NEGOTIATING POWER THROUGH TAG QUESTIONS IN CRISIS NEGOTIATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Crisis negotiation is a unique form of law enforcement–civilian interaction, as the crime is ongoing at the time of the exchange. Consequently, crisis negotiators have the opportunity to positively influence the outcome of the incident. In order to accomplish this, negotiators must both manage the dynamic power relations and build rapport with the subject. In this paper, I explore the use of tag questions in crisis negotiations to simultaneously minimize power asymmetries and build rapport with the subject in order to exert influence over the subject and bring the crisis incident to a non-violent conclusion.

To identify the specific functions that tag questions fulfill in the pursuit of these overarching goals, I apply Holmes’ (1995) taxonomy of tag questions to negotiators’ tag questions from five different crisis incidents. Holmes (1995) divides tag questions into four types: modal, facilitative, softening, and challenging. Focusing primarily on facilitative and softening tag questions, I take an Interactional Sociolinguistic approach to ascertain what discursive functions the facilitative and softening tag questions are fulfilling for the negotiators in each incident. I supplement my analysis of the discourse of the five crisis incidents with five subject matter expert interviews in order to ground my research in the experiences of career FBI negotiators.

I find that in instances where the negotiator and the subject both perceive the negotiator as the more powerful interlocutor, facilitative and softening tag questions are valuable discursive
tools for: 1) reinforcing a ‘collaborative problem solving’ frame (Tannen & Wallat, 1993) minimizing the significance of the subject’s negative actions, and 3) turning orders into requests to influence the subject’s decision-making. The successful use of tag questions for these purposes allows the negotiator to appear empathic while maintaining control of the overall situation. However, I find that in situations where the subject perceives himself or herself as more powerful than the negotiator, tag questions are a less effective tool. The results of this study contribute to ongoing research in linguistics regarding the relationship between power and tag questions and offer insights to crisis negotiators into how linguistic tools can be used to accomplish their goals.
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I. Introduction

In law enforcement-civilian interaction, power dynamics are front and center in our understandings and expectations of how the interlocutors will behave. We assume that the institutional representatives are always in indisputable positions of power over their civilian counterparts. However, crisis negotiations are a unique form of law enforcement-civilian interaction with uniquely complex power relationships. According to Borowsky, “one of the defining characteristics of hostage negotiations is the struggle for control that occurs during the negotiation process. In hostage negotiation events both parties attempt to exert power in order to influence the actions of the other party” (2011, p. 1). In order to exert influence over the subject, crisis negotiators are taught to “shift roles” (Strentz, 2006) from police officer to counselor. This involves guiding the overarching interaction while simultaneously achieving solidarity with the civilian and offering them the illusion of control (Borowsky, 2011). These are very difficult goals to accomplish individually, let alone simultaneously. It is particularly complicated since different types of crisis negotiations involve different power relations and therefore require different negotiation strategies.

The two main types of crisis incidents are hostage incidents and non-hostage incidents. Noesner (1999) defines a hostage incident as one in which “subjects hold another person or persons for the purpose of forcing the fulfillment of substantive demands upon a third party, usually law enforcement.” (p. 7). He argues that in these cases, hostages are leverage, not targets. In contrast, non-hostage incidents involve “subjects acting out of emotion, having ill-defined goals, and making no substantive demands” (McMains and Mullens, 2015, p. 450). The category
of non-hostage incidents includes both barricade incidents and barricade with victim incidents. In these types of incidents, “individuals barricade themselves or hold others against their will, not to gain leverage over police to achieve a specific goal but to express their anger over events or at the individual they hold” (Noesner, 1999, p.8). The latter are much more dangerous, since the risk of injury or death is much greater for the victim in ‘barricade with victim’ incidents than it is for the hostage in typical hostage incidents (Noesner, 1999).

