The Function Of Tag Questions In Sudanese Females' Interaction

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ABSTRACT
The goal of my study is to investigate the use of 'tag questions' in Sudanese women's conversations. The main assumption is that Sudanese women's linguistic behavior, with respect to tag questions, has a role to play in creating co-operation and intimate social relationships among them. The analysis of the present study based on recordings of naturally occurring talk among women friends in Khartoum. The participants were forty-one women from different age groups and educational levels. The total period of the recorded data was twenty-three hours. The study used three hours transcribed talk in the process of data analysis. Following Jefferson's transcription system, the data have been transcribed, transliterated, and translated into English. I adopted Conversation Analysis approach in analyzing the data. The results of this research show that the subjects tended to use tag questions in their private conversations. The women in the sample adopted this linguistic device to co-operate in completing communicative tasks during natural interactions, enhancing solidarity and good social relations among them.

Key words: Tag questions, women's conversation, collaborative talk, co-operation, solidarity, intimate social relations.

INTRODUCTION

Women's style of speech had been viewed negatively. It was seen as unassertive and weak (Lakoff, 1975). Now, this sty le is regarded as a strategy of making extended conversation and maintaining good social relations (e.g. Holmes, 1984; Coates, 1989, 1993, 1996; Tannen, 2007). In the Sudan, women tend to be intimate, supportive, and co-operative. This nature is reflected, more or less, in the language they use. I have adopted the hypothesis that Sudanese women's linguistic behavior reflects their social identity as a homogenous group regardless any differences. In other words, women employ some linguistic functions to create intimacy and socialization. This study argues that tag questions as one of the linguistic devices found in Sudanese women's interaction play a role in promoting co-operation and maintaining solidarity and intimate relations among them.

Area studied

Speakers differ in their communication behaviors leading to the existence of different speech communities (Weatherall, 2002). It is argued that tag questions are typically women's form because women use them more than men do. This claim has been proven empirically by Fishman (1980) and Preisler (1986). Lakoff (1975) believes that tag questions decrease the strength of assertion, and they are associated with tentativeness. Mizokami (2001), in contrast, maintains that tag questions represent multi-functionality and diversity of meaning rather than tentativeness. Coates (1993) argues that the function of tag questions is to draw speakers into conversation and to keep talk going, as well as to help participants to be in tune with each other. Some researchers believe that women, who are powerless members of society, use more questions than men. Such claim is initiated by Lakoff (1975), who argues that tag questions

which do not seek information are weak forms. In as much as tag questions are expression of tentativeness and unassertiveness, they are typically feminine since women speech is characterized as tentative and lacking assertion. Then, Tag questions minimize the strength of assertion (ibid). Consider the two examples below:

(12a) The crisis in the Middle East is terrible.

(12b) The crisis in the Middle East is terrible, isn't it?

(Source, Coates, 1993, p. 119)

Lakoff (1975) claims that women tend to use sentence like (12b) that contains a tag question more than men. Conversely, Coates (1996) argues that one of the question tags' functions which is found in women friend's talk, is to invite other speakers to participate in conversation as:

[Talking about the way talk changes when a man joins in]

Liz: but it does change <u>doesn't it?</u>

Anna: yeah/

(Source, Coates, 1996, p. 192)

In this example the question tag resulted in a response from another participant. This type of tag questions is called by Holmes (1984) 'facilitative tags' because speakers use them to facilitate the participation of others.

 Holmes analyzes question tags in terms of expressing 'primarily modal' meaning, and 'affective' meaning. Tag questions with a primarily modal meaning show the speaker's uncertainty about a particular proposition. Such kind of a tag question is called speaker-oriented since the speaker uses it to obtain information or confirmation of a proposition as:

(13) She's coming around noon isn't she

(Husband to wife concerning expected guest)

(Source, Coates, 1993, p. 120)

Tag questions that function as affective, on the other hand, express the speaker's attitude to the addressee. They are known as addressee-oriented. This can be done either by supporting the addressee (facilitative tag) as:

(14) The hen's brown isn't she

(Teacher to pupil)

Or by minimizing the force of negatively affective speech acts (softening tag) as:

(15)That was pretty silly wasn't it

(Older child to younger friend)

(Source, Coates, 1993, p. 120)

Holmes (1984) believes that if one considers the relationship between participants and facilitators, one will find out that those, facilitators, who are responsible for keeping talk going smoothly use more question tags than non-facilitators. Holmes notes that women use tag questions more than men since they act as facilitators. Moreover, Coates (1996) contrasts Lakoff's (1975) assumption that questions are weak forms. Recent discourse analysts (e.g. Coates, 1996) view questions as powerful linguistic forms.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Most of the studies of language and gender have been conducted in the West among middle-class heterosexual women and men. The main focus of these studies was to examine conversational behavior in mixed-sex talk. For example, Dubois and Crouch (1975) have tested

the assumption that there is a connection between tag questions and females' linguistic usage. Results show that most of the question tags used by women were facilitative tags which were produced to facilitate conversation not for seeking information. On the other hand, question tags produced by men were modal tags which expressed uncertainty. The findings confirm the assumption that tag questions are used significantly more by women than by men. The researchers support Lakoff's (1975) belief that tag questions which do not seek information are weak forms. They note that women in question who used question tags, in particular facilitative tags, more than men were considered to be powerless speakers.

