aimed at eliciting a response, however minimal, from the addressee” (p. 44).

Nevertheless, a closer look at turn change shows different trends when results are grouped according to conversational setting. Fig. 2 shows that the observations made for the data overall (i.e., turn changes are more common than no turn changes) hold true for both MapTask and DiffGame. On the other hand, in TV/Radio turn changes are roughly equally likely. G.Frat shows yet another pattern, with a predominance of TQs that do not elicit turn change. These differences between datasets could be attributed to the fact that in the games, TQs are used for purposes where the speaker is expecting a response (e.g., to check hearer understanding, to confirm the speaker’s assumptions). On the other hand, mundane conversation is often characterized by unspoken understanding. For example, a speaker may be prompting agreement from the hearer, but not necessarily expect a response, since agreement is assumed. The dependency between the incidence of turn change and conversational setting turns out to be highly significant ($\chi^2(3) = 36.87, p < 0.001$). The size of this effect – that is the degree of correlation between turn change and conversational setting, independent of sample size – estimated using Cramer’s V , is 0.14.

In conclusion, it turns out that dataset or setting not only affects frequency and functions of TQs, as we saw earlier, but also whether they are more or less likely to result in a change of turn. This raises the question whether turn changes are also related to function, since functions are themselves dependent on setting. The relationship between turn changes and function is displayed in Table 10.

As shown in the table, the direction of the trend changes according to the function that a TQ serves. The functions which most clearly result in turn changes are those related to requests for confirmation of assumptions and checking understanding: In such cases, the listener clearly feels the need to confirm. When a TQ signals an intention to move on to a new phase or topic in a conversation, turn changes also tend to occur, probably because here too, the signal invites a go-ahead from an interlocutor. Once again, the dependency between turn change and function turns out to be significant ($\chi^2(6) = 65.06, p < 0.001$; Cramer’s $V = 0.18$).

Table 10
TQ function and turn change. Percentages are given in parentheses.

Function	Turn	No turn
Confirm speaker’s assumption	593 (80%)	148 (20%)
Check hearer understanding	467 (74%)	160 (26%)
Close a topic	278 (66%)	142 (34%)
Emphasize the topic	69 (57%)	53 (43%)
Prompt agreement	16 (42%)	22 (58%)
Involve hearer	10 (67%)	5 (33%)
Request opinion/permission	11 (65%)	6 (35%)

Table 11
Frequency and proportions of TQs as a function of speaker role.

	Leading role	Following role
MapTask	1127 (85%)	193 (15%)
TV/Radio	38 (84%)	7 (16%)
Overall	1165 (85%)	200 (15%)

5.5. Conversational status

TQs have been argued to act as an interactional resource for individuals occupying a 'high conversational status' to obtain information and control the message recipient (Harres, 1998; Harris, 1984) and to facilitate conversation (Cameron et al., 1989). In the present study, radio and television hosts could be considered to hold more power of initiative in conversation, since they are the ones who run the show. The same holds of participants playing a leadership or director role in the MapTask experiment, since they are the ones holding the information. By contrast, participants in DiffGame and G.Frat are not assigned specific roles, taking free turns at speaking, making their status more symmetric, at least insofar as there was no formal specification of role in advance. Because of this, we consider these sub-corpora as having equal or symmetrical roles.

A further assumption that we make in what follows is that the social status of interlocutors is of secondary importance, and possibly irrelevant, in the settings we consider here. For example, a caller on a radio show is unidentified except for his or her first name, so other social aspects besides the temporarily assumed role of 'caller' are presumably unknown.

Table 11 shows the distribution of TQs in TV/Radio and MapTask, as a function of conversational role which, following the annotation developed in Section 4.1.1, is marked as 'leading' or 'following'.

The results in Table 11 show an overwhelming majority of TQs used by persons in a leading, as opposed to a following, role. A chi-squared goodness of fit test shows that the difference between leaders and followers across both datasets is highly significant ($\chi^2(1) = 682.22, p < 0.001$). However, a chi-square test of independence yields no evidence that this difference between speaker roles is impacted by the two datasets ($\chi^2(1) = 0, p > .8$). This is expected, since the proportion of TQs for leaders and followers turns out to be the same in both datasets.

