

[Grammar] Mood Tags

An overview

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Figure 1: A gazebo is a pavilion structure commonly found in parks, gardens, and spacious public areas. Gazebos are freestanding, roofed, and open on all sides; they provide shade, basic shelter, ornamental features in a landscape, and a place to rest. — Wikipedia

Overview

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Structure and Function

Structure

Structure

Sir Christopher Wren		was	building		a gazebo.	
Mood		Residue				
Subject	Finite	Predicator	Complement			

Sir Christopher Wren		was	building		a gazebo,		wasn't	he?
Mood		Residue			Mood Tag			
Subject	Finite	Predicator	Complement	Tag Finite/ Polarity	Tag Subject			



Function

Function

- A way of slightly modifying the speech function of an utterance (e.g. making a statement less absolute, more negotiable.... cf modality !)
- A way of inviting your addressee to respond to what you are saying
- A way of letting your addressee know what response you expect (!)
 - “You didn’t INTEND to kill him, did you?”
 - —“NO!”

Comparison with French and German mood tags

Comparison with French and German mood tags

- French:
 - ... , n’est-ce pas?

- German:[1ex]
 - ... , nicht wahr? / ... , oder? / ... , gell?
- English:
 - ... , didn't you?
 - ... , have they?
 - ... , shall we?
 - ... , won't he? (etc. etc. etc.)

Variables and problems

Variables and problems: Summary

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- speech function (vs. grammatical mood)
 - Statement, Command, Suggestion, Offer
- Polarity of Tag
 - same?
 - different?
- Intonation of Tag
 - rising?
 - falling?
- N.B.: There can be problems with
 - the underlying speech function
 - the **Subject**
 - the **Finite**
 - the **Polarity**

Variables

Variables (1): speech function

- Statement (+ Request for confirmation)
 - Sir Christopher Wren built a gazebo. + **didn't** **he**?
- Command (+ Request for compliance)

- Build a gazebo! + **will** you? / **won't** you? / ...
- Offer (+ Request for acceptance)
 - I'll build you a gazebo! + **shall** I?
- Suggestion (+ Request for participation)
 - Let's build a gazebo! + **shall** we?

Variables (2): polarity

- Speech functions other than Statement are special cases: we'll deal with them separately!
- For Statements:
 - Polarity of statement can be positive or negative
 - Polarity of tag can be the same or different
 - * He built a gazebo, **didn't** he?
 - * He built a gazebo, **did** he?

Variables (3): intonation

- For Statements:
 - Intonation of statement is normally 'falling'[1em]
 - Intonation of tag is either 'rising' or 'falling'[.5em]
 - * Statement, Tag – Expected answer (How certain?)[1em]
 - * He **built** a gazebo, **didn't** he? – **Yès**. (90 % certain.)(1em]
 - * He **built** a gazebo, **didn't** he. – **Yès**. (99 % certain.)(1em]
 - * He **didn't build** a gazebo, **díd** he? – **Nò**. (90 % certain.)(1em]
 - * He **didn't build** a gazebo, **dìd** he. – **Nò**. (99 % certain.)

Problems

Problems (1): Underlying speech function

- There is *no one-to-one correspondence* between
 - grammatical mood categories, and
 - semantic/pragmatic speech function categories
- Example:
 - “Shall I build you a gazebo?”
 - * is grammatically ‘interrogative’, but
 - * is really an Offer (Response: “Oh yes please!”), not a Question (*Response: *“Yes you shall.”)
- Always identify the underlying speech function!!

Problems (2): Subject

- Which pronoun to choose for the Tagsubject? [.2em]
 - the English system of gender is problematic!
 - * The cat always sat on the mat, didn't **she**?
 - * The ant crawled up your pants, didn't **it**? [.5em]
 - the English system of number can be a problem, too!
 - * No one rang while I was out, did **they**?
 - what about "there"?
 - * There's some milk in the fridge, isn't **there**?
- What is the *real* Subject of your Statement?
 - Beware of "grammatical metaphor"!
 - * I think it's going to rain, isn't **it**? (NOT: don't **I**?)
 - * John thinks it's going to rain, doesn't **he**? (NOT: isn't **it**?)

Problems (3): Finite

- Sometimes the Finite is already in the Statement:
 - Christopher **was** building a gazebo, **wasn't** he?
- With [simple present] and [simple past], it isn't:
 - Christopher builds gazebos, **doesn't** he?
 - Christopher built a gazebo, **didn't** he?
- You need to know the PROCESS TYPE:
 - He always **has** sandwiches for lunch, **doesn't** he?
 - He always **eats** sandwiches for lunch, **doesn't** he?
 - i.e., it's [material] not [relational] !

Problems (4): Polarity

- Statement looks [positive] but is really [negative]:
 - **Adverb** looks [positive] but is really [negative]:
 - * He **hardly** ever eats sandwiches for lunch, does he.
 - * = He **almost** never eats ... , does he.
 - * = He **almost** always doesn't eat ... , does he.
 - Negative polarity is often transferred from the proposition to the modality:
 - * I **don't** **believe** that pudding ever will be cooked, will it?
 - * '**Probably** not' + 'that pudding will ever be cooked, will it?
 - * '**Probably**' + 'that pudding will not ever be cooked, will it?
- i.e. TagPolarity is 'reversed': Statement = negative, Tag = positive

Typical exam questions

Typical exam questions (1)

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- Here the MoodTag has rising intonation:
 - The manager's left the factory already, **hasn't he?**
 - I think there's some milk left, **isn't there?**
 - He ought to have excused himself before he left the table, **oughtn't he?**
 - He can't possibly have known we were planning to skip class, **can he?**
 - Nobody had any problems with the grammar exam, **did they?**

Typical exam questions (2)

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- Here the MoodTag has rising intonation:
 - Surely the United States won't agree to the French proposal, **will it?**
 - He never used to skip classes at school, **did he?**
 - I don't suppose you could lend me your car, **could you?**
 - Let's have a party this weekend, **shall we?**
 - I'll be guided by your wishes then, **shall I?**

Typical exam questions (3)

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- Here the MoodTag has falling intonation:
 - He hardly ever has sandwiches for lunch, **does he.**
 - Please remember to put out the garbage before you go to bed, **won't you.**
 - The President will know mother has two bravery medals already, **won't he.**
 - Please don't forget to feed the cat before you leave the house, **will you.**
 - She's got a brother in America if I remember rightly, **hasn't she.**

Typical exam questions (4)

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- Here the MoodTag has falling intonation:
 - I wouldn't say he's the worst teacher we've ever hād, though, **is** **he**.
 - I'll bet she hasn't got the new Taylor Swift CD, **hàs** **she**.
 - But Boris Johnson would never have agreed to quit voluntàrily, **wòuld** **he**.
 - Occasionally one can simply be unlùcky, **càn't** **one**.
 - There's never been an èarthquake in Saarbrücken, **hàs** **there**.

Summary and Feedback

Summary

Summary

- Identify the underlying speech function
 - If it's a Statement, we'll assume that the TagPolarity is reversed; but what about the intonation?
- Identify the real Subject and choose the right TagSubject pronoun (gender? number? "there"?)
- Choose the right TagFinite (process type? tense?)
- Identify the real Polarity (be careful with those special adverbs and with those 'metaphorical' expressions of modality!)

Feedback

Feedback

- Did you find this treatment of Mood Tags useful?
 - was it too simple?
 - was it too abstract?
- Did you find the use of data-projector slides as a teaching medium useful?
 - was the experience too "passive"?
 - could the same results have been achieved using other means?