Two separate case studies have been conducted by Cameron, McAlinden, and O'Leary (1989) to discuss the idea that women use more tag questions than men do because they, in many contexts, indicate tentativeness and approval-seeking. The first study is conducted to examine the use of tag questions in casual conversations. Results show that thirty-six per cent of question tags were produced by women, and sixty per cent by men. The women in the sample tended to use facilitative rather than modal tags since women are more facilitators in conversation than men. So, the roles of facilitators were marked more by women than by men.

The second study is done to introduce the variables of conversational role and differential status, in addition to the variable of gender. The aim of the study was to test tag questions not in terms of sex differences but to investigate unequal encounters. That is, speech situations where the powerful participants control the talk, and use large number of tag questions. Cameron et al. (1989) assume that tag questions function as interactional resources of the powerful rather than the powerless in conversation. Cameron et al.'s (1989) argue that the patterning of a particularly linguistic form should be analyzed in relation to different variables in addition to gender such as participants' roles, objectives of the interaction, participants' status, and so on.

Mizokami's (2001) study argues that tag questions represent multifunctionality and diversity of meaning. Commenting on Holmes' (1984) study of tag questions, the researcher claims that the use of question tags does not always depend on the speaker's sex, but on the speaker's role in conversation. She supports her claim by Cameron et al.'s (1989) findings that the participants' usage of tag questions depends on other factors, rather than men's domination and women's subordination.

White (2003) has conducted a study to examine the usage of key linguistic functions, and how women use them to demonstrate solidarity in a casual conversation context. White's analysis has focused on the linguistic features of conversation such as tag questions and their use in controlling conversation or facilitating interaction. The main question the study has tried to answer is- did the woman's usage of these features stem from deficiency in her language or was her speech simply different as a result of a different interaction style? Findings show that tag questions produced by the woman were not seen as expressing uncertainty, as Lakoff (1975) claims, but rather as a facilitative behavior which provided support for the participants. Such usage of question tags supported the believe that women are more attentive at keeping conversation going.

Jakobsoon's (2010) study examined women's conversations in relation to hedges, tag questions, minimal responses. She used a sample of women friends of different ages. Jakobsson's findings show that women use tag questions in their private talk in particular 'modal tags' for confirmation since they felt insecure about what they said.

In mixed-sex study, Granqvist (2013) has investigated quantitatively the frequency of hedges, boosters, and tag questions in some episodes of the TV show 'Big Bang Theory' to show any differences that related to gender. Findings reveal that women use these linguistics devices more frequently than men do.

Tomaselli and Gatt (2015) have examined the use of tag questions and their conversational functions in Italian conversations. The researchers explore the relationship between the functions of tag questions and the conversational settings, the placement of tag questions in the speech, and their relationship with the role of the participants who were in the leadership position in the interactions.

The analysis reveals seven main functions of tag questions; confirming speakers' assumption, epistemic modal, checking the hearers' understanding, closing the topic, emphasizing the topic, prompt agreement, involving the hearer, request opinion/permission. Tomaselli and Gatt have found that the occurrence of tag questions and their functions depended on the conversational settings. Moreover, the participants in the leading role used more tag questions.

Having demonstrated some previous studies on tag questions, the current study pursues the use of question tags in Sudanese women's conversation, and intends to explore their functions during interaction. The argument is that tag questions in Sudanese females' talk serve as a device to create a co-operative floor, and hence, establish solidarity and intimate social relationships among them. In examining women's discourse, Coates (1996) claims that the use of question tags is a vital aspect in women's interaction, and it is a way of expressing solidarity and connection. I will explore this view by analyzing Sudanese women's casual discourse as my study based on all female's interaction. This will be done by examining the functions of tag questions in their friendly talk, using samples of question tags that occurred in the conversations of the three groups under study.

