



## TAG – QUESTION ERRORS OF NCE STUDENTS LEARNING ENGLISH AS SECOND LANGUAGE.

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### Abstract

*This paper investigated tag question formation errors of NCE Students of Kogi State College of Education Ankpa. It aimed at finding out the areas and reasons why the subject committed tag-question formations error, using a tag-question formation exercise as an instrument developed by the researcher. The analytical descriptive approach used for the study employed a tabular presentation of the item tested the responses, the correct form and explanation of possible reasons for the error. This study discovered that deficiency in making a tag to contrast the positive or negative statement using only a finite auxiliary and inability to use appropriate pronouns to replace noun subject constitute the major aspect in which error are committed. Limited knowledge of English grammar and Mother Tongue or first language transfer were the main reasons for the errors committed. It finally recommended rigorous context-based exposure to grammatical studies for teacher trainees and further studies on the topic.*

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Tag-Question Errors of NCE Student of English, Kogi State College of Education, Ankpa.

That the standard of education in Nigeria is falling by the day is no longer news. The poor performance cuts across all levels of teaching and learning. This educational anomaly is caused by many factors but the poor performance of learners in English Language which has been laudably attested to by many scholars (Banjo 1970, Oguele 2001 and Amer 2004). One area in which errors are committed in English is grammar the aspect of English that deals with the aspect of English that deal with the rules which assist in words formation and combination to form larger units. However, formation of tag question is one striking area of difficulty in grammar to many learners of English

The National Commission for College of Education in Nigeria has designed curriculum that guide effective teaching of English to second learners. This is to enable training and retraining of prospective teacher that would in no distance future constitute the work force in Primary and Secondary schools in Nigeria. In spite of the contentious efforts of Nation

Commission of College Education to regulate teaching and learning English wherever mention is made poor performance accusing finger are at teachers among the known stakeholders. This poor performance is often seen as the reflection of teachers who are often accused of lacking the basic linguistic competence to enable them perform creditably in such areas as tag-questions

A tag- question is a phrase that is usually added to the end of a statement in order to turn it into question or check that the statement is correct (Hemby, 2005). Kirn and Jack (1990), Quoted in Balarebe (2001), say tag-question as "statement with short question attached to the end". Thus if the statement is affirmative the tag- question is negative and vice-versa". Tag-questions therefore are the interrogative but significantly elliptical versions of the statement preceding them. They are asked for a number of reasons. Tag-question are usually used as responses to indicate on attitude to a statement (Omosowone, 1987). The attitude to statement could be that of politeness, interest, disbelief, indifference,



contradiction/disagreement etc. all depends on the rise and fall in pitch.

Advance rules that guide tag-question, Auwalu (2012) citing Omosowowe (1997). Have the following

1. Affirmative or positive statement attract negative tag-question.e.g. he is dead, isn't he?"
2. That negative statements attract positive tags e.g. she has not prayed today, has she?"
3. That helping verbs are repeated in the tags i.e. finite, auxiliary verbs e.g. "you can do it, can't you?"
4. That other verbs (main or lexically) use "do, "does, or did". substitutes in their tags, e.g. "He come last week, didn't he?"
5. If the subject in the tag-question is a pronoun or introductory word it must reflect appropriately in the tag.e.g. "Musa and Halima are guilty, aren't they?"
6. That tense and choice of the operator are determined by the verb phrase in the main clause.

#### Statement of the Problem

A large chunk of teachers in primary schools are holders of National Certificate in Education (NCE) from various Colleges of Education in Nigeria. The National policy on education (1998) considers primary education as a foundation upon which subsequent higher studies are built. Teacher role at this foundation level makes Oguiche(2008) opined that "they are embodiment of knowledge". Because pupils emulate their speech, action and whatever they say or do in accepted hook, line and sim-card. This made many scholars asserts that no nation or community rises above the quality of its teacher. This therefore is a thing of concern that a teacher in training finds it difficult to tackle tag-question (one aspect of English they expect to teach upon graduation).

#### Research Question and Objectives

This study hopes to find out:

1. The error committed by Kogi State College of Educating Students in the use of Tag questions.
2. The reason accounting for the errors committed.

It therefore hopes to answer the following question:

1. In what areas do students in the study area commit tag-question errors?
2. What are the reasons accounting for the errors?

#### Methodology

In this section, design, population and sample, instrument and data collection procedures in relation to the study shall be discussed.

#### Study Design

It's a descriptive one of the ex-post facto sub-category which attempts to study events after they have occurred.

#### Population and Sampling Techniques

The population of student learning English as second language in College of Education Ankps is 485 and 46 were randomly picked irrespective of their sex and were subjected to data gathering process. This is why no demographic data were elicited from the respondents. After the retrieval and numbering of scripts, 10 of them were picked using systematic random sampling.

#### Instrument

A Tag-question Formation Exercise was developed by the researcher and was administered on the subjects to test their knowledge at tag-question formation. The 15 item instrument are all in line with relevant areas identified by Omosowere (1997). The answer to the question one of the instrument "isn't it?" was deliberately provided by the researcher not only as an example but to provoke error in the rest items. This is because the Igala language which majority of the respondents have as their mother tongue uses one common tag for virtually all types of structures.

