

TAG QUESTIONS IN A HISTORICAL NOVEL DIALOGUE TEXT

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Abstract: The article deals with tag-questions from the dialogue texts of “Ivanhoe” and “The Talisman” written by Walter Scott, a famous novelist. The diversity of the constructions with question tags, so-called canonical and non-canonical, is under analysis; the lexical and grammatical peculiarities of the constructions are shown. In the article there is a comparison of the tag-questions from “Ivanhoe” and “The Talisman” with similar structures from the drama dialogic texts of Renaissance period (circa 1485-1650) and from the texts written by W. Scott coevals during the period 1770s – 1830s. The author’s stylistic devices of using contemporary syntax and archaic ways of word change are discussed.

Key words: tag-questions, historical syntax, spoken interaction, authorial styles, language change.

Introduction. Researchers of canonical constructions containing attached question tags (tag-questions) point out that these structures, such a familiar phenomenon in modern speech, are not found in either Old English or Middle English [Tottie, Hoffmann, 2009; Visser, 2002; Ukaji, 1988]. When could canonical tag-questions have been formed? A search in late thirteenth-century texts written in the sermon genre, which might have contained rhetorical questions similar to those attached, yielded no results. The earliest known canonical structure was found in the text of the play “Fulgens and Lucrece”, written by Henry Medwall in 1497, when a corpus of texts from the Chadwyck-Healey Collection of English Drama was being examined by means of semi-automated retrieval [Tottie, Hoffmann, 2009, p. 135, 155]. M. Ukaji suggests that the sentences containing

attached question tags could not have been formed before “*do*-periphrasis” being formed, i.e. before the use of combinations with the verb *do* as a substitute word for other verbs in interrogative sentences appeared. [Ukaji, 1988, p. 1-9]. The formation of *do*-periphrasis must have happened at the beginning of the 16 century [Ellegård, 1953, p. 161-163; Nevalainen, 2006, p. 200]. In the research of O. Fisher et al. a sharp increase of using the verb *do* as an operator (auxiliary and substitute verb) in interrogative and negative sentences in the texts of Early Modern English is noted. In Middle English texts the verb *do*, fulfilling auxiliary and substituting functions, is very rare, e.g. it can be seen in Chaucer’s interrogative sentence *Fader, wy do ye wepe?* [Fisher et al, 2001, p. 84]. G. Tottie and S. Hoffmann posit that the adoption of *do*-periphrasis may have accelerated the general spread of canonical constructions with an attached question, but was not a prerequisite for their emergence, especially since in the attached part of the above mentioned example from “Fulgens and Lucrece”, the auxiliary verb *have* was used, but not the verb substitute *do* [Tottie, Hoffmann, 2009, p. 155-156].

The fact that the construction with an attached question tag is used in the text of the late 1490s and has not been found in earlier texts, of course, does not mean at all that such constructions were not used in people’s everyday speech earlier than the late 15th century. It has been established that all modern functions of such constructions – *confirmatory (informational)*, *attitudinal*, *challenging*, *facilitative*, *hortatory* – were available to speakers of the 16th century, i.e. it is quite obvious that they were not absolutely new for them [ibid, 145-147].

Without supporting factual material, we cannot say for sure whether canonical constructions with an attached question tags were used earlier than the second half of the fifteenth century. As for non-canonical constructions, we do not know any data on the study of their time of origin.

In this paper we will look at fragments of direct speech containing tag-questions, which are used in two works written by the famous novelist W. Scott, the inventor and the greatest practitioner of the historical novel. These two novels

are “Ivanhoe” (1819), a novel set in 12th-century England, and “The Talisman” (1825), the latter being set in Palestine during the Crusades [Online Encyclopedia Britannica]. In both novels W. Scott describes events that take place during the time of King Richard I ruling and we can expect the author’s approach to the creation of elements of colloquial speech to be the same in both works.

It is clear that W. Scott, when creating the dialogues of the characters, did not set himself the task to restore and reflect the real colloquial speech of the late twelfth century. It is likely that his main desire was to tell the events of Richard the Lionheart’s reign to a wider audience. Thus, the writer had a difficult task – on the one hand, to give his contemporaries a description of long-gone events, to show characters who had lived more than seven centuries before, on the other hand – to make the narrative interesting, exciting, dynamic, attractive and not just understandable, but easy to read.