I decided to look at how tag questions were used in three hostage incidents and two non-hostage incidents to simultaneously build rapport and exert influence, as tag questions have been studied extensively in research on language and power. A tag question is “a syntactic device which serves to hedge the strength of the speech act in which it occurs” (Holmes, 1986, p. 2). Tag questions have two grammatical parts: a statement (which could be a declarative, an imperative, a description, an assessment, etc.) and an attached interrogative ‘tag’ (Hepburn & Potter, 2009, p. 72). Canonical tag questions are those which contain an auxiliary or modal verb in the tag, as in the tag question “It’s hard when they’re not there with you, isn’t it?” Invariant tag questions, such as ‘okay?’, ‘right?’, ‘huh?’, serve similar functions to canonical tag questions but do not have the same syntactic shape (Holmes, 1982; Stenström, Andersen, & Hasund, 2002). Because the literature suggests that they share similar overarching functions, I incorporated both types of tag questions into my analysis. I chose tag questions because I observed an interesting split in the literature in Linguistics over what functions tag questions fulfill in conversation: researchers such as Lakoff (1975) famously claimed that tag questions are part of ‘women’s speech’, and cause women to appear weak and unassertive. However, other researchers have argued that tag questions are used by powerful individuals to minimize power
asymmetries and build solidarity for the purposes of covert influence (Holmes, 1982; 1995). Further, others believe that tag questions are more overtly coercive strategies used to assert power (Cameron, McAlinden, & O’Leary, 1988). At the root of this debate are questions of power and solidarity- do tag questions build rapport or assert power? I argue that tag questions are polysemous in crisis negotiations. When successfully used, tag questions can assist negotiators with simultaneously building rapport and exerting influence over subjects. I hope to contribute to this linguistic debate by identifying the functions that tag questions serve in this high-stakes interactional context.

This pursuit falls within the discipline of forensic linguistics. While extremely broad, forensic linguistics can be defined as:

the interface between language, crime and law, where law includes law enforcement, judicial matters, legislation, disputes or proceedings in law, and even disputes which only potentially involve some infraction of the law or some necessity to seek a legal remedy (Olsson, 2000, p. 2).

Within this academic discipline, “various linguistic theories may be applied to the analysis of the language samples in an inquiry” (Olsson, 2000, p. 2). For this study, I utilize an Interactional Sociolinguistic approach to discourse analysis, borrowing from Critical Discourse Studies the concepts of power and institutional authority and the roles they play in interaction. My approach is mainly qualitative and data driven, as I analyze five separate case studies to better understand exactly how tag questions are used in unfolding discourse during crisis negotiations and what their functions reveal about the polysemy of power and solidarity of linguistic features. Three of the incidents are hostage negotiations, while the other two are non-hostage negotiations. Overall, approximately 8,000 lines of transcribed discourse are analyzed as part of this research. The
interactions were transcribed by federal law enforcement personnel, and were obtained from other researchers and a former crisis negotiator.

The tag questions in these transcripts are coded using Holmes’ (1995) taxonomy of tag questions. In this taxonomy, Holmes (1995) categorizes tag questions in two groups: speaker-oriented or modal tag questions and affective (or addressee-oriented) tag questions. For this paper, I focus particularly on affective tag questions, which she further divides into three groups: facilitative, softening, and challenging tag questions. I will discuss this taxonomy in more detail later in this paper. This structure allows me to look at the more immediate interactional goals that these different types of tag questions are being used to achieve within the overarching functions Holmes (1995) identifies for each category in her taxonomy.

My principal research question is as follows: ‘What is the role of tag questions in simultaneously building rapport and asserting influence in crisis negotiations?’ Within this larger question, I engage with the following questions: 1) Using Holmes’ (1995) taxonomy of tag questions, what kinds of tag questions are used most often in crisis negotiations? 2) What immediate interactional goals are they used to achieve? 3) Are there differences in how tag questions are used in two different types of crisis incidents? I hypothesized that facilitative tag questions would be the most commonly used type of tag question, as they are underscored in the literature as being a particularly good tool for rapport building (Holmes, 1982; Hepburn and Potter, 2009). I also hypothesized that facilitative and softening tag questions would be used to minimize perceived power asymmetries and position the negotiator as a helpful, empathic figure. Finally, I hypothesized that there would be a significantly larger percentage of tag questions in non-hostage incidents than in hostage incidents. I expected this would be the case because with
non-hostage incidents the civilian does not hold the victim to use as a bargaining chip and so would not be expected to question the negotiator’s power. This allows the negotiator to appear magnanimous in his or her minimization of the power differential while still maintaining overall control of the interaction. In contrast, I expected that the subjects in hostage incidents would be empowered by their possession of a valuable bargaining chip, so the negotiators would have to spend more discursive energy on repositioning themselves as more powerful than the subjects. In the course of my analysis, I discovered that perceived relative power and powerlessness cut across the two types of crisis situations relations, and that it is actually the subject’s perceived relative power vis-à-vis the negotiator that influences negotiators’ use of tag questions and their effects. I hope the findings from this study will contribute to the linguistics research community as well as offer insights to crisis negotiators that could eventually inform law enforcement training for these high-stakes interactions.

