Tags: Cross-linguistic diversity and commonality

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Abstract

The epistemic modal functions of English tag constructions, such as *You're coming, aren't you?* are well known: prototypical tags indicate reduced certainty on the part of the speaker. Tags can also have interactive effects, since they request a response from the listener. This dual function has been linked to their syntactic structure, which consists of a statement followed by an abbreviated question. But the majority of tag constructions cross-linguistically do not show this grammatical structure. This paper takes up the issue of the universality of tag functions by looking at the uses of tags in spontaneous speech in Mohawk. Tag constructions in both English and Mohawk show combinations of modal and interactive functions, but the inventories of uses of the constructions differ. Certain challenging and aggressive uses have been observed in English but not Mohawk, while certain discourse-structuring uses have been observed in Mohawk but not English. The differences can be seen to emerge from the common modal/interactive function, plus a deeper commonality, the propensity of speakers to exploit available linguistic resources for creative expression.
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1. Introduction

The epistemic modal function of tag constructions is well recognized (Coates, 1987; McGregor, 1995, 1997; Norrick, 1995; Kimps, 2007 and others). Tags can indicate reduced certainty or commitment to the truth of the proposition on the part of the speaker: *It's on the left, isn't it?* can convey less confidence than *It's on the left.* But tags also serve interactive functions: *It's on the left, isn't it?* solicits a response from the listener. The combination of proposition-oriented and addressee-oriented functions is sometimes linked to the syntax of prototypical English tag constructions, composed of a statement (*It's on the left*), and a reduced question (*isn't it?*). The English declarative-interrogative structure is far from universal, however; the majority of tags are single lexical items, including the English *right?, eh?* and *hunh?*. This paper pursues the question of whether all tag constructions are nevertheless united by some core function, and if they are not, whether the variation is random or principled. The use of tags is examined here in a language that is structurally quite different from more familiar European languages: Mohawk. Initial similarities are striking, but beyond these lie some interesting differences. The differences can, however, be understood in terms of certain deeper characteristics of human language.

2. Basic features of tags

There is a substantial literature on tag constructions, particularly those in English and other European languages. Among the works that include discussion of English tags are Huddleston (1970), Cattell (1973), Dubois and Crouch (1975), Hudson (1975), Lakoff (1975), Aimer (1979), Bublitz (1979), Östman (1981), Holmes (1983, 1984, 1995), Nässlin

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(1984), Quirk et al. (1985), Coates (1987, 1996), Algeo (1988), Cameron et al. (1989), Cameron (1992), Culicover (1992), McGregor (1995, 1997), Stenström (1997, 2005), Biber et al. (1999), Roesle (2001), Huddleston and Pullum (2002), Hoffmann (2006), Tottie and Hoffmann (2006), Kimps (2007), Kimps and Davidse (2008), Reese and Asher (2007), and Axelsson (2011). There are many more. Some of the work is based on introspection, some on informal observation, and some, particularly more recently, on corpora of various sizes. Some of the focus has been on structural features of the constructions, some on their functions and uses.

Syntactically, the English tag construction is typically described as a declarative sentence (the anchor or host) plus an abbreviated question (the tag). The tag agrees with the subject and auxiliary of the anchor, but it may either contrast in polarity (*It's on the left, isn't it?; It isn't on the left, is it?*), or coincide (*It's on the left, is it*). An essential component of the constructions is intonation. The most obvious aspect of intonation is the pitch contour.

> The tag with a rising tone invites verification, expecting the hearer to decide the truth of the proposition in the statement. The tag with the falling tone, on the other hand, invites confirmation of the statement, and has the force of an exclamation rather than a genuine question. (Quirk et al., 1985:811)

A second aspect is phrasing. Ladd (1981) distinguishes two structures according to the prosodic integration of the anchor and the tag.

Nuclear tags
have a separate nucleus or nuclear pitch accent, generally preceded in the rhythm of the sentence by a noticeable pause or intonational boundary.

Postnuclear tags
have no separate nucleus, the pitch contour on the tag merely continuing the nuclear contour begun at the preceding nucleus in the main sentence; generally, too, there is noticeably less of a pause or boundary before the tag. (Ladd, 1981:167)

Much of the literature on tag constructions has dealt with their semantic and pragmatic functions. Several functional typologies have been proposed. Tottie and Hoffmann (2006) provide a useful discussion of two, those of Holmes (1983, 1984, 1995) and Algeo (1988, 1990, 2006), and offer a synthesis.

Holmes' work is based on recorded conversations of New Zealand English, with a focus on politeness and gender.

(1) Tag functions according to Holmes (Tottie and Hoffmann, 2006:298)

    1. **Epistemic modal function**: Rising intonation
       Express genuine speaker uncertainty rather than politeness (1995:80)

    2. **Affective function**: Falling intonation

       a. **Facilitative**
         Hedges which serve as positive politeness devices.
         They invite the addressee to contribute to the discourse (1995:81).

       b. **Softening**
         Negative politeness devices, used to attenuate the force of negatively affective utterances, such as directives . . . and criticism (1995:81)

       c. **Challenging**
         Confrontational strategies [which] may pressure a reluctant addressee to reply or aggressively boost the force of a negative speech act (1995:152)

Algeo's work is based on the *Survey of English Usage* (later included in the London-Lund Corpus) and informal observations of private conversations and television programs. His goal is a comparison of British and American English.

(2) Tag functions according to Algeo (Tottie and Hoffmann, 2006:298–299)

    1. **Informational**
       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. The tune of the tag is a rising intonation. (1990:445)

    2. **Confirmatory**
       A more frequent use of tag questions is not to seek information but to draw the person addressed into the conversation. . . . These tags ask for confirmation of what the speaker has said. . . . The intonation of these tags may be a rising tune, but is more likely to be a falling one. (1990:445–446)

3. **Punctuational**
Some tags are used. . . . merely to point up what the speaker has said [and] are the vocal equivalent of an exclamation point or of underlining for emphasis (1990:446)

4. **Peremptory**
A peremptory tag immediately follows a statement of obvious or universal truth, with which it is practically impossible to disagree. . . . the speaker considers the conversation about it at an end. . . . The intonational tune is always a falling one. The tag is. . . . often a put-down of the addressee (1990:447–448)

5. **Aggressive or antagonistic**
The aggressive tag is superficially similar to the peremptory one but with a crucial difference. . . . [it] follows a statement that is by no means obvious and that the addressee cannot be reasonably expected to know. . . . By implying that addressees ought to know what they actually cannot know, [it] is insulting and provocative (1990:447).