This study is significant as it is hoped to fill in the gap by investigating the usage of tag questions in casual conversations in all-female setting. Most of gender related issues tackled by researchers have focused on mixed-sex conversation (e.g. Dubois and Crouch, 1975; Cameron et al., 1989; Mizokami, 2001; White, 2003; Granqvist, 2013) and ignored the actual use of language among all- female talk. Then, the need for similar studies in all-female interaction is urgent since it is rarely found in the literature. For example, Jakobsoon (2010), and Coates (1996) who notes that women friends talk collaboratively and their speech can be described as co-operative. This study is expected to contribute to the literature on language and gender by exploring the role of cultural practices in constructing conversations, in regard to tag questions, in the Sudanese women's community.

METHODOLOGY

My aim in this study is to explore the way Sudanese women construct their conversation considering tag questions as one of the linguistic devices they use in their speech that show how their cultural practices reflect their group-membership as co-operative and intimate. In this sense, in the present paper, I have analyzed Sudanese women's interaction in relation to tag questions adopting descriptive qualitative research methods. Qualitative research method is useful in such cases since it extends into cultural studies (Travers, 2009). The Conversation Analysis approach (henceforth CA, Have, 2007; Liddicoat, 2007) was adopted in analyzing the data since it gives more detailed analysis, considering the immediate communicative situation. CA is a discipline that studies speech in conversations. It deals with the description and analysis of any particular phenomenon (e.g. interruption) found in social interactions (Have, 2007; Liddicoat, 2007). CA emphasizes individuals' understanding of the situations and

messages in their shared world. It also shows the participants' interpretation of social actions and how they relate meanings to these social actions (Boden, 1990).

Schegloff (1992) has developed, from his lectures in conversations in the early 1960s, an approach to the study of social actions. This approach studies social order obtained through the practice of everyday speech. Since then, CA emerged as an independent area of investigation oriented towards interpreting the organizational structure of speech. Have (2007) argues that CA differs from other approaches, when studying speech behavior, such as the quantitative approach in a number of ways as follows:

1. CA operates closer to the phenomenon being tested more than other approaches. This is because it gives more detailed description of interactional activities, recordings, and detailed transcripts, rather than counting a phenomenon quantitatively.
2. CA works on naturally occurring data rather than experimental data such as interviews.
3. CA does not study the language as a linguistic system, but it examines oral language in natural situations.

Then, CA allows a reasonable description of a linguistic feature and how this feature operates in social interaction. This is done through analyzing full transcripts of casual speech, rather than depending on predetermined experimental data such as that of critical discourse analysis (henceforth, CDA, Wooffitt, 2005).

For the above argument, I avoided the quantitative approach in the present study since it only deals with the occurrence of the phenomenon, and then summarizes it. Therefore, I adopted CA approach to investigate the function of tag questions in Sudanese women's speech in a natural setting.

Data Collection
Subjects
Women's communities in the Sudan are considered to be cohesive with closely tight social networks. This is depicted in their shared social practices in various situations. Generally speaking, Sudanese society emphasizes the importance of co-operation in social occasions especially among women. For instance, one of the social practices found predominantly among Sudanese women is the financial support granted to a friend on occasions such as giving birth, weddings, and cases of mortality. Then as a collective group, the women share their friend her happiness or sadness. This situation would be a good soil for friendly conversations.

The data analyzed here were derived from ethnographic study carried between March 2010 and January 2011. The study included female friends' meetings in different areas in Khartoum. The subjects of the study were urban women, from Khartoum city, of different age groups (between twenties and seventies), ranging between uneducated and educated at various levels. The total of the subjects were forty-one women divided into three groups according to their age. The three groups had been given special names for identification throughout the process of analysis.

a. Maya; eleven university students in their twenties.
b. Malak; twelve educated women, university and post-graduate levels, ranging between thirties and forties.
c. Homy; eighteen participants aged between fifties and seventies. All women in this group were below university level.

Instrument

The present study depends on data collected via recording actual conversations. This is because recording is the best method for doing conversation analysis. Have (2007) argues that audio-recording plays an important role in the emergence of CA as an independent discipline. Recording provides multiple examinations that lead to systematic analysis. This is because recording permits playing and replaying the talk for transcribing, analyzing, and cross checking (ibid). Researcher's observation was used as a tool to accompany recordings as it helps in giving good account of some acts that might be useful for the analysis such as the non-verbal acts that accompanying the speech. Coates (1996) argues that feminist scholarship emphasizes that knowledge obtained through engagement provides greater insights and interpretation. She adds that ethnographers do ethnography in their own societies. In this sense, I acted as a participant observer in the process of the recordings.

Transcription is important for understanding the findings in CA since it shows different consideration of casual speech. Transcription is a secondary data representing the primary data of the recorded conversation (Liddicoat, 2007). Heath & Luff (1993) argue that transcription represents the talk to be analyzed, helping the researcher to notice features of the transcribed talk. This provides a detailed analysis which cannot be achieved otherwise. I adopted a simple system commonly used in CA with minor modifications (Jefferson's, 1985; 2004, transcription system).

