The question of tag questions:  
A comparison across patterns, languages and genres

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Previous literature on English tag questions has mainly concentrated on describing their pragmatics and formal properties (e.g. Algeo 1988, 1990; Holmes 1983, 1984; Kimps 2007), as well as the gender and age differences in their usage (e.g. Cameron et al. 1989; Coates 1988, 1996; Holmes 1986, 1995; Lakoff 1975; Stenström 1997, 2005). A similar situation is found in Spanish (Briz 1988; Christl 1996; Rodríguez Muñoz 2009) and Portuguese (Cruz Ferreira 1981; Moniz et al. 2011) with research mostly focusing on the pragmatics of tags question in spoken discourse. Quantitative investigations are less numerous (e.g. Algeo 1988, 1990; Tottie and Hoffman 2009), and similarly few in number are those studies exploring tag questions within the varieties of one language (Algeo 2006; Tottie and Hoffman 2006) or those undertaking cross-linguistic investigations (Allerton 2009; Axelsson 2006; Brown and Enfield 2006; Martins 2004; Recsky 2006).

In my talk I will present an extensive analysis of “canonical” tag questions (CTQs), exemplified in (1) to (3), that is contrastive from three different angles: patterns, languages and genres. I will compare variation patterns of CTQs within the same language and across three different languages, British English, Peninsular Spanish and European Portuguese, in a variety of spoken genres that represent the monologic-dialogic, formal-informal and private-public oppositions.

(1) I think we've had enough with gigs, don't you?  
(2) /* BEA: pero yo creo que todo el mundo estamos igual/ ¿no? */  
(3) /mas não quer dizer que nós adoptemos/ não é ?

Supported by statistical significance tests, my aim is to examine the statements made about CTQs in the qualitative literature uncovering, at the same time, whatever differences and parallelisms emerge from this triangular comparison along the following parameters: (i) patterns of formal variation, (ii) functional or pragmatic features and (iii) the sociolinguistic variables of age and gender.

The corpora analyzed are, for English, the spoken component of the International Corpus of English-Great Britain (ICE-GB) (Nelson, Wallis, and Aarts...
and, for Spanish and Portuguese, the corresponding subcorpora of the Integrated Reference Corpora for Spoken Romance Languages (C-ORAL-ROM) (Cresti and Moneglia 2005).

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