In the next section, I offer some background on the field of crisis negotiation, highlighting the dearth of literature on this type of interaction in Sociolinguistics. Following this background, I outline previous linguistic research on power, institutional-layperson interactions, questions and tag questions. I then offer my analysis of the data, in which I offer three interactional goals that affective tag questions are being used to accomplish. Specifically, I find that facilitative and softening tag questions fulfill the following interactional functions: 1) reinforcing a ‘collaborative problem solving’ frame (Tannen & Wallat, 1993; Gordon, 2015), 2) minimizing the significance of the subject’s negative behavior, and 3) softening requests for the purposes of influencing the subject’s immediate behavior. By appearing to minimize the power asymmetry in these ways, the negotiator is able to offer the subject the illusion of control. I also
offer counter-examples for situations in which tag questions are not effective in fulfilling these functions. It appears that the perceived power relation is what influences the use and effectiveness of tag questions, not the hostage and non-hostage distinction per se. I end with a summary of the findings, a discussion of their implications for the polysemy of power and solidarity in discourse, and some limitations and future directions.

II. Literature Review

*Background on Crisis Negotiations*

In 1973, Detective Harvey Schlossberg, Ph.D. and Lieutenant Frank Boltz developed new trainings for what eventually became known as the New York Police Department Hostage Recovery Program (Schlossberg 1979, Boltz and Hershey, 1979). Motivated by recent hostage incidents such as the case of Downs vs. United States and the hostage crisis at the Munich Olympics, law enforcement groups across the United States were reevaluating hostage situation tactics and shifting their emphasis from the reliance on intimidation and threats of force to a less aggressive approach (Strentz, Subject Matter Expert interview; Rogan & Hammer, 2002). Schlossberg and Boltz stressed the following points in their training: a) The importance of negotiating with the hostage-taker in a hostage incident, b) the importance of understanding a hostage-taker’s motivations and personality in a hostage situation, and c) the importance of slowing down an incident so time can work for the negotiator (McMains and Mullens, 2010). Later in 1973, the FBI began its own national training program at the FBI Academy in Quantico, VA, bringing together behavioral scientists and law enforcement personnel to determine effective strategies for successfully resolving these high-stakes incidents. For all cases, the goal
for the negotiator was, and continues to be, to end the incident with the subject’s voluntary surrender and “no loss of life”, including the life of the hostage-taker (Noesner, Subject Matter Expert interview).

In the 1980’s the focus of hostage negotiations shifted from hijackings and terrorist hostage-takings to “incidents that are more personal in nature, i.e. domestic incidents and barricaded subjects” (McMains and Mullens, 2010). The focus was broadened from ‘hostage’ negotiation to ‘crisis’ negotiation, which includes hostage incidents, suicide intervention, and any similar cases, such as ‘barricade with victim’ incidents. In the last two decades, suicide intervention has become one of the most common deployments for crisis negotiators (Regini, 2002; Regini, Subject Matter Expert interview). HOBAS, or the Hostage Barricade Database System, is the Crisis Negotiation Unit’s online database used to track crisis incidents nationally, going back to the late 1990s. According to Dr. Thomas Strentz, a subject matter expert who was interviewed for this research, in 2015 there were approximately 250 incidents that were classified in HOBAS as ‘hostage’ incidents and 620 that were classified as ‘barricade with victim’ incidents (Subject Matter Expert interview).

