Tag Questions in Manipuri and German

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Abstract

In Meiteilon/ Manipuri, a Tibeto-Burman language, questions are formed by adding question markers like *–la*/*-ra -dra (-də-ra*)/*-tra (-tə-ra)* etc. to the derived noun (deverbal). Questions are formed in German with the change of word order like English. Manipuri has two types of Tag Questions, Reverse Tag- and Constant Tag Question. Reverse tag is used commonly in other languages also. Constant Tag on the other hand are used in very specific cases, for instance Constant tag is used in declarative with tag, positive proposition and positive tag question, however it does not go along with interrogative in Manipuri. While Constant Tag is found with limited lexical items, Reverse Tag on the other hand is clearly visible in TQ in German, an Indo-European language. German language uses lexical items such as *nicht wahr, oder*, *gell* (used in southern part of Germany), *stimmt's*, *richtig*, *ja, ne* etc. to form tag questions. While *nicht wahr* is used in speech as well as written form the other tags are mostly used in speech form and seldom in written form. In studying the tag questions in Manipuri and German it has been observed that the choice of auxiliary does not need to agree with the tense, aspect and modality. As in Manipuri, tag-question are constructed by the verbal phrase only and there is no existence of auxiliary verb. In German although the auxiliary exist in the sentence, tag questions are formed by the addition of lexical tag items (as mentioned above) only, irrespective of the tense.

Key Words: Reverse Tag**,** Constant Tag, Question Tag, Proposition.

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Introduction

A tag question is a syntactic structure in which the uttered proposition seeks confirmation through the addition of Question tag markers. In a tag question a declarative or an imperative statement is normally turned into a question by adding an interrogative-fragment or marker. Tag questions are used mostly when the speaker wants a confirmation of the uttered statement. There are two very commonly used types of tag questions, Reversed and Constant tag. Tags are normally added at the end of a clause, and can be either noun phrase tags, question tags or declarative tags.

Manipuri Tag Question Markers

In Meiteilon/ Manipuri, a Tibeto-Burman language, normally yes/no questions are formed by suffixation of the question markers like *–la*/*-ra -dra (-də-ra)*/*-tra (-tə-ra)* etc. to the derived noun (deverbal) or the noun. Manipuri has two types of Tag Questions, Reversed Tag- and Constant Tag Question. Reversed tag is used commonly in other languages also. Constant Tag on the other hand are used in very specific cases, for instance Constant tag is used in declarative with tag, positive proposition and positive tag question, however the use of negative proposition with negative tag question is not found in Manipuri with an exception of *nattra*.

Question Tag Markers in German

Yes/No questions are formed in German with the change of word order like English. German language uses lexical items such as ***nicht wahr***, ***oder***, ***gell*** (used in southern part of Germany), ***stimmt***, ***nicht***, ***ne, und so,*** etc. to form tag questions. While ***nicht wahr*** and ***oder*** are used in speech as well as in written form, the other tags are mostly used in speech form

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and seldom in written form. While Reversed Tag is clearly visible in German, an Indo-European language, Constant tag is used with some lexical items such as *stimmt* and *ne*.

Constant Tag Questions and Reverse Tag Questions in Manipuri

Like yes/no Questions, Tag Questions in Meiteilon are constructed by the verbal phrase only, but are semantically different from the former.

1. nupi-si   məsək   phəjə-y,   phəjə-bra (bə-ra) [Constant TQ]

   girl-this face   beautiful-asp. beautiful+Q.mk

   "This girl is beautiful, is she?"

The above example would be translated literally as "This girl has a beautiful face/ is beautiful, beautiful right? The first part of the question is a positive proposition, followed by a positive QT, such occurrence seems rather unusual however, a positive QT following a positive proposition to form a Constant TQ is used by some speakers in Manipuri. On the other hand a negative proposition followed by a negative QT (as in example 4) to form Constant Polarity TQ is not commonly used.

2. nupi-si   məsək   phəjə-y,   phəjə-dra (də-bə-ra) [Reversed TQ]

   girl-this face   beautiful-asp. beautiful+neg.Q.mk

   "This girl is beautiful, isn't she?"

3. nupi-si   məsək   phəjə-de,   phəjə-bra (bə-ra) [Reversed TQ]

   girl-this face   beautiful-neg.mk.   beautiful+Q.mk

   "This girl isn't beautiful, is she?"

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In case of Reverse Polarity TQ the occurrence of a Proposition either negative or positive followed by opposite (either positive or negative) QT is widely used, as in example (2) a positive Proposition is followed by a negative QT and in example (3) a positive QT follows a negative Proposition.

4. nupi-si   məsək   phəjə-de,   phəjə-dra (də-bə-ra)   [Constant TQ]

   girl-this face   beautiful-neg.mk.   beautiful+neg.Q.mk

   "This girl isn't beautiful, isn't she?"