Procedures

The recordings covered the period between March 2010 and January 2011. The duration of the recorded interactions was about twenty-three hours and thirty minutes. The actual data used for the analysis were selected from one hour transcribed talk from each of the groups under investigation (three hours in total). The settings of the recordings were varied; a university campus, a university teaching staff's office, mourning houses, and friends' houses. The recordings were made in mid-days and at evenings. Pseudonym was used to identify the participants (using the initial letters of the informants' names). Following Coates's (1996), the conversations had been recorded surreptitiously in order to get spontaneous data. For ethical reason, after recordings were completed, all participants were informed that a recording had been made for research purposes, and asked whether they allow me to use the recordings in the study. All participants agreed that the data be used for research agenda.

Data organization

This study focused on investigating and describing qualitatively the use of tag questions and how they function in Sudanese women's talk. I selected some examples of the tags from the recorded speech of the informants after sorting out the different types that found in the women's utterances. The feature in question was taken from each group under investigation then systematically represented in extracts. The selected data was transcribed, transliterated, and translated into English. To represent the recorded utterances accurately, I followed Liddicoat's (2007) approach which adopts a modified orthography in representing the data. This approach is useful in noticing language features in conversations. In my case, I used an orthographic system of the colloquial Arabic spoken in Khartoum in the process of transliteration which is hoped to represent the speech as it was uttered. Following Have's (2007), free translation, and word-for-word translation were carried out because the systems of the two languages, Arabic and English, are different. This helps in following the analysis while reading the translation.

DATA ANALYSIS

Each use of a tag construction was investigated in its discourse context. Besides tape-recording as a principal source of data, my observation contributed to the analysis as it was necessary for observing the phenomenon under study in order to obtain enough interpretation (Travers, 2008). This is because the participants sometimes used paralinguistic features such as gestures and eye gazes that showed doubt, interest or other impressions while producing the tag questions. Therefore, I took contemporaneous note while the informants were talking.

Uncertainty

The major function of tag questions, it is argued, is to signal the degree of uncertainty among speakers (Lakoff, 1975). When speakers are uncertain about their proposition, they tend to tag their utterance in order to gain agreement or confirmation, or disagreement from the recipients. Holmes (1984) classifies this kind of tags as 'modal tag' since it requests confirmation or information from the addressee. In this case, when speakers tag their speech they display uncertainty which needs a response from the addressees (Jakobsoon, 2010).

The following extracts, from the three groups under study, demonstrate such a phenomenon.

a- [Maya: conversation about S's mobile]
1-N: aṣlan ana wãḥid mã gã‹da aghayyru
1-N: actually it's (her mobile) the only one, I don't change it
2-J: talafo:nik etsaraq(.)walla eshnu?
2-J: your mobile has been stolen(.)hasn't it?
3-N: ã:y
3-N: yeah

J (2) was unsure that N's mobile had been stolen. She tagged her utterance seeking confirmation from her friend, N. J's medial position pause expressed her doubt about the truth of her proposition, N's mobile had been stolen. To declare her uncertainty, she looked at J and used the tag "walla eshnu?" (hasn't it?) which was acknowledged by the recipient, N. Therefore, N (3) supported J's proposition and confirmed that her mobile had been stolen, using a minimal response 'yeah'.

b- [Malak: interaction about E]
1-M: E di eddikto:ra mush(.)?
1-M: E is the doctor, isn't she(.)?
2-A: la la(.)E di elkabi:ra
2-A: no, no(.)E is the oldest one

Here, M was uncertain about her prediction that the mentioned woman, E, was the doctor one. To express her uncertainty, M used the tag "mush?" (isn't she?). There was a pause following the tag which allowed time for the hearer, A, to think and respond. (Schegloff, 1980) maintains that the pause gives the addressee a chance to raise problems of understanding, recognition, or correction. In this sense, the pause gave A a chance to think, then confirm or disagree with M. A (2) paused after she refuted M's assumption to give herself some time to think and respond with the correct proposition, E was the oldest one.

c- [Homy: speech about B's healing from magic work]
1-A: raggada filbirish
1-A: he (the sheikh) laid her on a mat
2-T: filbirish(.)mush yã B raggadik?
2-T: on a mat(.)didn't he, B, laid you down?
3-B: u::(.)gãl ley ag‹udi(.)gara leyya……
3-B: yeaah(.)he asked me to sit down(.)he read (Quran) for me……

In this conversation, A's (1) and T's (2) turns acted, together, as one turn. That is, after A said "raggada filbirish" (he laid her on a mat), T (2) repeated A's last utterance "filbirish" (on a mat). Then after a pause, she switched her gaze to B, looking for approval from her. She used the modal tag "mush?" (didn't he?). The pause before the tag conveyed T's doubt of the truth of the proposition, laid B on a mat, and gave her a chance to ask for recognition, discussed in Schegloff (1980). B (3), in return, supported A's and T's speech, uttering a prolonged minimal response "u::" (yeah), thereby also acknowledging that a larger unit was in progress as she went on her anecdote which was interesting for her friends.