Over time, as the focus of the incidents changed so did the tactics for achieving optimal outcomes. There are a number of models designed by both behavioral scientists and law enforcement professionals to understand and promote successful crisis negotiations (see Donohue & Roberto, 1996; Noesner & Webster, 1997; Fowler & DeVivo, 2001; Vecchi, Van Hasselt, & Romano, 2005; McClain et al., 2006; Strentz, 2006; Hammer, 2007). However, according to my subject matter expert interviews, the Behavioral Change Stairway Model (BCSM) developed by Noesner & Webster (1997) and furthered by Vecchi et al. (2005) is the
model currently used as one of the primary training tools for the FBI Crisis Negotiation Unit (CNU). The model was designed primarily for non-hostage incidents and is illustrated by Vecchi et al. (2005) in Figure 1:

![BCSM Model](image)

**Figure 1: BCSM Model**
(Vecchi et al., 2005, p. 542)

The BCSM pictured above was designed to walk the negotiator through the process of influencing the subject to end the crisis peacefully. It contains five steps for the negotiators to follow, each involving different tactics. The five steps are 1) active listening, 2) empathy, 3) rapport, 4) influence, and 5) behavioral change (Noesner & Webster, 1997; Vecchi et al., 2005; for a slight variation on this model, see the Behavioral Influence Stairway Model (BISM) in Van Hasselt, Romano, & Vecchi, 2008). According to Noesner and Webster,

Applying active listening skills and showing empathy establish a degree of rapport between negotiators and subjects that can lead to the discussion of nonviolent alternatives to resolve incidents. The rapport creates an environment where negotiators can suggest various alternatives that the subject previously could not see or would not consider. (1997, p. 18)
Noesner and Webster (1997) list a number of specific techniques used by negotiators to accomplish ‘active listening’, including mirroring the last words of the subject, paraphrasing the subject’s speech, putting a label to the subject’s emotional state, summarizing the subject’s speech, using pauses to effectively keep the subject talking, offering minimal encouragers to indicate attention without stopping the subject’s speech, asking open-ended questions, and offering contextually relevant personal disclosures (Noesner, 1999; Vecchi et al., 2005). Many of these strategies reflect interactional features often associated with engagement in linguistic research. For example, the ‘minimal encouragers’ endorsed in the BCSM correspond with what linguists calls ‘backchannels’ (Yngve, 1970; Tannen, 1984), while the BCSM’s explanation of ‘mirroring’ is very close to the way linguists understand ‘repetition’, including its function as a rapport-building device (Schegloff, 1997; Stivers, 2004; Tannen, 2007). In addition, the BCSM’s support for effective pauses corresponds with the rich history of linguistic research on the functions of silence and the cultural norms that accompany them (Kurzon, 1998; Ephratt, 2008). Finally, as will be clear from subsequent sections of the literature review, questions of all types have been studied extensively in linguistic research.

However, the later stages such as ‘rapport building’ and ‘influence’ are more amorphous in their description. Rapport is defined as “a relationship characterized by trust and mutual affinity”, while influence is “the act or power of producing an effect without apparent force or direct authority” (Vecchi, 2011, p. 28). In the rapport stage, negotiators are encouraged to offer face-saving justifications for the subject’s actions, downplay the negative behavior of the subject, and find common ground with the subject. However, unlike in the active listening stage, it is less clear what the linguistic features are that trainers can point to in order to help negotiators achieve
these targeted interactional goals. The tactics for achieving influence are even more nebulous. It is in these two stages that I believe the field of Interactional Sociolinguistics can offer insights into how to operationalize the goals of ‘rapport’ and ‘influence’ by highlighting certain discursive tools that can be used to successfully accomplish these goals. In the following sections, I discuss the previous literature in Linguistics regarding covert and overt power strategies, looking particularly at the literature on questions in institutional discourse and the polysemy of tag questions in asserting influence and building rapport.