Based on the above work and their own examination of tag constructions in the British National Corpus and the Longman Spoken American Corpus, Tottie and Hoffmann arrive at the schema in (3).

(3)   Tag functions: Tottie and Hoffmann (2006:300–301)

1. **Informational**
Genuine request for information

2. **Confirmatory**
Speaker is not sure of what s/he says, wants confirmation

3. **Attitudinal**
Emphasizes what the speaker says, does not expect involvement or reply

4. **Facilitating**
Speaker is sure of the truth of what s/he says but wants to involve the listener

5. **Peremptory**
Follows statement of generally acknowledged. . .truth, is intended to close off debate

6. **Aggressive**
Functions as insult or provocation

They provide the comparison of the three systems shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Classifications of pragmatic functions of English tags: Tottie and Hoffmann (2006:301).

Macro category	Holmes	Algeo	Tottie and Hoffmann
Epistemic modal	Epistemic modal	Informational	Informational
		Confirmatory	Confirmatory
Affective	Facilitative	Confirmatory	Facilitating
	Softening		
		Punctuational	Attitudinal
	Challenging	Peremptory	Peremptory
		Aggressive, Antagonistic	Aggressive

3. Mohawk tag functions

Mohawk is an Iroquoian language spoken in northeastern North America, in communities in Quebec, Ontario, and New York State. The current study is based on a corpus of conversations recorded in four communities, Kahnawà:ke, Kanehsatà:ke, Ahkwesáhsne, and Ohswé:ken. Altogether 62 speakers are represented, a mixture of men and women, all adults. Participants in each conversation are well known to each other, longstanding friends and/or relatives. Since there are no multimillion-word corpora of Mohawk comparable to those of some European languages, a quantitative study would be misleading, but the present corpus offers certain other advantages. Each use of a tag construction can be examined in its full syntactic and discourse context, complete with its intonation. The personal characteristics of the speakers and their interrelationships are well known. All of the material in the corpus was transcribed and interpreted with

the aid of at least one speaker who was a participant in the conversation. The help of these speakers insured that pertinent background information was available and that the tone of the exchanges was accurately conveyed in the translations.

The Mohawk tag is a single lexical item, the particle *wáhi'* or *wahe'* (a dialectal difference). It has no discernible internal morphological structure, and its etymology has been lost in the mists of time. It does not appear with questions or commands. It is, however, pervasive in speech.

4. Mohawk tags in conversation

4.1. Epistemic modality

Mohawk *wáhi'* is used as an epistemic modal much like its English counterpart. In example (4), the speaker stated a proposition, but the tag indicated that she was open to it not being true.

(4)   Epistemic modality: reduced certainty
   A   *E:so' ki' ní:se' tehsahthénno'ks, <u>wáhi'</u>.*
        'You play a lot of golf, <u>don't you</u>.'

   B   *<u>Iah</u>...*
        '<u>No</u>.'

   A   *A:,   iáh   kenh?*
        oh   no   Q
        'Oh no?'

   B   *Ia:,   iáh   ó:nen.*
        no: not now
        'No, not anymore.'

This usage corresponds to Holmes' *Epistemic* and Algeo's and Totti and Hoffmann's *Informational* categories.

English tag constructions of this type often show rising intonation, a rising pitch movement on the tag itself. This pattern has been linked to the interrogative status of the English tag and its function as an appeal for verification. Interestingly, the Mohawk tag does not show a rise here. It also does not have the grammatical structure of a question, though it constitutes an appeal for verification, an effect visible in the immediate response (Fig. 1).
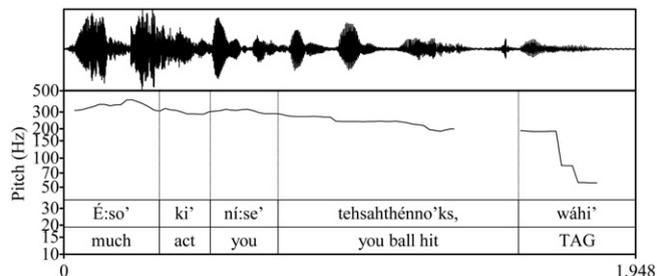

Fig. 1. 'You play a lot of golf, don't you.'

This construction shows Ladd's *Postnuclear* tag structure. The tag *wáhi'* was part of the same overall intonation contour as the anchor, continuing the general downward movement in pitch from the beginning of the sentence to a final low. A subtle division into two intermediate phrases might be discerned: there was a very slight pause between the *ks* burst at the end of the anchor and the beginning of the tag. The tag retained its own word-initial stress, as can be seen in the peak on the pitch trace, but there was no significant pitch reset.

4.2. Appeal for confirmation

Corresponding to Holmes' *Epistemic modal* function, Algeo and Tottie and Hoffmann recognize two types, *Informational* and *Confirmatory*. Their *Informational* is like that in example (4) above. Tottie and Hoffmann's *Confirmational* indicates further reduced certainty: 'the speaker is not sure of what s/he says, wants confirmation' (2006:300). Mohawk shows a similar range of certainty associated with the use of tags.

(5)   Less certainty
   A   *Thó: ken nó:n nihotenhninónhserote' ne:*
       'That's where the store was
       thí:ken ratenohkwakéhtats rokstèn:ha <u>wáhi'</u>?
       that belonged to that old peddler, <u>wasn't it</u>?'

   B   *láh nen' nè:'e.*
       'No. That wasn't it.'

   C   *láh.*
       'No.'

   D   *láh.*
       'No.'

Algeo characterizes his *Confirmatory* function as interactive.