It is clear that the women in the above conversations worked collaboratively by adopting tag questions which helped in keeping conversations continued (Tannen, 2007). Although the women used tag questions because they were uncertain (Jakobsoon, 2010), they also showed their interest of the topics under discussion as they were listening attentively to their friends. According to Holmes, this type of tag questions is speaker-oriented because it is designed to meet the speaker's need for information. The following is an example of this type from Cameron et al.'s (1989) study.

You were missing last week / weren't you (SEU)
(Source, Cameron et al., 1989, p. 82)

Checking the Shared Knowledge
There are some instances where tag questions serve as a device for checking the participants' knowledge about a proposition in a situation where all the participants are familiar with the topic of the interaction (Coates, 1996). In this case, tag questions used as an invitation to support the speaker. While reporting an event, tag questions are commonly used to highlight mutual knowledge (Bazzanella, 1994). In such situations, the speakers want to make sure that the addressees recognize what they say, and prompt a confirmation using question tags. Such constructions are generally followed by a clear approval from the addressees (Mithun, 2012). Coates (1996) argues that the main function of this type of tag questions is to check the taken-for-granted-ness of what is said. The following interactions from my data show this function of tag questions.

a- [Maya: talk about D]
1-N: D nazalat hina mush?
1-N: D is enrolled here (at the university) isn't she?
2-J: α̃:y D(.)essami:na(.)mush?
2-J: yeah, D(.)the fat one(.)ins't she?
3-N: D α̃:y(.)D fi esku:l(.)mush?
3-N: D, yeah(.)in school of math(.)isn't she?
4-J: α̃:y
4-J: yeah
In the above conversation, N (1) used the question tag "mush?" (isn't she?) to check J's knowledge about D. J (2) confirmed N's speech that she knew that D joined the university. Then, she tagged her speech to check the shared recognition of D, the fat girl that they both knew. N (3), again, checked J's knowledge that the mentioned girl, D, was in the school of math. By so doing, both N and J kept interacting collaboratively by checking each other's shared knowledge about D, checking recognition of the propositional level, (Bazzanella, 1994). By and large, this interaction showed how the participants' turns were in tune with each other (Coates, 1996). That is to say, the same tag construction was used by the interlocutors in a harmony.

b- [Malak: discussion about R's not putting on henna]
1-R: la ana mã(.)yaˁni(.)baˁad marrãt masalan//
1-R: no, I'm, not(.)like(.)sometimes, for example
2-R://mã tiṭhannan aw mã titggayyaf//
2-R: doesn't (a woman) put on henna or care about herself
3-R://laˀnu zaˁlãna(.)juwwa nafsa mush kida?//
3-R: because she could be angry(.)inside herself, couldn't she?
4-R://min<rãjila
4-R: with her husband
5-S: <mumkin indikeishan
5-S: it can be an indication (that she doesn't put on henna because she might be angry with her husband)

R's comment on the woman who doesn't put on henna was mid-tagged by "mush kida?" (couldn't she?). She inserted the tag between "zaˁlãna(.)juwwa nafsa" (she could be angry(.)inside herself) and "min rãjila" (with her husband). S (5) did not address the tag question with a minimal response because she did not need to. Rather, she jumped into the discussion, enthusiastically, with a hand gesture. S supported R when she overlapped her, adding (it can be an indication) to the existing topic which signaled that she understood the proposition and made a comment. This is a way of establishing common ground, 'orientation within the proposition' (Mithun, 2012).

This confirms the common belief that, in Sudan, married women do not put on henna when they do not get along with their husbands. The use of tag question showed that the participants shared the same view about the function of henna in the Sudanese woman's life.

c- [Homy: conversation about a neighbor who had a new baby]
1-M: H di<kãn wildat(.)mush?(.)itti ebtaˁrifiya
1-M: this H, had a baby(.)didn't she?(.)you know her
2-E: <ã::y
2-E: yeaah
3-M: wildat assi(.)mush?
3-M: she had a baby recently(.)didn't she?
4-E: ã:y
4-E: yeah
In this interaction, M (1) tagged her utterance in mid-turn saying "mush?" (didn't she?). By so doing, E was addressed to participate in the conversation. M attempted to see whether E knew that H had a baby. E (2) overlapped M's speech, responding before M saying that H had a baby. E's quick response could be related to the belief that Sudanese women are highly involved in their mundane talk to the extent that they can predict what the speaker are going to say. Then, E overlapped M using a prolonged minimal response "ã::y" (yeaah) to confirm what M was saying which signaled her awareness of the topic. It indicated that E was listening attentively as the dominant interaction was about a friend of her, H. M (3), again, adopted tag question to check E's knowledge that H had a baby recently.