*Background on Power Research*

Merriam-Webster’s dictionary defines nine different senses of the word ‘power’, including “ability to act or produce an effect” and the “possession of control, authority, or influence over others” (merriam-webster.com, 2016). These two senses of the word ‘power’ have been the focus of a great deal of thought in the discipline of Critical Discourse Studies. I use Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) here instead of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) since Wodak and Meyer (2015) recommend that researchers “use the term Critical Discourse Studies for the theories, methods, analysis, applications and other practices of critical discourse analysts, and to forget about the confusing term ‘CDA’” (p. 3). Two of the foundational thinkers in CDS power research, Michael Foucault and Norman Fairclough, have written extensively on how power is exerted and enacted through language. In his critical investigation of the theamtics of power, Foucault argues that we cannot answer the question ‘what is power?’ Instead, he claims it is better to ask the question ‘by what means is it exercised?’ (Foucault, 1980). In order to answer this question, Foucault (1980) distinguishes between the exercise of power via ‘capacity’ and the exercise of power via ‘relation’. Capacity is “that which is exerted over things and gives the
ability to modify, use, consume, or destroy them-- a power which stems from aptitudes directly inherent in the body or relayed by external instruments” (Foucault, 1982, p. 786). In contrast, ‘relation’ highlights the relationships between social actors, which can be individuals or groups. Relational power is “an ensemble of actions which induce others and follow from one another” (Foucault, 1982, p. 786).

Fairclough also distinguishes between two types of power: power in discourse, which is similar to Foucault’s ‘power via relation’, and power behind discourse, which is similar to Foucault’s ‘power via capacity’. Power in discourse is concerned with “discourse as a place where relations of power are actually exercised and enacted”, while power behind discourse focuses on “how orders of discourse, as dimensions of the social orders of social institutions or societies, are themselves shaped and constituted by relations of power” (Fairclough, 1989, p. 43). However, Fairclough notes that, “power, whether it be 'in' or 'behind' discourse, is never definitively held by anyone person, or social grouping, because power can be won and exercised only in and through social struggles in which it may also be lost” (Fairclough, 1989, p. 43).

Indeed, Cameron, Frazer, Harvey, Rampton, and Richardson (1992) argue that human interactions are an “intricate mosaic of differing power potentials in different social relations” (p. 20). These different social and discursive relations are complex, and continuously evolving (Mayr, 2008, p. 15).

Fairclough (1989) points out that “power in discourse is to do with powerful participants controlling and constraining the contributions of non-powerful participants” (p. 46, emphasis in original). In addition, power in discourse is centered on the struggle over different interpretations of meaning. Holzscheiter (2005) ties this problem to discursive choices in the following way:
This struggle for semiotic hegemony relates to the selection of ‘specific linguistic codes, rules for interaction, rules for access to the meaning-making forum, rules for decision-making, turn-taking, opening of sessions, making contributions and interventions’ (Holzscheiter, 2005, p. 69, in Wodak, 2009, p. 35)

In Holzscheiter’s view, the very structure of communicative norms is maintained by powerful individuals in order to perpetuate their power. What is considered appropriate in certain contexts is dependent upon the power relations central to that context. For example, in the context of an American courtroom, all of the aspects highlighted by Holzscheiter (2005) are strictly regulated, including who may enact what speech acts, who may interact with whom, and who is expected to draw conclusions from the interactions that occur. The “discursive strategies” used to gain, control, and retain power are what distinguish ‘communicative uses’ of language—language which is aimed primarily at producing understanding—from ‘strategic uses’ of language, which are oriented towards successfully influencing others to enact a certain event or result. (Habermas, 1984, 1987). However, these uses of language are closely intertwined (Foucault, 1982). Strategic uses of language for enacting influence can be overt or covert (Lukes, 1974; Wang, 2006), but even “the salience of latent and hidden techniques and forces of power… can be deconstructed via discourse analysis” (Wodak, 2009, p. 36).

However, the linguistic strategies that serve as forces of power, particularly those that Wodak (2009) terms “latent and hidden techniques” (p. 36) can potentially be ambiguous or even polysemous depending on the context. Tannen (1994) highlights the complicated relationship between power and solidarity in interaction using the following graphical representation:
She argues that a linguistic feature, such as conversational overlap, can be perceived as an attempt to dominate the conversation— a tactic for the assertion and maintenance of power. Alternatively, the same strategy can be perceived as an attempt to show engagement and establish rapport— a tactic for closeness and solidarity building. The strategy perceived by the interlocutor depends almost entirely on the context and the addressee’s social and cultural expectations of conversation. In addition, the same linguistic feature can be used to achieve both power and solidarity at the same time. For example, asking the question “where is your coat?” to a colleague “shows friendly concern and suggests a parent-child constellation” (Tannen, 1994, p. 25). The potential polysemy of linguistic features is integral to what makes tag questions a valuable tool for crisis negotiators. Before I address this further, I apply these theoretical discussions of power specifically to institutional discourse.