> A more frequent use of tag questions is not to seek information but to draw the person addressed into the conversation. . . . These tags ask for confirmation of what the speaker has said. (Algeo, 1990:445)

Mohawk tag constructions are also put to this use. The sequence in (6) involved a play on words based on the roots for 'be a child' (-*ks*-) and 'plate' (-*ks*-). Surrounding speech is provided in English only, to facilitate processing on the part of the reader. The original material was in Mohawk (Fig. 2).
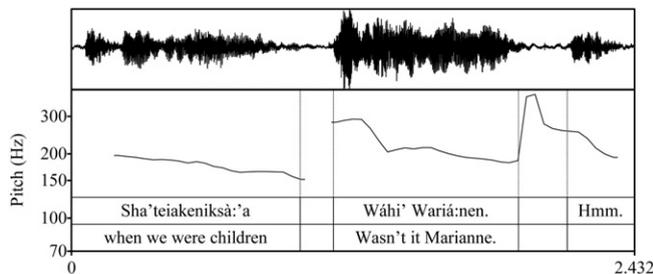

Fig. 2. '[It was] when were children. Wasn't it Marianne.'

(6)   Backup
   A   'It was when we were just little children that we started working on this. Girls.'

   B   'Now you have big plates.'

   A   *Sha'teiakeniiksà:'a.*
       'When we two were <u>kids</u>.

       <u>Wáhe</u>' Wariiá:nen.
       '<u>Wasn't it</u> Marianne.'

   C   *Mm.*

The intonation here was different from that in (4). This is an example of Ladd's *Nuclear tag*, a tag in a separate intonation unit. The assertion constituted a full intonation unit on its own, with complete final fall. The appeal for confirmation began after a pause (visible on both the waveform at the top of the display and the break in the pitch trace), with a full pitch reset, also visible on the pitch trace. The nuclear tag still showed a fall in pitch.
   The two uses of Mohawk tags described so far are primarily epistemic, indicating the degree of certainty of the speaker toward the proposition, though they contain an interpersonal element, an appeal to the audience for confirmation.

4.3. Confirmation

The marker *wáhi'* also appears pervasively in fixed phrases of confirmation: *Né: ki' wáhi'* or just *Ki' wáhi'*.

(7) Confirmation
    A   'The cost of living is really going to be high.'

    B   'Mmhm. And it will be a long time before we eat corn.'

    A   *Né:ki'* <u>*wáhi'.*</u>
        'That's right, isn't it.'

This phrase also ended with a fall, though the fall is not visible on the pitch trace, because the final syllable was very short and voiceless. The fall was not as steep as that in (4) (Fig. 3).
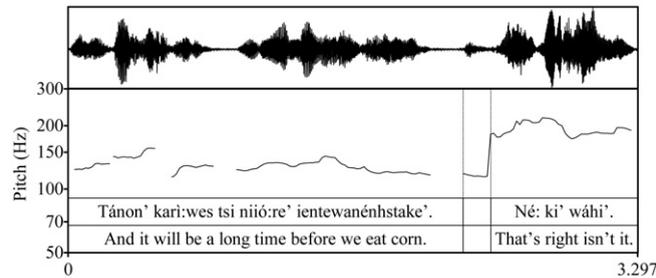

Fig. 3. 'And it will be a long time before we eat corn.'. … 'That's right isn't it.'

These constructions typically constitute complete turns in the conversation, and do not solicit a response.

(8) Confirmation
    A   'That's the reason there's a lot of cancer nowadays. It's the food.
        They mix in all kinds of stuff.'

    B   <u>*Ki' wáhi'.*</u>
        '<u>That's right, isn't it</u>.'

    C   <u>*Ki' wáhi'.*</u>
        '<u>Isn't that so</u>.'

The constructions consist entirely of particles. The discourse anaphor *né:* 'that', is used to refer to ideas in previous discourse. It is also used in copular-type constructions without another overt copula: 'that is'. The particle *ki'* indicates that a sentence is pertinent to the previous discussion: 'in fact, actually'. The ultimate epistemic effect of each construction as a whole is actually the opposite of that typically attributed to basic tags. Instead of indicating reduced certainty on the part of the speaker, they assert confirmation, albeit polite confirmation, more consensus. With this use and those described in the following sections, interactive functions begin to take precedence over purely epistemic ones.

4.4. Facilitative

The first interactive or affective use of English tags recognized by Holmes is what she terms *Facilitative*, 'hedges which serve as positive politeness devices' and which 'invite the addressee to contribute to the discourse' (1995:81). (This function is similar to Algeo's *Confirmatory* category. Tottie and Hoffmann include it in their schema as well.) This use, too, can be observed in Mohawk. In the exchange below, a speaker from Kanehsatà:ke, researching the history of her community, went to visit an elderly lady in Kahnawà:ke to ask about her early memories of the place. This lady knew at the outset that her visitor was interested in information about Kanehsatà:ke. The conversation opened with pleasantries on a number of other topics. After some period of time, the visitor brought up the reason for her visit (Fig. 4).

(9) Facilitative
    A   'What I wanted to ask you was,

        Kanehsatà:ke,
        Kanehsatake

        iehsienté:ri se'   <u>*wahi'.*</u>
        you know   indeed   TAG
        you know it, <u>right</u>?'
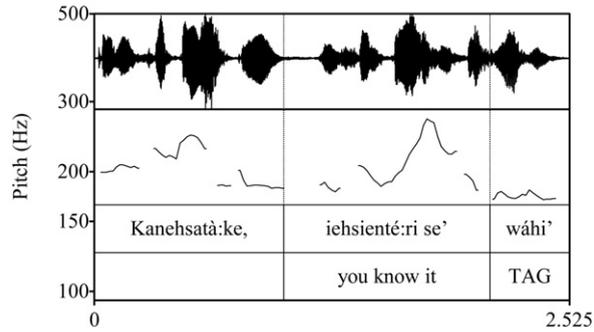
Fig. 4. 'Kanehsatà:ke, you know it, right?'.

B   *Én:.*
     'Yes.

     Kienté:ri—
     I know it--

     It's not a big town, and it's pleasant.'

As can be seen in the waveform and pitch trace, the tag *wáhi'* was fully integrated into the sentence (a postnuclear tag) and it was spoken with low pitch. The construction was successful, because the listener responded and continued with reminiscences.

4.5. Shared knowledge, experience, and values

A slightly different interactive use of tags is pervasive in Mohawk conversation. Here, too, speakers add tags to propositions about which they have little doubt. The tag serves as an appeal for acknowledgment of shared knowledge, experience, or values, as speakers seek to establish a bond with their listeners. These constructions are generally followed by clear assent from the audience. (In example (10), the second response overlapped with the tag (Fig. 5).)