#### Data collection procedure

The instrument was personally administered in form of test for cautious assessment. The researcher later marked the scripts as no one got lost.

#### Data Presentation and Analysis

The data in relation to all the respondents were presented in a tabular form, depicting the responses of all the respondents.



Table 1: Presentation and Analysis of Respondents' Performances

S/N	Question Item	The Respondents' Response				The Correct Form	Possible reason for the Error	Correctness %
		Respondent A	Respondent B	Respondent C	Respondent D			
1	This Table is bad,...?	Isn't it?	Isn't it	Isn't it	Isn't it	Isn't it	The responses was given in the instrument as an example	100%
2	You can't eat the food alone,...?	Is you?	me?	Me?	Isn't it	Can you?	Poor knowledge or application of the rule	0%
3	Sule doesn't live with his brother,...?	Does he?	Since	Since	No	Does he	Poor knowledge/ application of the rule	25%
4	The money was stolen,...?	Wasn't it?	and beautiful	And beautiful	Yes, it was	Wasn't it?	Poor knowledge/ application of the rule	25%
5	You will have some milk more,...?	Haven't you?	That this	That this	No, I have some	Won't you?	lack of knowledge that is the finite verb (aux or finite) that serves the operator	0%
6	Our house used painting..?	Isn't it?	Now	Now	_____	Doesn't it?	Hausa MT interference leading to the belief that there is only one tag as in the Hausa "kobahakaba?" usually translated as (isn't it so) as said consistently here by the respondent	0%
7	The National Team play football very well,...?	Isn't it?	Last year	Last year	Yes, but sometimes are not	Doesn't they?	Poor knowledge/ application of the rule	0%
8	There was too much salt in the stew,...?	Isn't it	Isn't it?	Isn't it?	It is?	Didn't he?	Poor knowledge/ application of the rule	0%
9	You have never been late to school,...?	Isn't it	Why?	Why?	Yes, you haven't	Have you?	Poor knowledge/ application of the rule	0%
10	The teacher is unfair to Halima,...?	Isn't it?	Why?	Why?	Isn't it	Isn't she?	Poor knowledge/ application of the rule	0%
11	It could be done well,..?	Isn't it	Because of what?	Because of what?	Yes	Couldn't it?	The same as 7, 8, 9 & 10.	0%
12	He danced well..?	Isn't he?	She can't it?	She can't it?	Yes, but she try	Didn't she?	incomplete knowledge/ application of the rule	0%
13	She has to do the assignment?	Isn't she	Doesn't it?	Doesn't it?	He can	Doesn't he?	The same as in 12 above	0%
14	She is early today...?	Isn't she?	Isn't it?	Isn't it?	No but she come early in the morning	Isn't she?	Poor knowledge/ application of the rule	25%
15	They are learning English,...?	Aren't they?	Why?	Why?	Yes?	Aren't they?	Poor knowledge/ application of the rule	25%ht.



It is discernible from the above table that except for item one for which the answer was provided, the respondents highest percentage of correct attempt was 25, that affects item 3,4,14,and 15 for the rest items (2,0 percent of the students got it right)

It was also discovered that poor/lack of knowledge/application of the rules governing tag-question formation was one of the reason accounting for the errors committed. The second major reason discovered was the transfer of the features of the predominant Igala language which is the MT or L1 to all the respondents. Igala people are known to use the expression "chabalems?" (Isn't it?) as a common tag-question to virtually all sorts of statements. It was also discovered that most of the subjects liberally used "isn't it" as a tag-question because the first example in the instrument was "isn't it?" hence it was on this basis that wrong generalizations were made.

#### Conclusion

It can be concluded from the above that the students in the study area have serious tag-question formation problems. These are due to limited knowledge of this aspect of grammar of English, MT or L1 transfer among other researchers.

#### Findings

It is very clear from the presentation and analysis of data in the above table that the NCE student of English in Kogi State College of Education do commit errors in the form of inability to:

1. Think of negative tag-questions, for positive statements.
2. Form positive tag-question for negative statement as in items 2, 3, 5 and the likes
3. Reflect the tenses of the verb of statement in their corresponding tag-questions.
4. Use appropriate pronoun as subject in tag-question to substitute the nominal's in the statements talents preceding them as in items 7,8,10 it and others

#### Recommendations:

From the discussions, findings and conclusion drawn, this paper recommends strongly that teacher trainees, especially those studying English as second language should be rigorously exposed to English grammar. This is due to the vehicular role of grammar in language.

This paper also recommends that teaching should be contextualized to various practical or real life situations to reduce the abstractness with which grammar lessons are viewed and practiced.

Another recommendation is that more lecture periods be allocated to teaching of grammar to enable the trainees acquire extensive and formidable knowledge of tag-question formations.

Finally students in training in colleges of educations should be made to commit all the roles of tag-questions to memory to enhance easy application of same at all time.

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