Considering the constructions with the attached question tags, which W. Scott uses in the dialogues of the characters in “Ivanhoe” and “The Talisman”, we will try to answer the following questions: what kinds of constructions the author chooses, how he makes the structures understandable for the reader, whether and how he uses the attached question in order to create the flavour of the described era. It seems quite logical to assume that the author mainly draws those constructions which he himself uses and hears from his contemporaries. It is interesting to see how the author implements the selection of tag-questions components, creating pictures of the distant past.

Methodology

The linguistic material (examples of colloquial speech including constructions with different types of attached question tags) is taken from the dialogic texts of the novels “Ivanhoe” and “The Talisman”. And besides, there are some examples from the texts of fiction, written by the authors of Renaissance period (circa 1485-1650) and from the texts written by W. Scott contemporaries during the period 1770s – 1830s. The methods of conducting a continuous sample of the studied material,

linguistic research of linguistic facts, linguistic description, comparative analysis are applied.

Result and Analysis. Earlier we showed the variety of constructions with an attached question tags in Renaissance works [Merkuryeva 2020a; 2020b; 2021] in which canonical tag-questions were first recorded, as it was mentioned above. The examples we found were distributed into three groups based on the lexical and grammatical correspondence of the components of the attached question tags and the main members of the anchor (reference, prop) sentence. Let us consider them in conjunction with the varieties of constructions with an attached question selected from texts written by Scott's contemporaries during the period 1770-1830.

The first group is formed by the so-called canonical constructions in which the attached part is built on the basis of strict adherence to the lexical and grammatical forms of the subject and the predicate of the anchor part. Renaissance texts, as well as those of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, contain the following types:

– constructions with attached questions in which the pronouns and modal verbs are repeated from the reference sentence, for example *You will make yourself a party in the treason, will you?* (1639, Shirley J., "The Gentleman of Venice") and *It won't leave us, cousin Tony, will it?* (1771, Goldsmith O., "The Stoops to Conquer");

– constructions in which the pronouns and auxiliary verbs of the tags are repeated from the reference sentence, as in the instances *I had byn finely handled, had I not?* (1609, Middleton Th., "The Witch") and *You had best abuse them too, had you not?* (1784, Cumberland R., "The Natural Son");

– constructions where the pronouns and link-verbs from the anchor sentences are repeated in the attached structures, as in the examples *I am no kin to you, am I?* (1611, Beaumont Fr., Fletcher J., "A King, and no King") and *And you are generally of your lady's way of thinking, are you not?* (1784, Cumberland R., "The Natural Son").

A separate subtype in this group is the constructions with the substitute verb *do*. In the example *You know me? **doe you not?*** (1602, Shakespeare W., “Troilus and Cressida”) the verb *know* in the prop part is not repeated in the attached part and is represented by the verb *doe*. In the example *She said she’d keep it safe, **did she?*** (1771, Goldsmith O., “The Stoops to Conquer”) the verb *said* of the reference sentence in the attached question is represented by the verb *did*.

As we have seen in the examples above, the attached question of the first group is characteristically placed in the sentence ending, in the postposition of the reference sentence. In Renaissance texts we did not record the placement of the canonical question tags inside the anchor sentence, whereas Scott’s contemporaries can place tags in the prop sentence: *Don’t you mind ‘un, zur, **don’t ye – he be’s intoxicated.*** (1797, Morton Th., “Cure for the Heart Ache”).

The second group is made up of constructions in which the attached question has some differences from the “strict” canonical tag-structure of the first group. The differences may concern the choice of the verb or its form, or the choice of the pronoun.