(10)   Shared knowledge, values
        A   'But then it's just as well,'

             sótsi ka'nikonhráksen's ótia'ke ki: nithotiiòn:sa wáhi'.
             because some of the youth these days have bad minds don't they.'

        B   *Mmm.*

        A   'They see something, you know, and they'll just vandalize it.'

             Iáh kwi' tetkaié:ri ne thó: naiá:wen'[ne' wáhi'].
             'It isn't right that this should happen, is it.'

        B   [*Iáh wáhe'*.]
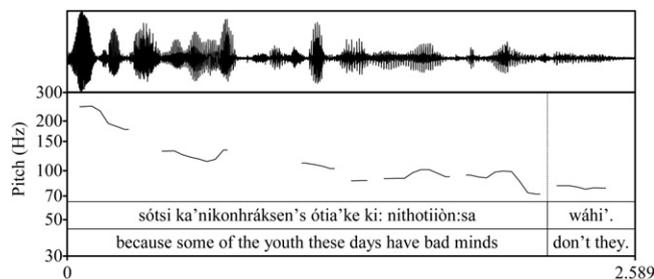   'No, it isn't is it.'

Fig. 5. 'Because some of the youth these days have bad minds, don't they.'

The final tag in this example was fully integrated into the sentence and spoken on a final low tone, with little stress. (The 'down stress' tone melody on the preceding word *nithotiiòn:sa* 'youth' regularly consists of a steep rise followed by a steep fall, to below the baseline pitch.)

The tag does not always occur at the end of the sentence. In example (11) it followed the nuclear clause, the predicate which carried the main information, but was followed in turn by the nominal *ne nahò:ten*' 'the stuff', an antitopic which confirmed the reference of 'it'. (The verb *tionkwehtáhkwen* 'we believe in it' would be perfectly grammatical as a complete sentence on its own.)

(11)   Shared values
        A   ['I feel strongly about the language.']

        B   [Me too.]

        C   *Tionkwehtáhkwen <u>wáhi</u>' ne nahò:ten'.*
             'We really believe in it, <u>don't we</u>, that stuff.'

        D   *Mmm.*

Here too the tag was fully integrated prosodically, with no pauses before or after it. Its barely stressed syllable *wá* was right in line with the continuous falling tone of the sentence. (The preceding word *nahò:ten*' 'what, something, stuff' again carries basic 'down stress', beginning with an extra-high rise, then falling to below the baseline pitch (Fig. 6).)
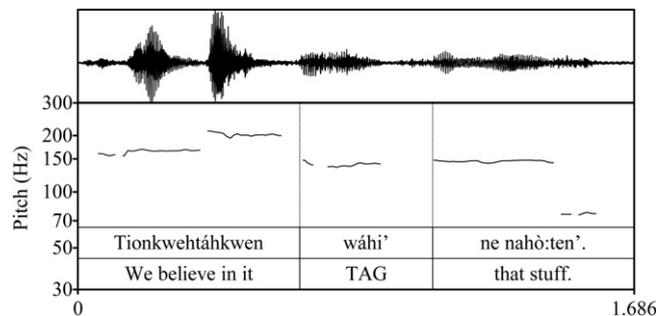

Fig. 6. 'We believe in that stuff don't we.'

4.6. Joint plans

Not surprisingly, the Mohawk tag *wáhi*' appears in proposals for joint action. The speaker makes a statement about a possible course of action, necessarily a tentative proposal, then appeals to the listener for confirmation. This use is in keeping with the characterization of tag constructions as epistemically qualified propositions combined with requests for confirmation. This function is primarily interactive, however. It could be classified as directive (Kimps and Davidse, 2008; Axelsson, 2011), and thus a type of deontic modality, though it is worth noting that the speakers themselves provided the translation 'don't you think?', rather than 'shall we?'.

(12)   Joint plan
        A   'What should we talk about next?'

        B   *Tóka né: ki' kí:ken ionkwaiió'te' <u>wáhi,</u>*
             'Maybe this work we're doing <u>don't you think,</u>

             this translation project.'

A did not provide a response to the tag, but jumped right into the discussion. The tag was fully incorporated into the same intonation unit as the anchor, with no pause or pitch reset. (The break visible in the waveform and pitch trace corresponds to the voiceless consonants '*t*, not at the end of the anchor (Fig. 7).)
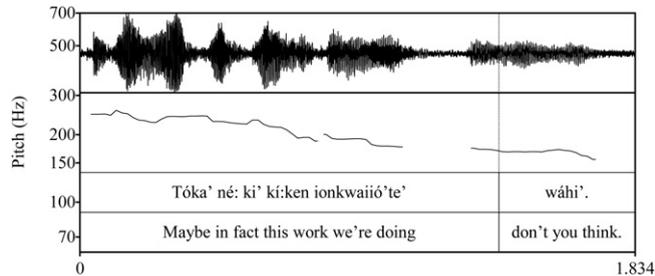
Fig. 7. 'Maybe [we should talk about] this work we're doing don't you think.'

Another example of a tag with a proposal for joint action is below. The speaker was introducing a newcomer to the group, a person by the name of Kaientarónkwen, literally 'it is shaved wood' or 'Wood Shavings'. The group had been discussing the polysynthetic structure of Mohawk verbs, so the speaker jokingly proposed analyzing his name morphologically. The group responded, but with laughter.

(13)   Joint plan
         Tówa' nón:we nè:'e aetewahiatónnion' ka' nón: teiotonhontsóhon Kaientarónkwen wáhi'.
         'Maybe we should write the name Kaientarónkwen where the pieces fit, <u>don't you think</u>?

5. Tags in narrative?

It is frequently observed that English epistemic modals occur much more often in conversation than in narrative. Coates (1987), demonstrating the range of linguistic forms involved in the expression of epistemic modality in English, examines three forms in detail: *I think*, tag questions, and *sort of*. She draws a distinction between their uses in narrative and discussion in conversation.