These findings echo those of Bazzanella and Fornara (1995), who showed that in Italian, interviewers used TQs more frequently than interviewees. The current findings establish this on a larger and more diverse corpus, at least insofar as 'status' is viewed in terms of the role of the speaker and the degree of institutional control they exercise in the course of the conversation.

It is however possible that leaders and followers use TQs for different purposes. The distribution of TQ functions by role is displayed in Fig. 3. By far the largest differences between leaders and followers – reflected in the distribution in the figure – is in checking hearer understanding, which leaders clearly use much more. Recall from our earlier discussion that this function is most frequently attested in MapTask. Its preponderance among leaders suggests that they are indeed using TQs to check understanding in the game before moving on to the next part. By contrast, leaders and followers do not differ so dramatically in the extent to which they use TQs to request confirmation of the speaker's assumptions: Leaders often use them to check whether the follower actually has the same objects drawn on the map, and that they are in the same location as theirs; followers use them to confirm directions received from the leader. In the same way, both leaders and followers use the function of drawing attention to an object, although to different extents (the former typically referring to an object to describe it, the latter to ask for clarifications about it).

Involving the hearer occurs solely in the speech of TV/Radio hosts' speech as a cue to the callers or guests to join in (as shown above, this function does not occur in MapTask, and neither does highlighting mutual knowledge).

Although TQs used to request an opinion or permission are relatively rare, it is interesting to note that asking for an opinion and asking for permission (both politeness strategies) are actually used more frequently by individuals in a leading role. This contradicts previous claims in the literature that mitigation is more typical of lower status individuals (e.g., Baxter, 1984; Kollock et al., 1985). It is in fact possible that individuals with higher conversational status may rely on these politeness strategies to redress status asymmetries, thereby diminishing the imbalance of 'power' in a conversation.

In summary, the data provide evidence not only that individuals who are institutionally responsible for the conduct of talk tend to use more TQs, but also that the resulting asymmetry between types of interlocutors is strongly impacted by the communicative function. To place this claim on a firmer statistical footing, we used a chi-squared test of independence to assess the impact of function on the difference in frequency of TQs among leaders and followers. For this part of the analysis, we collapsed three of the functions in Fig. 3, where frequencies are low, to avoid biasing the chi-square estimate. This gave rise to a 5 (functions) by 2 (role) contingency table. The test confirmed that the