For instance, in the construction with modal verbs *I will say the crowe is white. **wylt thou so?*** (1562, Heywood J., “Three hundred epigrams”) the attached part contains a request for the listener’s opinion, the anchor part expresses the speaker’s own intention, which causes differences in the pronouns and verb forms used in these parts. In the construction *Why, it is a chair, **an’t it?*** (1797, Morton Th., “Cure for the Heart Ache”) we can see the tag *an’t it?* whereas an “expected” tag may look like *is it?* or *isn’t it?*. In the construction *I’ll contrive that you shall speak to her alone. **Will you?*** (1798, Thompson B., “The Stranger”) the part *will you?* is joined instead of an “expected” canonical *shall you?*

There can be some other differences between this group of constructions and the canonical one. For example, in the sentence *...thou hast been at Parris garden **hast not?*** (1602, Dekker Th., “The Vntrussing of the Humorous Poet”) we can see the attached part formed by the verb *hast* and the particle *not*, the pronoun is

absent. Such constructions are used by Renaissance authors and are virtually uncommon later [Merkuryeva, 2020a].

The second group also includes sentences with an attached *or*-structure. In 16-17 centuries texts the short form *or no* is mainly found among the joined structures, as in the example *How say you, is this my original or no?* (1553, Udall N., “Ralph Roister Doister”). The building of tags with predicative combinations is rare and used by individual authors. The attached parts are only placed at the end of the construction. In the time of W. Scott and his contemporaries, both predicative and non-predicative attended structures are in speech use, non-predicative tags are placed at the end of the construction *Will you take her, or no?* (1780, Lee S., “The Chapter of Accidents”). And besides, predicative tag structures can be placed not only at the end of the construction, but also directly next to the combination for which an alternative is requested. For instance, in the extract *Has he, or has he not, any inheritance yet to come?* (1791, Inchbald E., “Next Door Neighbours”) the question tag *or has he not* is found in the postposition to the word combination *has he*.

The third group includes non-canonical structures – with attached tag interjections, tag question words, predicative and non-predicative tag question-phrases.

Constructions with attached interjections are used both by Shakespeare and his contemporaries, and by writers during 1770s – 1830s. A variety of these joined parts are made up mainly by the interjections *ha, ho, ah* and *hey, eh*, respectively. We can see such tags in the sentences *All thy tediousnesse on me, ah?* (1598, Shakespeare W., “Much Adoe about Nothing”) and *What? you kill'd him? hey?* (1797, Coleridge S.T., “Osorio”).

The tag question word in both periods is most often represented by the adverb *then*, and also by the words *indeed, sure, perhaps*: *You will not, sure?* (1641, Shirley J., “The Cardinal”), *You know him, then?* (1803, Colman G., “John Bull”).

The tag question-phrase is also used by Renaissance authors and by contemporary writers of W. Scott. Such a question is constructed with two obligatory components – a second person pronoun (*you* или *thou*) and verbs, among which *think*, *hear*, *see*, *mean* can be found. The word order in these kinds of attached structures can be direct or inverted. Renaissance authors use constructions with such attached structures, as can be seen in the sentences *Dost this felow come to me, **thinkest thou?*** (1575, Gascoigne G., “The Glasse of Gouvernement”) and *Yea, sir; by this shoe, **you say?*** (1599, Dekker Th., “The Shoemaker’s Holiday”). W. Scott’s contemporaries also use similar constructions: *How much, **think you?*** (1797, Morton Th., “Cure for the Heart Ache”), *Mr. Blushenly, **you mean?*** (1784, Cumberland R., “The Natural Son”).

An attached question is sometimes represented by a phrase without a verb. Such a tag *in dede*, having the meaning *in fact*, *in truth*, *in reality* [Online Etymology Dictionary], can be found in the texts from the early 14 century. The construction *And are ye gone **in dede?*** (1538, Bale J., “Thre Lawes”) can serve as an illustrating example of using the tag.

Now let us consider the variety of attached question tags used by Scott in the dialogue lines of the characters in “Ivanhoe” and “The Talisman”.

To the first (canonical) group we attribute the following constructions. Tags in the sentences of the extracts *‘The assailants have won the barriers, **have they not?**’ said Ivanhoe.* (“Ivanhoe”) and *‘Peace!’ said the Grand Master. ‘This thy daughter hath practiced the art of healing, **hath she not?**’* (“Ivanhoe”) are constructed with an auxiliary verb repeated from the anchor part and a pronoun corresponding to the noun-subject of the prop sentence. In the second example, the possible neutral version of the attached question *has she not?* is replaced with *hath she not?*, the word *hath* – the 3rd person singular present tense of the verb *haven*, which was used in the Middle English and Early English periods [Nevalainen, 2006, p. 185-186] – is drawn.