> Analysis of the overall pattern of conversation shows that there is a constant fluctuation between *narrative*, where one speaker speaks with active support from the others present, given in the form of minimal responses, and *discussion*, where all speakers participate.
> In terms of the epistemic modals, what emerges is a pattern where the narrative sections are relatively modal-free, while the discussion sections are highly modalized. This is precisely what you would predict, given an underlying politeness principle which necessitates constant vigilance over the face needs of others. Where an anecdote introduces a new topic, the speaker is involved in simple narrative, with facts rather than value-judgments. (Coates, 1987:122)

Mohawk conversation is certainly richer in tag constructions than formal oratory. In everyday life, however, the division between narrative and discussion is rarely clear cut. Narratives of varying length, from a few lines to long stories, are typically embedded in conversations with multiple participants. Intriguingly, Mohawk narratives in such situations show substantial use of tag constructions. They serve several important functions.

5.1. Co-construction

Tags occur particularly frequently in discussions of shared experiences, histories, and co-constructed narrative. In these situations, their functions do not necessarily include qualification of the certainty of the speaker about the basic proposition.

One common use of Mohawk tags is to bring pertinent facts into the discussion which are known to the listeners but not within their immediate consciousness. The tag allows the speaker to contribute facts without appearing to tell listeners something they already know. The tag particle in these Mohawk examples tends to be reduced, with little if any stress, and low pitch and volume. The constructions do prompt responses, however (Fig. 8).

(14)   Co-construction reminder
         A   'I don't know if you'd remember this,'

              wahshakonahskwawíhon, <u>wáhi'</u>.
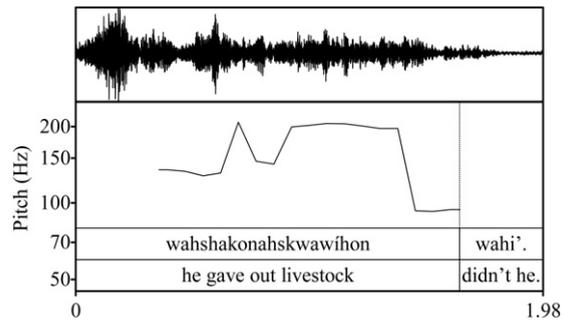   'he gave out livestock, <u>didn't he.</u>'

         B   *Én:.*
              'Yes.'

Fig. 8. 'He gave out livestock didn't he.'

(15)   Co-construction reminder
        A   ['T's house also used to be near there.']

        B   *En:*
             'Yes.'

             Né:'e tehonta'enhrané:ken <u>wahi</u>'.
             'They were neighbors, <u>weren't they</u>.'

        C   *Én:*
             'Yes.'

        A   *Én:*
             'Yes.'

These tag constructions serve a social function, allowing the speaker to avoid claiming authority for knowledge shared by the listener, and to recognize the listener's knowledge overtly. They can also provide a useful social tool for addressing a mixed group of listeners, some with shared knowledge and some without. Charles Goodwin discusses the value of English tags in such situations.

> Though the statements made are transformed (through intonation and the addition of a tag question) into statements appropriate to a knowing recipient, they are still being spoken for their unknowing recipients as well (Goodwin, 1981:154).

> These examples provide support for the possibility that producing a request for verification in fact constitutes a systematic resource available to speakers for making visible the appropriateness of their talk for its current addressee as they move their gaze from one type of recipient to another. Such procedures for including a knowing recipient in talk otherwise addressed to an unknowing recipient do of course provide a resource for dealing with interactive problems that might arise within the turn (Goodwin, 1981:155).

Such use of the Mohawk tag can be seen in the excerpt below from a conversation involving three persons: two women who had been together the previous day and witnessed a funeral procession, and a third who had not been present. As the first two described the events to the third, their account was peppered with tag constructions.

(16)   Co-constructed narrative
        Tánon' kí: Tiohren'shá:ka, thó: kwi' rotiia'ten'tòn:ne', <u>wáhi'.</u>
        'And these White people, they were following along there, <u>weren't they</u>.

        I don't know how long it was before they got back to their house.'

There was no pause after the sentence ending in the tag, and the knowledgeable listener did not attempt to respond. Other examples do show a response.

(17)   Co-constructed narrative
        A   'If our friend hadn't gone out we wouldn't have noticed anything.'

B   'No.'

Tontaietákhe' *ki*' <u>*wáhi*'</u>
'She just came running, <u>didn't she</u>,

taionkhihroià:ne'.
to tell us.'

A   *En:.*
'Yes.'

This use of tags in co-constructed narratives makes perfect sense as a politeness device. It is thus not very different from that identified by Holmes and Tottie and Hoffmann as *Facilitative* and by Algeo as *Confirmatory*: 'The speaker is sure of the truth of what s/he says but wants to involve the listener (Tottie and Hoffmann, 2006:301). But this is not the only use of Mohawk tags in narrative.

5.2. Orientation

Mohawk tag constructions also occur in narratives addressed to listeners who lack prior knowledge of the story, and they are typically attached to propositions the speaker is certain about. The epistemic function is thus backgrounded in favor of an interactive one: the request for acknowledgment of the proposition. This interactive feature leads to another type of function. It allows the speaker to highlight important points in the discussion or narrative, points that are key to understanding it as a whole: 'Are you with me?'. This strategy is frequently exploited for setting a scene or establishing a discourse topic.

(18)   Setting the scene
'He was bad, that guy. Over there there's a school.'

Thó: non: takatáhsawen' *a:kherihónnien*' <u>*wáhi*'</u>
'That's where I started to teach, <u>right</u>?'

'He was always chasing the children. They couldn't play near the fence.
His house was right here. (motioning with her hands)
The school is on this side. And they'd throw their ball in there and he'd keep it.'

(19)   Introducing new topic
A   *Tóka*' *wahón:nise*' *tshisewaientehrhà:*'on <u>*wáhi*'</u> Robert.
'Maybe a long time ago you all used to know Robert, <u>right</u>?'

All   'Oh yeah.'

In prototypical epistemic tag constructions like that in (4) seen earlier, 'You play a lot of golf, don't you', the tag follows the full anchoring proposition. When it is part of orienting material, establishing a setting or topic, the tag often appears inside of the proposition, setting off the topicalized setting or participant at the beginning of the sentence. The tag requests recognition of that element, rather than of the proposition as a whole. In this position, the tag may or may not elicit a response.

