**ER 6.3 *Tags***

A tag question has two parts. The first is a statement. The second turns the statement into a question, by adding a phrase, or ‘tag’, to the end. For example:

(1) *John likes coffee, doesn’t he?*

(2) *John doesn’t like coffee, does he?*

These two examples show that the tag at the end often has ‘reversed polarity’. This means that if the statement is positive, the tag will be negative (*likes . . . doesn’t he?*), and if the statement is negative, the tag will be positive (*doesn’t . . . does he?*). When do we use sentences like this? What’s the difference in meaning between (1) and a ‘normal’ question like *Does John like coffee?*

Now focus on the verb used in the tag part. What verb is it? Here are some more sentences to consider:

(3) *John liked coffee, didn’t he?*

(4) *John hasn’t arrived yet, has he?*

(5) *John can swim, can’t he?*

(6) *John must work harder, mustn’t he?*

Though tag question polarity is often reversed, this is not always the case: the polarity of the statement and the tag can be the same. You can, for example, say *John likes coffee, does he?* What sense does this convey? How is it different in meaning from sentence (1)?

Use your conclusions to arrive at a statement which says what tag question are, how they are used, and how formed in StE. If you should need it, there’s an explanation below about the verb used in the tag part.

**The verb in the tag**

Our examples show that in StE, many tag questions are formed by using the verb *do*, operating as a \*substitute verb; sentences (1) to (3) are like this. Sentence (4) shows that when the auxiliary *have* is in the statement, this is used in the tag (*John hasn’t arrived yet, has he?*). When a modal verb, like *can* or *must* is used, this is repeated in the tag. This is what happens in sentences (5) and (6). All very complicated! Perhaps it helps if you think of the tag part as being a shortened ‘normal’ question. So *John hasn’t arrived yet, has he?* is a shortened version of *John hasn’t arrived yet, has John arrived yet?*