In the sentence *But they were Saxons who robbed the chapel at St Bees of cup, candlestick, and chalice, were they not?* (“Ivanhoe”), when the question tag is being built, the link-verb *were* and pronoun *they* are repeated from the reference. In the construction *Let this Nubian, as thou callest him, first do his errand to our cousin – besides, he is mute too, is he not?* (“The Talisman”) the prop sentence for the attached question is the clause *he is mute too*. In the question tag the link-verb *is* and the pronoun *he* of the anchor are repeated.

In the retort *Meanwhile we part friends, do we not?* (“Ivanhoe”) the sentence with the tag *do we not?* is used. The principal verb *part* of the prop clause is replaced by the substitute *do* in the tag.

It can be seen that in all the attended questions W. Scott uses a single word order “verb + pronoun + not”. This is the word order most characteristic of the canonical attached question tags of the Early English period [Tottie, Hoffmann, 2009; Ukaji, 1988].

Among the constructions of the second group we note the sentence with an attached predicative *or*-structure *Did you, or did you not, know any lady amongst that band of worshippers?* (“The Talisman”), that is placed inside the anchor sentence in the postposition of the phrase *did you*.

Of the third group of attached questions, W. Scott uses a variety of types of attached parts – attached tag interjections, tag question words, attached question-phrases, both predicative and non-predicative.

The adverb *then* and the interjection *ha* are used to form tags for anchor sentences of different communicative types. In some cases, these types are easy to determine, as in *Do not Saxon priests visit this castle, then?* (“Ivanhoe”) and *what dost thou think of this, friend Gurth, ha?* (“Ivanhoe”), *And what is his name, then?* (“Ivanhoe”), when the prop sentences are interrogative clauses. As for the constructions *You leave England, then?* (“Ivanhoe”), *You will not harm me, then?* (“Ivanhoe”) and *So this Scottish man, this envoy, met with a wandering physician at the grotto of Engaddi – ha?* (“The Talisman”), here it is difficult to talk about

the type of anchor sentence and it is not possible to opt for an narrative or interrogative sentence without an inversion (so-called declarative question (the term from [Quirk et al, 1972, p. 392])).

For designing constructions with attached phrases the author draws the verbs *say*, *think*, *see*, for instance, *Willingly, saidst thou?* (“Ivanhoe”), *Hath he sense enough, thinkst thou?* (“Ivanhoe”), *Richard arise from his bed, sayest thou?* (“The Talisman”), *Thou hast nothing, thou seest, to fear from my interference.* (“Ivanhoe”). It can be seen that all the verbs of the attached clauses are used in the forms constructed by the suffix *st*, characteristic of 2nd person singular verbs in Middle English. W. Scott draws the forms because all the verbs are combined with the pronoun *thou*. It is known that, like the other Germanic languages, English “used to have two second-person pronouns, *thou* in the singular and *you* in the plural. The use of the plural *you* started to spread as the polite form in addressing one person” only in Middle English [Nevalainen, 2006, p. 194], apparently this is why W. Scott chooses the pronoun *thou* to create attached question tags and it seems to be very appropriate.

To the third group we also attribute the following construction with the tag built on the base of the combination *is it*, as in the extract ‘*Whose deeds*’, *said Richard, ‘have so often filled Fame’s trumpet! Is it so?* (“The Talisman”). The attached clause contains the adverb *so*, referring the utterance to a previous statement. The non-pronoun structure *after all* is joined to a question sentence to form the construction *but what is the great offence, after all?* (“The Talisman”) and represents the third group as well.

Combining attached questions and pragmatic markers in the same sentence, Renaissance authors spread the phatic structures to the beginning and the end of the sentence, or group them at the end [Merkuryeva, 2021]. W.Scott uses the same way of placement as well. The combination of the tag *ha* and the address *Neville* can be seen at the end of the construction *What thinkest thou of a request so modest – ha, Neville?* (“The Talisman”). The conjunctions *and* and *so* and the tag

ha are spread to the beginning and to the end of the constructions *And I warrant me thou wouldst have another in requital, ha?* (“The Talisman”) and *So this Scottish man, this envoy, met with a wandering physician at the grotto of Engaddi – ha?* (“The Talisman”).