**Discourse and Institutional Power**

Before discussing discourse in institutional contexts, it would be helpful to briefly discuss what I am referring to with the term ‘discourse’, as it is used differently in different subfields of
sociolinguistics (Johnstone, 2008; Mayr, 2008). I am using it here in the sense of discourse as ‘language in use’, or “a culturally and socially organized way of speaking” (Mayr, 2008, p. 7). Discourse, understood in this way, is both the source and the result of our knowledge about the world, our communities, and the communicative norms we adhere to (Johnstone, 2008). Researchers who adopt this definition “assume that language is used to mean something and to do something” (Richardson, 2007, p. 24), and that this meaning and doing is inextricably connected to the context in which it appears.

In particular, discourse plays an influential role in the maintenance of institutional power. In Agar’s (1985) definition of institutions, he posits that institutions are “a socially legitimated expertise together with those persons authorized to implement it” (p. 164, emphasis added). This suggests that institutions are not restricted to physical settings, such as a courtroom or a hospital, and therefore refers to any powerful authority that has special knowledge and is socially legitimated. Agar’s definition also includes the understanding of institutions as “involving asymmetrical roles between institutional representatives or ‘experts’ and ‘non-experts’ or ‘clients’, who must comply with institutional norms and objectives” (Mayr, 2008, p. 4).

There is an abundance of literature on institutional discourse that has focused on understanding the relationship between discourse and power (see Mumby, 1988, 2001; Drew & Heritage, 1992; Van Dijk, 1993; Fairclough, 1993, 1995a, 1995b; Wodak, 2009; Mumby & Clair, 1997; Sarangi & Roberts, 1999; Iedema & Wodak, 1999; Cameron, 2000; Iedema, 2003; etc.). While researchers and theorists agree that institutions have immense power, there are many who argue that this “power is achieved not by mere oppression but also by persuasion and consent and the complicity on the part of people” (Mayr, 2008, p. 4). In other words, institutions
find ways to influence civilians to accept and protect the established societal power asymmetries. This argument is what Scott (2001) refers to as the ‘second stream’ tradition in power research. While the mainstream tradition has tended to focus on power as overt domination and oppression, second-stream research “has been mainly concerned with the significance of [the state and its institutions’] persuasive influence” (Mayr, 2008, p. 11). These are the covert discursive strategies that “enlist subjects to their ‘natural’ cause” (Iedema, 1998, p. 497) and influence them to act in a way that is desired by powerful individuals. In this case, ‘natural’ is being used to mean that the power relations are ‘naturalized’ and made to seem as though the structure is simply how things are, which accounts for the covert influence. The focus of my present research is the use covert discursive tools by powerful individuals to achieve their desired ends. In particular, I am interested in the value of tag questions for covert power assertion and rapport building in crisis negotiations. Before discussing tag questions however, I will review the literature on questions more generally, and their role in the assertion of power in interaction.

*Power and Questions*

Heritage (2002) defines questions as “a form of social action, designed to seek information and accomplished in a turn at talk by means of interrogative syntax’ (p. 147). However, this seems too simplistic, because questions accomplish a number of different objectives in a variety of forms, using both interrogative and non-interrogative syntax (Freed & Ehrlich, 2009). Despite the lack of consistency in form, “[t]he nature of actuality –of things that have happened, or what things ‘are’” appears to be crucial to understanding the purpose of
questions (Tracy & Robles, 2009, p. 132). Tracy and Robles further explain the role of questions in institutional discourse:

Questions do important work when it comes to negotiating an institutional encounter. As arbiters of reality, questions are a primary means by which institutions determine truth and amass facts. Questions are account seekers: they do the jobs of eliciting, as well as asserting, accounts of reality (Tracy & Robles, 2009, p. 133).