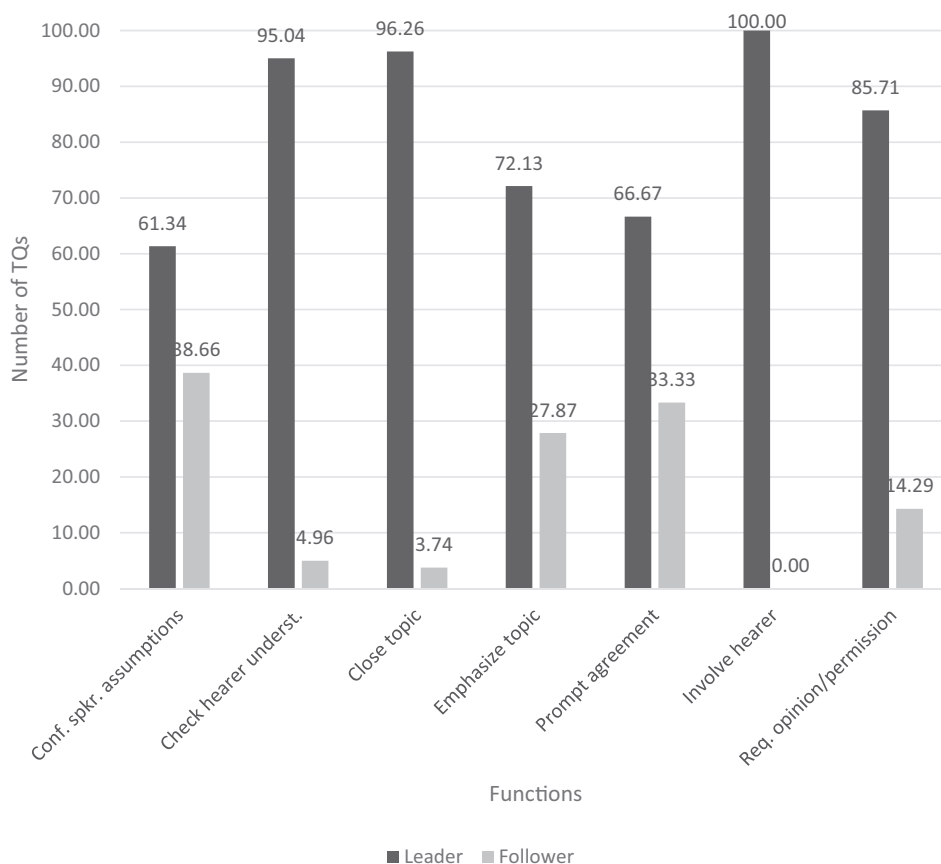


Fig. 3. Distribution of TQ functions over roles.

distribution among leaders and followers is highly dependent on function ($\chi^2(4) = 248.42$, $p < .001$; Cramer's $V = 0.43$).

5.6. Summary

The findings reported in this section can be summarized as follows. First, our analysis of TQs shows that the frequency of their use and the functions they serve in the conversation depend on the conversational setting and on whether or not a conversation is task-oriented or not. Thus, in conversational games such as MapTask, the most common functions were to obtain confirmation of assumptions being made by the speaker, or checking the hearer's understanding, and to close a topic, and hence move on, in conversation. For TV/Radio, the most frequent functions were to prompt agreement – which often involves highlighting mutual knowledge – and to invite hearer involvement; while for G.Frat the most frequently attested function was prompting agreement. The analysis has also shown that in conversations where there are a priori asymmetries between interlocutors in terms of conversational status, individuals in a leading role tend to use more TQs. However, here too, functions play a role, with leaders using them for specific purposes, such as confirming assumptions and closing a topic to move on in conversation. Finally, we also showed that function influences the impact that TQs have on the structure of conversation, in inducing turn changes, and in the placement of tags within the utterance.

6. Conclusions

This paper has presented an analysis of the distribution and use of TQs in Italian in conversation. The analysis relied on corpora representing language use in different settings and used certain techniques from Conversation Analysis to identify TQs and their functions, followed by a quantitative analysis of their distributional properties. The variety in the corpus data allowed us to consider the impact of several factors, including differences between functions for which TQs

are used and the way these are affected by setting and conversational status, as well as how function influences the placement of tags within an utterance and whether or not it induces turn change.

The overall picture that emerges from this analysis is complex. First, while the functions identified for TQs in our corpora have a degree of overlap with those identified in previous literature, there are also functions which have not hitherto been proposed. A similar trend is to be found in recent work investigating TQs in languages other than English, notably Mithun (2012). The present work can therefore be viewed as a contribution toward a broader understanding of TQs supported by cross-linguistic data. Second, our data also permitted an analysis of the interaction between pragmatic function and tag position, as well as turn-taking. It turns out that this interaction is systematic. Among other things, TQs whose purpose is to check hearer understanding or confirm speaker assumptions tend to occur utterance-finally, and to elicit turn changes. Third, conversational setting, as reflected in our different datasets, is an important influence both on the frequency of TQ use and on the functions they are used for. Thus, TQs were more frequent in the task-oriented MapTask and DiffGame settings, followed by G.Frat and TV/Radio. Functions associated with MapTask and DiffGame include confirmation of assumptions or checking understanding, and closing a conversational topic; there is no occurrence of TQs to prompt agreement by an appeal to mutual knowledge, or to invite hearer involvement. On the other hand, these were more typical of TV/Radio, where the functions of TQs overlapped very little with those in the game settings. This is especially true of the use of TQs to close a topic, which never occurred in these sub-corpora.