In examining tag questions of Mohawk's discourse, Mithun (2012) defines a similar function of question tags as 'shared knowledge, experience and values'. Then, tag questions can occur in discussions of shared experiences and stories between women friends, displaying their co-operation and solidarity. In these situations, their functions do not indicate uncertainty of the truth of the proposition. The speakers may use question tags to bring facts without seeming to tell the addressees something they already know. Mithun (2012) maintains that one usage of tag questions by Mohawk is to bring facts into the discussion that is known by the recipients

but not within their minds at the moment. The following example, from Coates (1996), shows this type of tag questions.

[End of topic: Relationships]
Liz: it's strange isn't it? The life some people lead /
(Source, Coates, 1996, p. 194)

Topic Development
Tag questions are also adopted in developing an already existing topic. Speakers may tag their speech to keep the conversation going and to develop the topic under discussion. Coates (1993) defines this type of tag questions as 'speaker oriented' as it does not need a response from the hearer. Columbus (2010) believes that this kind of tag questions does not need any expectation or response, rather, its function is to hold the listener's attention. The following conversations from the data show such a usage.

a- [Maya: J conversated about her friend, N]
1-J: ana gutta leikum ꞌirifta keif(.)gibeil dãyra aḥki leik//
1-J: I told you how I knew(.)earlier, I wanted to tell you
2-J://elgiṣṣa(.)mush?
2-J: the story(.)didn't I?
3-R: aha?
3-R: then?
4-J: yalla ṣaḥbati N eshshayṭãna di........
4-J: then my friend, N, the naughty one......
J initiated the speech about her friend by reminding the interlocutors of what she told them before. After a pause, J produced the tag question "mush?" (didn't I?) as a device to keep her friends' attention, and developing the story about her friend. R's (3) "aha?" (then?) was an invitation to J (4) to go on speaking, indicated that she was listening and following her.

b- [Malak: interaction about M's finger being injured]
1-M: ana ḥassi ꞌãrfa da nafs eṣṣubãꞌ (.)//
1-M: now, you know, it's the same finger (that was injured before)(.)
2-M://da kãn ḥaggat ettalja(.)mush?(.)shufti.......
2-M: it was the ice one(.)wasn't it? (a finger that once got hurt with a piece
of ice)(.)you see........
M told her friends how she cut her finger that had been injured before with a piece of ice. She developed her own anecdote using the question tag "mush?" (wasn't it?). By employing a tag question, M connected a present experience with a previous one (cutting her finger twice**).** In this conversation, M tagged her speech in medial position to get her friends' attention without any real need for a response. The hearers, in return, did not respond to the tag question as they did not need to, allowing their friend to continue.

c- [Homy: talk about B's sudden sickness]
1-B: ...... ji:t(-)mush?(.)baꞌad mã ji:t//
1-B: ....I came back(-)didn't I?(.)after I came back
2-B://ligi:t leik ennãs.....
2-B: I found the people (her family).....
In this extract, B talked about her experience when she fell sick suddenly. To get the interlocutors' attention, B tagged her speech after a relatively long pause.

To sum up, the tag question in the above conversations was a speaker oriented in that the speakers did not wait for the participants to cut them off while telling their story. So, it did not give the addressees time to respond but to give the speakers time to formulate the rest of their stories. The recipients did not feel the need to intervene, and then, allowed collaboratively the speakers to continue speaking after the question tag. Thus, the use of this tag questions emphasized the speakers' role as narrators. Andersen (2001) calls it a 'non-turn-yelding' function. This type of tags is tested by Cameron et al. (1989) who examined the use of tag questions in a TV program. The researchers have found that the presenter tried to develop the topic by adopting question tags in order to elicit a long reply from the guest. However, in the present study, the women used tag questions as a strategy that enabled them to develop their own stories as they were friends engaged in casual conversations.

Claiming that women are cooperative conversationalists (Coates, 1996; Tannen, 2007), the above extracts showed how these women friends were keen in keeping conversation continued. Coates's (1996) example supports this view. Here Ann developed her topic using tag.