(20)   Setting the scene
A   *Shahonterí:io* <u>*wáhi*'</u>
'During the war, <u>you know</u>,

thi:ken towers tkahnió:ton', *tahaten*'*nikòn:raren.*
he guarded those towers over there.'

B   *A:.*
'Ah.'

(21)   Establishing a topic
A   'It's just that when they buried him, what they were talking about was

tsi nón: nihontkari'*tsheronnià:tha*' <u>*wahi*'</u>,
the place they play, <u>you know</u>,'

B   *Mmhm.*

A   'It's not right the way they fixed it, the way the nets are set up all over the city, where they deliver the ball. They were fixing it while I was watching. They're always working on that, to make absolutely sure that it won't topple over. But it fell, didn't it.'

5.3. Highlighting crucial points

In a similar way, Mohawk tags are used to highlight statements of particular importance to the discussion or salient events in narrative. The speakers below were discussing a shift in the community from Mohawk to English.

(22)   Significant point

A   'X has such good language and we're sitting there.
         Suddenly I realized he was talking to me in English.
         I didn't say anything.'

         Kwah nek ni:teionkeníhthare' sok ne: ki:Tiorhèn:sha' wahatewennón:tahkwe' wáhi'.
         'As we were talking he started speaking English <u>you see</u>.'

B   'Yes.'

A   'We really have to– you have to be determined if you want to speak pure Indian.
         You don't even realize you're talking English again, do you. (shared experience)
         My older brother's like that.
         When we meet and talk to each other, he starts speaking English to me.'

         Tánon' raónha rakhtsì:'a í:ken <u>wáhi'</u>.
         'And he's my older brother <u>you know.</u>'

This highlighting function is similar to those termed *Punctuational* by Algeo and *Attitudinal* by Tottie & Hoffmann. Characterizing his *Punctuational* function, Algeo says,

Some tags are used. . . . merely to point up what the speaker has said [and] are the vocal equivalent of an exclamation point or of underlining for emphasis (Algeo, 1990:446).

Tottie and Hoffmann state that their *Attitudinal* function

emphasizes what the speaker says, does not expect involvement or reply. (Tottie and Hoffmann, 2006:300)

5.4. Offline commentary, explanation, and evaluation

When recounting narratives, speakers may move outside of the event line to provide explanations, evaluation, or other information. In Mohawk, these offline commentaries often include tags.

(23)   Explanation
         'I didn't see them myself. I'd already left by then.'

         Né: Ostonhronòn:ke shiionkwé:non <u>wahi'</u>
         'We'd already gone to the States <u>you know</u>.'

(24)   Explanation
A   'He'd bring flowers.'

B   'He used to be respectful, but

         khere' kati' ken tshitewana'kón:nihskwe' <u>wahi'</u>.
         I guess we made him mad <u>you know</u>.'

C   'Oh, yeah.'

The interactive use of Mohawk tags in establishing shared knowledge or experience, discussed in Section 4.5, provides a basis for many of these explanatory uses, explanations couched in terms of shared principles, values, or experience.

(25)   Explanation through shared knowledge

'People would compete over who had the best garden.'

Iáh kwi: tekaio'tenhseraién:tahkwe' ne thó: nón:we shikawá:wi, wáhi'.
'As you know, there were no jobs around in those days, <u>were there</u>.'

The exchange below was part of a story about the speaker's younger brother, who was sent home from church because of improper attire.

(26)   Offline explanation
     A   'I don't remember how he was dressed. He wasn't dressed right.
          He probably wasn't wearing a tie.'

     B   'Oh?'

     A   *Ó:nenk <u>wáhi</u>' enhsatenia'taránia'ke'*
          'At that time, <u>you know</u>, you had to wear a tie.'

This function appears at first to be something like the *Peremptory* use described by Algeo and by Tottie and Hoffmann, in that it involves an appeal to general knowledge.

> A peremptory tag immediately follows a statement of obvious or universal truth, with which it is practically impossible to disagree. . . . the speaker considers the conversation about it at an end. . . . The tag is. . . . often a put-down of the addressee. (Algeo, 1990:447–448)

The effect of this Mohawk construction is nothing like that attributed to its English counterpart, however. Instead of closing off discussion or putting down the listeners, it serves to fill in explanatory background information that allows the audience to better understand the larger discussion or narrative, courteously allowing for the fact that they probably already knew this.

The constructions seen in these past sections, setting a scene, establishing a topic, highlighting crucial points in a discussion or narrative, and providing off-line commentary, show functional extensions beyond not just epistemic modality but also beyond interaction. They serve to structure larger sections of discourse, particularly narrative. These uses of Mohawk *wáhi'* are in many ways like those of English *you see* or *y'know*. Schiffrin provides a rich discussion of the discourse functions of English *y'know*. On the basis of conversational data from English, she makes the following observations.

> [*Y'know*] helps create an exchange structure which focuses the hearer's attention on a particular bit of information provided by the speaker (Schiffrin, 1987:285)
> *Y'know* with narrative evaluations marks information whose importance is its relation to other information in the discourse and to the overall point of the entire story (1987:285).
> *Y'know* also marks the general consensual truths which speakers assume their hearers share through their co-membership in the same culture, society, or group (1987:274). Speakers often use general descriptions to support their more specific claims and to gain their hearers' endorsement of such claims (1987:276).

5.5. Focus clitic

This is not yet the end of the story of the Mohawk tag *wáhi'*. As seen so far, this particle often appears with reduced stress. It also appears further reduced segmentally to *wi'*, immediately after the first element of the sentence.

(27)   Second-position clitic *wi'*.
    Iáh <u>wi</u>' tehatikwénie's akonwaristanhónta', ki: akohsá:tenhs.
    not wahi' were they able they would metal insert this horse
    'They just weren't able to put the bit in the horse's mouth.'

It sometimes appears combined with another particle *se'* 'indeed'.

(28)   Second position *se' wi'*.
    Né: <u>se</u>' <u>wi</u>' ne:' ne aonhá: iawékon.
    that indeed wahi' it is the most it is delicious
    'For that is what is liked the very best.'