According to our observations, Renaissance authors do not use dash to form a construction with an attached question tag [Merkuryeva, 2020b]; to separate the attached question part this punctuation mark does not appear until the early 1700s. W. Scott, naturally, uses the punctuation mark he considers appropriate, as in 19th century texts various punctuation marks are placed between the attached and the reference parts of the sentence, including dashes: *But the wager of battle is complete, even according to the fantastic fashions of Norman chivalry – Is it not, Father Aymer?* (“Ivanhoe”). Most likely, the purpose of the punctuation mark is to show the length of the pause that separates the reference sentence and the tag. This is evidenced by the fact that the attached interjection is preceded by a dash in one case and a comma in the other: *What sayest thou – ha?* (“Talisman”), *What sayest thou, ha?* (“The Talisman”).

The most characteristic location for the Renaissance attached question tags, as we have noted above, is in the finale of the construction. We did not see the inclusion of an attached structure in an anchor structure in works written earlier than the first half of the 18 century. W. Scott places the attached question both in the postposition of the prop sentence and also inside it, which is particularly evident in the following passage, with two consecutive constructions with canonical and non-canonical attached questions *wilt thou not?* and *thou seest?:* *But now thou knowest my drift, thou wilt resume thine own original plan, wilt thou not? – Thou hast nothing, thou seest, to fear from my interference.* (“Ivanhoe”). *Hearest me not?*, a non-canonical question tag, is found in the middle of the complex structure *Here, Urfried – hag – fiend of a Saxon witch – hearest me not? – tend me this bedridden fellow.* (“Ivanhoe”).

The next extract illustrates the using of three tags, two of them are canonical *is he not* and the third one is non-canonical *ha*, in one complex structure: ‘*And what like is the Nubian slave who comes ambassador on such an errand from the Soldan? – a negro, De Neville, is he not?*’ said a female voice, easily recognized for that of Berengaria. ‘*A negro, is he not, De Neville, with black skin, a head curled like a ram’s, a flat nose, and blubber lips – ha, worthy Sir Henry?*’ (“The Talisman”). The purpose of the use of tags here is to reinforce emotionally the combination *a negro*, as well as a certain irony, which is provided by the attached *ha* in combination with the address *worthy Sir Henry*.

Conclusion. In creating the dialogues of the characters, Walter Scott draws tags of the canonical and non-canonical varieties. The way in which the novelist chooses to use constructions with an attached question is specific and, as the past two hundred years of the enduring popularity of “Ivanhoe” and “The Talisman” have shown, very successful. The writer uses easily recognisable structures of contemporary colloquial speech, introducing certain specific elements in the lexical and grammatical means of creating these structures. For example, the verbs *will, say, do, see, hear* being combined with the pronoun *thou* are used in the forms *wilt, saidst, sayest, dost, seest, hearest*, that are typical for the Middle English verb. Such elements are as if characteristic of some “old” era, and at the same time understandable. They immediately catch the eye because they are repeated several times. The “old” era is chosen by W. Scott's deliberately. These are the well-known times of the Renaissance. They are known largely because of the plays of William Shakespeare and his contemporaries – Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, Ben Jonson, Thomas Dekker and others, whose works are familiar to audiences nowadays and were undoubtedly popular in the 19th century.

In order to give the speech a naturalness, W. Scott introduces constructions with attached question tags into the remarks of the characters, without taking into account the fact that such constructions were probably formed much later than the historical period he describes. However, since the tag question is widespread and

familiar to the writer and his audience, the speech of the characters cannot be created without such a question. The juxtaposition of the author's contemporary syntax and the archaic way of word formation in the building of the constructions, on the one hand, creates the effect of "comprehensibility" for any untrained reader, while on the other hand, it "ages" the characters' speech and contributes to the feeling that the phrases belong to people of a bygone time.

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