Finally, we also considered the potential impact of asymmetries in conversational status on the rate at which TQs are used. Interlocutors in a leadership role – for example, directors in a task-oriented dialog or hosts on a TV or Radio show – were found to use most TQs overall. Here again, the function of TQs plays an important role, with speakers holding higher conversational status using them to check understanding and move the conversation forward. Speakers whose status was lower within the bounds of the conversational setting tended to use TQs to confirm their assumptions or check understanding, as well as emphasize subjects. Politeness strategies of involving the hearer, and requesting an opinion/permission appeared very rarely in the corpora, but were always used more by leaders/hosts. In short, the impact of conversational status on TQ use cannot be reduced to a display of uncertainty on the part of an individual who has less power of initiative in conversation; rather, it depends on how and why the TQ is being used.

6.1. *Limitations and future research*

The fact that different datasets were not equal in size meant that certain comparisons were not straightforward, although this is partly mitigated in the analysis by the computation of effect sizes, where these were relevant. The corpora used were also not fully representative of different types of everyday conversation, which meant that some TQ functions did not appear at all, and consequently could not be compared to the results of previous studies. For example, the way that speakers manage arguments is a fruitful topic to study, and might have yielded interesting results in this context. As discussed in the literature (see Section 2), a series of different TQ types can be employed in confrontational talk, for example. However, this type of exchange was extremely scarce, and none of these were observed.

As observed in Section 3, the G.Frat corpus was originally collected for a comparative study of how discourse markers are used by participants from the North and South of Italy. Since recordings in the CLIPS corpus are organized by city, they would provide a substantial amount of data for this type of study, which could reveal differences between varieties of Italian.

Based on the results of our study, another avenue for future work would be to focus on the relation between TQs and social status (as opposed to conversational status), which could also be related to the regional differences found. Bazzanella and Fornara's (1995) study examined conversation between interviewers and interviewees in work settings, which undoubtedly presented a defined contrast in status. The limitation of their study, nonetheless, is that it examined only 24 individuals, in 12 h of interviews; the authors themselves comment that idiosyncrasies do impact findings, and that their study is more qualitative than quantitative. In order to gain a better understanding of the role of TQs and related discourse markers to interlocutor status, as well as sociolinguistic variables, different corpora would be necessary. In particular, studies in specific settings, such as those on English related to the use of TQs in medical settings (Harres, 1998) and in the courtroom (Harris, 1984) should pave the way forward in this direction, as should studies that have shed light on the effects of age (Stenström et al., 2002; Tottie and Hoffmann, 2006) on TQ usage. Finally, the effects of gender differences on TQ use remain an open question, made topical by early theoretical speculations (e.g., Lakoff, 1973, 1975).

Ultimately, we argue that our understanding of the nature of such apparently 'meaningless' expressions in discourse can only be furthered through the investigation of extensive corpora, using analyzes that investigate the impact of many different variables on the observations.

Appendix A

Table A1
Tags from the corpus.

Italian tag	English gloss	Italian tag	English gloss
A posto	<i>All right</i>	È vero	<i>Is it true</i>
Bona (bene)	<i>Good</i>	Giusto	<i>Right</i>
Buona (bene)	<i>Good</i>	Hai capito	<i>(You) understood</i>
Capi' (capito)	<i>Understood</i>	Hai presente	<i>You know</i>
Capisci	<i>(You) understand</i>	Mm	<i>Mm</i>
Capito	<i>Understood</i>	Mi segui	<i>Do you follow</i>
Capito come	<i>Understood (how)</i>	Mi spiego	<i>Do I explain myself</i>
Chiaro è	<i>Is it clear</i>	Ne (no)	<i>No</i>
Ci sei	<i>Are you there</i>	O sbaglio	<i>Or am I wrong</i>
Ci siam capiti	<i>Are we understood</i>	O no	<i>Or not</i>
Ci siamo	<i>Are we there</i>	Okay	<i>Okay</i>
Ci troviamo	<i>Do we understand</i>	T'e capi' (hai capito)	<i>(You) understood</i>
D'accordo	<i>Agreed</i>	Ti risulta	<i>Does that make sense</i>
È così	<i>Is it so</i>	Va bene	<i>Is that all right</i>
Eh	<i>Eh</i>	Ve' (vero)	<i>True</i>

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