[Piano lesson]
Anna: there's a lovely little boy who goes before me called Dominic.....
Liz: he's just done his grade one as well hasn't he?
(Source, Coates, 1996, p. 196)

However, this tendency contradicts Lakoff's (1975) belief that women use question tags because they lack confidence. Consider the following female's speech.
It's a nice day isn't it
(Source, Coates, 1993, p. 75)

According to Lakoff, this speech is unassertive while for many researchers (e.g. Holmes, 1984; Coates, 1993; Tannen, 2007) it is a way of making a collaborative floor between women friends. Confirmly, my data showed that the women were working co-operatively to extend their discourse by employing question tags.

Drawing Participants into Talk
Sometimes women tend to adopt tag questions in order to draw the interlocutors into conversation. Holmes (1984) calls this type of question tags 'facilitative' since it facilitates conversation by involving participants in the talk. Coates (1993) argues that facilitative tag may not give new information. Instead, it may have an important interactional function which leads participants to get involved in the conversation, discussed in Coates (1993) as 'hearer oriented'.

This type of tag questions is considered to be interactive rather than epistemic in the sense that the speaker may be certain of the truth of the proposition, but wants to encourage the listener to be involved in the interaction (Mithun, 2012). The following talk from my data demonstrate this use of tag questions.

a- [Maya: conversation between friends about some building]
1-N: aṣllan K deil azwãgum sheina shadi:d
1-N: those K (a construction company), their style (in building) is so nasty
2-R: ṣãḥ(.)mush?
2-R: right(.)isn't it?
3-N: assi ‹aleik ellah shãyfãm ‹ãmli:n shinu fil‹amãyer bitã:‹at S?

3-N: now, you see what they did in the buildings of S?

In this interaction, R (2) used the question tag "mush?" (isn't it?) after she confirmed N's speech as a device that made N (3), the initiator of the speech, took another role. So, R tried to keep the conversation going by employing a facilitative tag. By adopting the tag question, R displayed her full attention which encouraged N (3) to add some new information to develop the existing topic. Hence, the tag question was a clear invitation to elaborate the topic under discussion. In this sense, R was not drawn to share in the interaction. Rather, by using the question tag, she left the floor to N to have a new turn in a collaborative talk, Coates (1996).

In comparison, the use of facilitative tag can be restricted to conversational role (Cameron et al., 1989). This is obviously observed in my data when R played the role of facilitator by using the tag question, which encouraged N to continue. This finding confirmed Fishman (1980) and Holmes (1984) who contend that the role of facilitator in conversation is played by women.

b- [Malak: interaction about a relative's daughter]
1-N: fi ḥassi farig kabi:r(.)mush?(.)bein K(.)//
1-N: now there's a big difference(.)isn't it?(.) how K(.)
2-N://kãnat fãrda jinãḥa keif ‹ala essughãr(.)ḥassi W di kadi?
2-N: was caring the kids(.)is W (K's younger sister) like this?
3-R: la la la(.)*wala leya da‹wa*(.)↑*wala leya da‹wa*
3-R: no, no, no(.)she has nothing to do with it(.)she has nothing to do with it
In the above extract, N tried to make her point more impressive so as to get the attention of the recipients. She employed a medial position's question tag "mush?" (isn't it?) for emphasis, before the main utterance that showed how K was caring the kids. By uttering the tag question, N intended to let R involved in the conversation. In so doing, N facilitated the interaction by drawing R into the conversation. R's (3) response was obvious as she uttered "la" (no) three times before expressing her opinion about W's attitude. R's hand gesture, raised voice, and repeated opinion about W explained her high involvement in the discourse.

c- [Homy: some friends described their neighborhood]
1-A: mãfi shãri‹ ẓalaṭ(.)//
1-A: there was no main road (when they moved there)(.)
2-A://hu eẓẓalaṭ fi lãkin……
2-A: the main road was there but…..
3-M: lã: ḥawla(.)ma‹nãta maḥal muwãṣalãṭ da eyku:n(.)ṣãḥ?
3-M: wow(.)it means it was a transportation route(.)right?
4-E: da kullu kida kãn muwãṣalãṭ(.)maḥaṭṭaṭ eshshajara
4-E: all of it was a transportation route(.)elshajarah bus stop
Here, M (3) acted as a facilitator when she adopted the tag question "ṣãḥ?" (right?) which helped, with the aid of the eye gaze, in inviting another participant, E (4), to take part in the conversation. Acting co-operatively, M aimed to facilitate the interaction by employing a facilitative tag.
This tendency has been reported by several researchers. For example, Cameron et al. (1989) argue that facilitative tags are used predominantly to draw participants into interaction. They found that women adopted facilitative tags rather than modal ones to facilitate conversations. But when examining power relation among the participants, it is found that powerful participants in terms of social class, age, and occupation used facilitative tags more than the other participants did. However, this tendency was not found in my data since all of the participants were friends and equal in status.