The elicitation and assertion of a particular reality is an integral aspect of power and control in interaction. Similarly, question and answer pairs highlight power inequalities behind the discourse by implying that a questioner has the right to hold another accountable for a particular piece of information (Tracy & Robles, 2009). Answering questions is “treated as a basic moral obligation” for all interactional participants (Clayman, 2001, p. 404; see also Schegloff, 1968; Heritage, 1984), which imposes a questioner’s will on the addressee by constraining the possible topics available for the addressee’s response (Goody, 1978; Rogers & Farace, 1975; Wang, 2006; Tracy & Robles, 2009). The reason for this stems from our understanding of questions and answers as two parts of an adjacency pair. According to Schegloff (2007), an adjacency pair is:

(a) composed of two turns, (b) by different speakers, (c) adjacently placed; that is, one after the other, (d) these two turns are relatively ordered; that is, they are differentiated into “first pair parts” (FPPs, or Fs for short) and “second pair parts” (SPPs, or Ss for short). First pair parts are utterance types such as question, request, offer, invitation, announcement, etc.—types which initiate some exchange. Second pair parts are utterance types such as answer, grant, reject, accept, decline… types which are responsive to the action of a prior turn… Besides being differentiated into Fs and Ss, the components of an adjacency pair are (e) pair type related; that is, not every second pair part can properly follow any first pair part. (p. 13)

In the case of question and answer adjacency pairs, the expected response to a question (FPP) is an answer (SPP). Refusing to complete the second pair part in the question-answer pair is a
violation of the relationship of ‘conditional relevance’, which suggests that the occurrence of a
first pair part makes the second pair part relevant (Schegloff, 2007). If “such a second pair part is
produced next, it is heard as responsive to the first pair part which preceded. If such a second
pair part is not produced next, its non-occurrence is as much of an event as its occurrence would
have been” (Schegloff, 2007). Because of these conversational norms, asking questions obliges
the addressee to provide a relevant response or “to be accountable for it’s absence” (Cameron,

There has been extensive research on how questions are used in a variety of institutional
contexts. Tracy and Robles (2009) offer an expansive literature review of this research,
particulatrly focusing on the contexts of doctor-patient interactions, courtroom interactions,
political interviews, research interview, therapeutic discourse, teacher-student interaction, and
law enforcement-civilian interaction. The research relating to police contexts is of particular
interest, since crisis negotiation is a type of law enforcement-civilian encounter. Much of the
research in this area to date is focused on police interviews (Shuy, 1993, 1998; Schafer &

Questioning strategies of police interviews are particularly relevant to the discussion of
power dynamics, as questioning strategies in this context play an integral role in the construction
of the suspect’s guilt or innocence by the police interviewer (Stokoe & Edwards, 2008). Gibbons
(2003) claims, “[t]here may be two objectives of legal questioning. One is a genuine process of
elicitation of information. Another is to obtain confirmation of a particular version of events that
the questioner has in mind” (p. 95). While both of these objectives can operate simultaneously,
focusing on the latter may lead to interrogation-style interviews. These are highly problematic,
since they often presume the guilt of the suspects, rather than initially presume their innocence, and can lead to coerced false confessions. In his work on police interviews, Shuy (1998) clarifies the linguistic distinctions between interrogations and interviews by highlighting different interactional choices on the part of the police, and argues that the police should do more interviewing than interrogating. Importantly, he argues that police interviewers “make use of less of their power than do interrogators” (Shuy, 1998, p. 12). However, making less use of their power does not imply that they are not asserting their institutional power in the interactions. Instead, the assertion of power is done in a less aggressive, overt manner. Shuy (1998) further outlines the distinctions in the following way:

An interview probes, but does not cross-examine. It inquires but does not challenge. It suggests rather than demands. It uncovers rather than traps. It guides rather than dominates. It is “you” focused rather than “I” focused. The interviewer’s questioning sequence moves first from open-ended wh-questions to probes with yes-no questions when appropriate… In contrast, interrogators make ample use of their power. They challenge, warn, accuse, deny, and complain. They are more direct. They demand and they dominate. Open-ended questions are infrequent, and probe questions tend to be challenges that indicate disbelief in what the suspect has said (Shuy, 1998, p. 12-13, emphasis added).