The above examples consist of two different polarity tags, (1) and (4) belong to constant polarity tag. The case of (4), where the speaker utters a negative proposition and further seeks confirmation through a negative TQ, i.e. negative- negative is not found in Manipuri. Constant tag, as in example (1), is generally used when the speaker makes a statement and wants the listener's opinion on the same. Example (2) and (3) on the other hand are examples of Reversed polarity Tag. In Reversed Tag the speaker is sure of the proposition and either wants to emphasize on it or wants a confirmation from the listener, the listener however is expected to give only a positive reply. The difference between interrogative sentences and declarative tag question lies in the fact that in case of the former, the speaker does not know if the proposition is true and wants the listener to provide the information, whereas in case of the later the speaker wants a confirmation of the proposition or simply intends to emphasize on the proposition.

Unlike other TQ markers in Manipuri, *nattra* is a TQ word in itself, it is not added as a suffix to the derived noun like most TQ markers. Semantically *nattra* is used to obtain confirmation, syntactically it is used in both negative as well as positive proposition. The lexical item *oder* has the same connotation of confirmation as *nattra* in Manipuri.

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5. nupi-si   məsək   phəjə-y,   nattra (nat-ta-ra) [Reversed TQ]

   girl-this   face   beautiful-asp.   neg.Q.mk

   "This girl is beautiful, isn't she?"

6. nupi-si   məsək   phəjə-de,   nattra (nat-ta-ra) [Constant TQ]

   girl-this   face   beautiful-asp.   neg.Q.mk

   "This girl isn't beautiful, isn't she?" (functions as **is she**)

7. du: kɛnst   i:n   o:dɐ   [Reversed]

   2p   V-agr   3p-agr   neg.Q.mk.

   "du kennst ihn oder?"

   You know him right?[SFP]

8. e:r   ɪst   de:ɐ   bəry:mtə   ʃaʊʃpi:lɐ   o:dɐ   [Reversed]

   3p   is   det.agr   famous-agr   actor   neg Q.mk. (neg.QT)

   "Er ist der berühmte Schauspieler, oder?"

   He is the famous actor isn't he?

The answer to ***nattra*** and ***oder*** (***oder was, oder wie***) questions can be both contradictory/ confirmatory and it may include additional elaborations and explanations as well.

9. e:r   ɪst   de:ɐ   bəry:mtə   ʃaʊʃpi:lɐ   nɪçt   va: [Reversed]

   3p   is   det.agr   famous-agr   actor   neg. true (neg.QT)

   "Er ist der berühmte Schauspieler, nicht wahr?"

   He is the famous actor isn't he?

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QT *oder* and *nicht wahr* as in example (8) and (9) are both reversed polarity tags in German Language, while the former is generally used when the speaker is quite unsure of the proposition made and wants a confirmation, the later is used to obtain a confirmation and also emphasize on the proposition made.

Ne, a colloquial term which is quite common in Berlin, it is another tag in German that indicates that the speaker is rather certain about the proposition and expects a confirmatory answer, *ne* can also be replacement for *nicht wahr* and *stimmt's.*⸗

10. e:r ɪst de:ɐ   bəry:mtə ʃaʊʃpi:lɐ   ne   [Reversed]

    3p is det.agr famous-agr actor   <u>neg.</u> (neg.QT)

    "Er ist der berühmte Schauspieler, ne?"

    He is the famous actor isn't he/right?

Conclusion

In studying the tag questions in Manipuri and German it has been observed that the choice of auxiliary does not need to agree with the tense, aspect and modality. As in Manipuri, TQ are constructed by the verbal phrase only and there is no existence of auxiliary verb. In German although the auxiliary exist in the sentence, tag questions are formed by the addition of lexical tag items (as mentioned above) only, irrespective of the tense. In Manipuri the main constituent of the verbal phrase is marked by a comma thus indicating the proposition and the TQ marker is added as suffix on the derived noun, as a normal yes/no question construction, each of the major constituents belongs to the category "sentence" (Singh, 1996). The most commonly identified function of the reversed polarity tag is to obtain confirmation (Jesperson 1940) where the listener is expected to agree with proposition

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made by the speaker. In Reversed Tag the speaker is sure of the proposition and either wants to emphasize on it or wants a confirmation from the listener, the listener however is expected to give only a positive reply. Constant tag on the other hand are used to seek affirmation or express uncertainty. The difference between interrogative sentences and declarative tag question lies in the fact that in case of the former, the speaker does not know if the proposition is true and wants the listener to provide the information, whereas in case of the later the speaker wants a confirmation of the proposition or simply intends to emphasize on the proposition.

Nattra in Manipuri and *stimmt's* & *oder* in German, are quite alike in functions they can be used both for constant as well as reverse tag.

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Abbreviation

TQ= Tag Question

QT= Question Tag

neg.= negative

-asp=aspect

Q.mk= Question Marker

neg.mk= Negative Marker

1p=1st Person

2p= 2nd Person

3p= 3rd Person

V-agr = Verb + Agreement

agr = Agreement

neg. Qmk.= Negative Question Marker

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det.agr = determiner+ Agreement

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