The next extract, from Cameron et al. (1989), demonstrates the use of this question tag.

Presenter: it's compulsive isn't it (elicits long reply from the guest)
(Sourse, Cameron et al., 1989, p. 90)

To sum up, my data revealed that there was no power relation affecting the use of any kind of question tags. In other words, the women who were engaged in the conversations showed similar patterns in the use of this linguistic device regardless age or educational differences. Generally speaking, one may argue that Sudanese women can be described as facilitators. They work actively in their friendly talk, adopting tag questions as one of the linguistic devices they use to display co-operation that sustain and develop solidarity and connection among them.

DISCUSSION

This paper has presented an analysis of the functions of tag questions in Sudanese women's discourse. My argument is that Women in the Sudan design their talk in a way that develops support and co-operation, which promotes tied social relations among them

The study based on a corpus of recorded data collected from three women groups in natural conversations. Have's (2007) CA approach was adopted in the process of the analysis. This method is qualitative in nature, describing the phenomena to be tested.

The results have shown that Sudanese women develop intimate social relations during private interactions. In this community, women produce shared meaning when discussing personal issues, 'rapport talk' (Tannen, 2007). In their getting together, Sudanese women talk about many issues relating to their daily life. Enhancing social ties is achieved by certain linguistic functions that create a friendly atmosphere (Coates, 1996; Tannen, 2007). To this end, tag questions promote co-operation and establish intimate social relations between them.

Prototypical question tags indicate uncertainty on the part of the speaker. However, tag questions can also have interactive effects since they request a response from the addressee. Four types of tag questions are found in the women's speech. First; uncertainty, the women in the study used modal tags when they were not certain about the proposition, addressee-oriented (Coates 1993). Second; checking the shared knowledge, in situations where the women were aware of the topic being discussed, they tagged their speech to test the participants' mutual knowledge about the topic (Bazzanella, 1994), discussed in Coates (1996) as taken-for-granted-ness. Third; Topic development, the women in the study used question tags when they intended to develop the topic being discussed Columbus (2010). Coates (1993) defines this tag questions as 'speaker oriented' as it does not need a response from the hearer. Forth; drawing participants into talk, women in our sample were found to have used tag questions also to encourage the participants to contribute to the discussion (Mithun, 2012). This kind of tag questions is known as 'facilitative tag' since it facilitates conversation (Holmes, 1984).

Having summarized the main results of the use of tag questions, it is noted that Sudanese women show their feminine profile as supportive and co-operative by adopting this device in mundane talk. They do not consider question tags as sort of weakness of women's speech (Lakoff, 1975). Rather, tag questions have certain social functions (Holmes, 1984; Coates, 1996; Tannen, 2007). In this sense, they keep conversation going by using tag questions, and thus, create intimacy and socialization among them.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion to be drawn is that Sudanese women adopt speech styles which help them develop support and co-operation in conversation. In their mundane talk, the women under

study created a collaborative floor by participating actively in the interaction. This might stem from the claim that Sudanese women tend to be co-operative. This tendency is reflected in their sociolinguistic behavior. That is to say, Sudanese women use some linguistic functions in ways that show how they work co-operatively in their private discourse, and then, construct their friendship through their talk. Co-operation is maintained through the use of tag questions as one of the linguistic devices they employ in casual speech. Similar studies in the Western societies have proven empirically that women use tag questions as a way of maintaining co-operation and socialization (e.g. Holmes, 1984; Coates, 1996; Tannen, 2007). By and large, this tendency goes with my argument which indicates that women's linguistic behaviors signal solidarity and connection between them in various communities.

At the end, the study has revealed that education and age have played no role in the choice of the linguistic function examined. The women who participated in the conversations showed similar speech style, with respect to tag questions, although they belong to different age groups with different levels of education. In short, I may claim that Sudanese women use tag questions as one of the linguistic forms they employ which help promote mutual support, co-operation, solidarity and intimate social relationships among them regardless any differences.

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APPENDIX

Transcription Conventions

The transcription conventions used for the conversational data are as follows:

1- //,   double slashes sign indicates one's utterance is incomplete and will continue in the next line.

2- [a square bracket indicates the start of interruption between utterances.

3- <   an angled bracket indicates the start of overlap between utterances.

4- (.) a micro pause.

5- (-) a longer pause.

6- underlined utterance indicates stressed talk.

7- CAPITALIZED utterance indicates loudness.

8- *italicized* utterance indicates quietness.

9- :   a colon sign indicates prolonging utterance

10- ….dots indicates missing utterances

11-   ↑an upper arrow indicates faster pace of an utterance than the previous one.

12-   ↓a down arrow indicates slower pace of talk than the previous one.