Much more often, it appears compounded with the particle *ki'* 'actually, in fact'. The combination is usually pronounced *kwi'*, though speakers still recognize it as *ki'* + *wáhi'*. *Ki'* can be seen on its own in some of the previous examples, such as (4) 'You <u>actually</u> play a lot, don't you', where the preceding discussion had been about the good golf score achieved by the addressee on a recent outing. *Kwi'* systematically follows the first element of the sentence, whatever its lexical category or syntactic role. The sentence below was part of a discussion of the meaning of the verb *satshó:ri*, usually used just for slurping soup.

(29) *Kwi'* after temporal adverb

    A   'There's a lot of things you can *satshó:ri* besides soup.'

    B   'The way I know it it's just soup. That's how I learned it.
          You can only slurp soup.'

    A   *Toka' ó:ia' nahò:ten'*
        'If it's something else,

        ó:nenk <u>*kwi'*</u>   *ne tsi tenhsatskà:hon.*
        then   ki' wáhi' the as you will dine
        then you have to eat it.'

Examples of the range of elements set off by *kwi'* are below.

(30) *Kwi'* after place adverb

    'He went there to Montreal. He and his wife, S's late mother,

    kaná:takon <u>*kwi'*</u>   *ni'terón:tahkwe'.*
    town place ki' wáhi' they used to live there
    they in fact used to live in the village.'

(31) *Kwi'* after negative

    A   'He said it was because the money was slow to come.'

    B   'Well, what did he think, that they'd just give him a bag of money right away?'

        Iah <u>*kwi'*</u>   *thó: thé: tekahwistanákerehkwe' thó: non: shontakahá:wi'.*
        not ki' wáhi' there any was there much money there   as it carried
        There wasn't in fact much money around back then.'

    A   *Hén:*
        'Yes.'

(32) *Kwi'* after emphatic pronoun

    A   'I'm not making fun of you. I never said that. That's not what I'm saying.'

    B   *I:* <u>*kwi'*</u>   *tehsekkà:nere' tsi ne: sá:ton.*
        me ki' wáhi' you're looking at as that you're saying
        'Well <u>I</u>'m the one you're looking at as you're saying that.'

    A   'Well you're the one that's standing close by.'

(33) *Kwi'* after quantifier

    'He'd hitch up the horse and plow, and after they plowed there was a hoe brigade.'

    É:so' <u>*kwî'*</u>   *iátion   wáhi'.*
    many ki' wáhi' we were in it TAG
    'There were actually quite a lot of us, you know.'

(34) *Kwi'* after nominal

    Rakenonhà:'a <u>*kwi'*</u>   *Só:se thó: non: nihati'terón:tahkwe'.*
    he is uncle to me ki' wáhi' Joe   there place they used to reside
    'My uncle Sose and his family used to live there.'

(35) *Kwi*' after predicate
'The horse was kicking up a full fuss. It just wasn't possible to put the bit in its mouth.'

Tanon' kakowá:nen <u>kwi</u>' *ne akohsá:tenhs.*
and   it is big   ki' wáhi' the it carries one on its back
'And as you know, a horse is large.

It's impossible to force it.'

In combination with *ki*', the tag *wáhi*' has evolved into a second-position clitic which functions pervasively to structure discourse. Word order in Mohawk is not based on syntactic relations such as subject or object, but rather on information structure, on the relative newsworthiness of constituents at that point in the discourse. (Grammatical relations are specified with pronominal prefixes on every verb.) The most newsworthy word of the sentence appears first (sometimes after various orienting or linking particles), what in some models of information structure is termed the focus of the sentence. The particle *kwi*' serves to set off this focused element. In this way the clitic continues the highlighting function of its ancestor *wáhi*' seen in Section 5.3, comparable to the *Punctuational* function of Algeo and the *Attitudinal* function of Tottie and Hoffman.

Kwi' also retains a feature of its original constituent *ki*' signaling that the sentence is pertinent to the preceding discussion. It is now highly grammaticalized, appearing in an invariant position and reduced in phonetic substance. It is distinct from its diachronic sources: *kwi*' often appears in the same sentence as *wáhi*', in as in (33) above and (36) below.

(36) *Kwi*' with *wáhi*'
'We were healthy while my father was alive.
We had chickens, a cow. My father was always working.
There was a real difference when we moved to my grandmother's.

Ó:nenk <u>kwi</u>' nek tsi, . . . wa'akwanèn:raieste'   <u>wáhi</u>'.
then   just   we added to the group TAG
Then we just added to the group, <u>you see</u>.'

Furthermore, some uses of *kwi*' have now become established constructions in their own right. The combination *láh kwi*' with *iáh* 'not' seen in (31) and the contrastive *ó:nenk kwi*' with *ó:nenk* 'just then' in (29) are particularly frequent in speech. Negatives are frequently contrastive, so it is no surprise that the *iáh kwi*' construction should have become routinized for this purpose. The *ó:nenk kwi*' construction is similarly used routinely to contrast the current situation with an earlier one.

6. Prosody

Most descriptions of English tag constructions include discussions of pitch. As noted by Quirk et al. (1985) and by Huddleston and Pullum (2002), for example, rising pitch on the tag in reversed polarity constructions expresses doubt or request for verification, with a bias toward an answer that confirms the anchor. Falling pitch on the tag merely seeks acknowledgment that the anchor is true. In constant polarity constructions, tags show only a slight rise, but they do not express doubt; they often, however, carry 'an emotive meaning of disapproval, reproach, belligerence, or the like' (Huddleston and Pullum, 2002:894–895).

Schiffrin correlates intonational differences among English *y'know* constructions with different pragmatic effects. She found that rising *y'know* reflects less certainty about shared knowledge than falling *y'know*. Nearly all consensual truths in her data, for example, were marked with falling *y'know* (Schiffrin, 1987:291–292). Rising *y'know* serves as a turn-transition device, used to elicit hearer confirmation. She also found that when *y'know* preceded information focused on, that information was presented with a rising contour, but when it followed the relevant proposition, that information was presented with either rising or falling intonation.

The Mohawk *wáhi*' constructions do not show the same prosodic patterns. Both the tag and the associated proposition are normally presented with falling pitch. The falling intonation could be related to the fact that Mohawk yes/no questions themselves do not generally show strong rising pitch movement. Some yes/no questions from conversations can be seen in (37) and (38). Interrogation is marked with the particle *kénh*.

(37) Yes/no question
Tiotonhontsóhon kénh ki: ná:keke'.
it is wanted   Q   this the I should eat it
'Should I eat this?'

The lexical stress on the final word *ná:keke*' 'I should eat it' in (36) carries the basic high tone (Fig. 9).

Example (38) shows a yes/no question in which the final word carries 'down stress', an extra-high rise followed by an extra-low fall. The overall contour of this question shows an even steeper fall than the previous question (Fig. 10).

(38)   Yes/no question
    Tá:ien'   *kenh kí:ken ne Terè:s?*
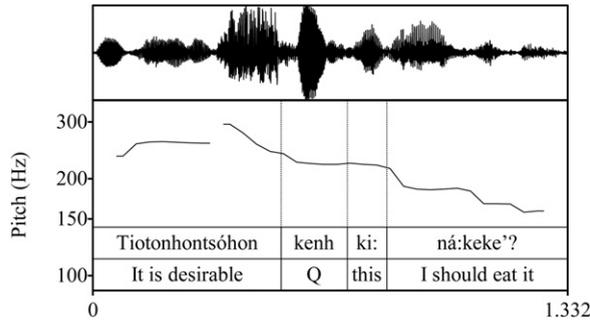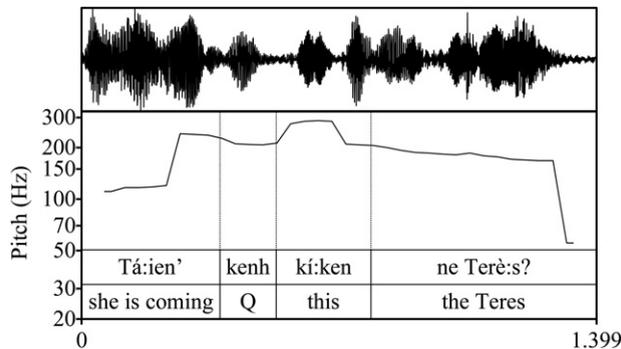   she is coming Q   this   the NAME
    'Is Teres coming?'

Fig. 9. 'Should I eat this?'

Fig. 10. 'Is Teres coming?'

7. Comparisons

Tag constructions in English and Mohawk show many parallelisms in use. In both languages, they serve both epistemic and interactive functions. In some uses, the epistemic function is foregrounded: the tag serves primarily to indicate reduced commitment on the part of the speaker to the truth of the proposition. In others, the interactive function takes priority: the speaker may be quite certain of the truth of the proposition, but wish to heighten the involvement of the listener in the conversation.

There are also interesting differences. English tag constructions are sometimes used with negative interactive consequences not paralleled in Mohawk. Holmes describes a *Challenging* use in New Zealand English.

> Challenging: confrontational strategy [which] may pressure a reluctant addressee to reply or aggressively boost the force of a negative speech act. (Holmes, 1995:152)

This use is likened to Algeo's and Tottie and Hoffmann's *Peremptory* use.

> A peremptory tag immediately follows a statement of obvious or universal truth, with which it is practically impossible to disagree. . . . the speaker considers the conversation about it at an end. . . . The tag is often a put-down of the addressee. (Algeo, 1990:447–448)

Mohawk tags often do follow statements of 'obvious or universal truth', but their function and effect in these contexts are quite different from those described by Holmes and Algeo for English. These Mohawk tags are used to establish a bond

with the listener, a sense of shared values, and to provide explanation in terms of agreed-upon principles. There is no evidence that they serve as a 'put-down of the addressee' nor that they close off discussion. It should be noted that the *Peremptory* use is not rampant in English. Tottie and Hoffmann found that only 1% of the tags in both their British and American corpora served this function (2006:302).

The *Aggressive* or *Antagonistic* use of English tags described by Algeo and by Tottie and Hoffmann, for 'insult or provocation' has similarly not been observed in Mohawk. This difference is not altogether surprising. Tottie and Hoffmann found that even dialects of English differ in this use: *Aggressive* tag questions are used by speakers of British English but not American English, and of the 371 tag constructions in their British corpus, only in 1% (4) were used in this function (2006:302).

On the other hand, Mohawk shows pervasive use of tags in functions not so far included in descriptions of English. These are discourse-structuring functions, particularly in narrative, where tag constructions serve to highlight the establishment of a setting or topic, significant events, and offline background information, explanation, evaluation, and other commentary. To some extent these functions are filled by other constructions in English like *y'know.* The Mohawk tag has been extended still further in its discourse structuring function, with the development of the second-position clitic *kwi'* (from *ki' wáhi'*) an even more grammaticalized discourse marker.

8. Conclusion

English and Mohawk tag constructions share a functional core, a mingling of epistemic and interactive functions. Coates raises the issue of categorical separation of the two explicitly in her work on English modals.

> Holmes has done more than any other linguist I know to demonstrate the different functions that epistemic modals are involved in. However, I am unhappy about her neat categorization of modal forms into 'modal meaning' (roughly, speaker-oriented or proposition-oriented) and 'affective meaning' (addressee-oriented). While it is important to stress that epistemic modal forms do express both speakers' attitude to propositions and their attitude to addressees, I am not sure that it is possible to say exactly what any one modal form 'means' on any particular occasion. ... Speakers exploit the polypragmatic nature of the epistemic modals to say many things at once. (Coates, 1987:130)

It is these overlapping meanings that lie at the root of both the cross-linguistic similarities and differences. The mix allows speakers to extend the use of the constructions in a variety of directions, sometimes privileging one meaning, sometimes privileging another. The Mohawk developments seen here are in keeping with general hypotheses about semantic developments from subjectivity to intersubjectivity: constructions used by speakers to convey their own attitudes and beliefs, their stance toward propositions, are often extended to their attention to the cognitive stances and social identities of addressees (Benveniste, 1971; Traugott and Dasher, 2002; Traugott, 2003).

The extension of the constructions to new contexts is ultimately constrained by a variety of universal and language-specific factors, linguistic and extralinguistic: the grammatical structure of the tag, the presence in the language of competing constructions like English *y'know*, the nature of social relationships among speakers, and culturally-specific styles of interaction and linguistic performance. The differences reflect a deeper characteristic common to speakers of all languages: the propensity to exploit available linguistic resources for creative acts of communication.

Acknowledgements

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