The distinction of overt versus covert power assertion drawn here is a very important one. While Shuy (1998) seems to suggest that there is less assertion of power in interviews than interrogations, in reality, power can still be exerted in interviews, though more covertly, through ‘guiding’ rather than ‘dominating’, since by “guiding” an interview law enforcement offers the subject the illusion of control. While questions are by nature a useful tool for powerful individuals in conversation, they can be more or less overtly dominating. The many uses for questions (i.e. probing, inquiring, cross-examining, challenging, etc.) and the different forms
questions can take to accomplish those speech acts highlight the contextual dependency of
questions in institutional interactions.

In the FBI’s Behavioral Change Stairway Model (BCSM), open-ended questions are only
considered a supplemental active listening skill, while negotiators are encouraged to avoid
yes/no questions entirely. This was surprising to me, but former crisis negotiator and subject
matter expert Christopher Voss explained that “the smartest thing to do is to get them talking
without asking them questions… because they are used to being questioned or interrogated, so
the minute you don’t do that they really like it” (Subject Matter Expert interview). However,
when questions are used, certain open-ended questions are considered more valuable than others.
For example, ‘what’ and ‘how’ opened-ended questions are significantly more effective than
‘why’ questions (Voss, Subject Matter Expert interview). Voss posited, “the question ‘why’
makes people defensive in every culture on the planet, so you want to be real careful about ever
asking a ‘why’ question” (Voss, Subject Matter Expert interview). Crucially, he argues that the
secret to knowing when to ask questions and when to refrain comes from what he calls
‘contextual intelligence’. I will come back to this idea later in the paper. In the following section,
I explore the relationship between power and questions even further, looking specifically at one
questioning strategy: tag questions.

*Power and Tag Questions*

The research on tag questions has gone through a fascinating metamorphosis since
Lakoff’s (1973) hypotheses regarding the role of tag questions in ‘women’s speech’. According
to Lakoff,

A tag question, then, might be thought of as a declarative statement
without the assumption that the statement is to be believed by the
addressee: one has an out, as with a question. A tag gives the addressee leeway, not forcing him [sic] to go along with the views of the speaker (Lakoff, 1973, p. 54).

She argued that tag questions are much more likely to be used by women than men, and that they indicate uncertainty or an unwillingness to commit to the proposition outlined in the assertion attached to the tag. This idea was refuted by a number of researchers, who contested that tag questions are used by powerless individuals regardless of gender (Dubois & Crouch, 1975; O’Barr & Atkins, 1980). Later, Cameron, McAlinden & O’Leary (1988) offered a radically different approach to tag questions. Citing Hudson (1975) and Harris (1984), Cameron and her colleagues argue that tag questions “function as an interactional resource of the powerful rather than the powerless in conversation” (Cameron et al., 1988, p. 88). They found that tag questions were preeminent among persuasive questioning forms. They serve as an invitation for the addressee to agree with the speaker, and to validate the speaker’s interpretation of reality.

This suggests that tag questions are valuable tools for power and influence in interaction. Tag questions are “specifically intended to prompt a respondent to confirm or deny a version of events presented in the question” (Newbury & Johnson, 2006, p. 221). In addition, Cameron, et al. (1988) point out, “if a question contains a completed proposition, this takes more interactive work to challenge than it does to assent to; the consequence is that respondents tend to produce confirmations of the embedded proposition” (Cameron et al., 1988, p. 87). Going even further, Tsui (1992) observes, “the very construction of a tag question suggests that the speaker has certain assumptions and is biased towards a certain answer” (92). However, on the surface, they still appear to do what Lakoff noted in the quote above- in theory, a tag question does give the addressee leeway since it is phrased as a question rather than simply an assertion of fact.
Holmes (1984, 1995) researched tag questions further and found that different types of tag questions may have different functions. She discusses two main types of tag questions, which she calls modal and affective tag questions. Modal tags request information or confirmation of information about which the questioner is uncertain, such as “It’s three o’clock, right?” They are speaker-oriented, designed to fill the questioner’s need for information (Cameron et al., 1988, p. 82). In their empirical studies, Holmes (1984) and Cameron et al. (1988) found that both more and less powerful interlocutors used modal tag questions.

In contrast, affective tag questions are addressee-oriented, indicating at least a superficial concern for the addressee. In the same empirical studies conducted by Holmes (1984) and Cameron et al. (1988), affective tag questions were used almost exclusively by the more powerful interlocutors. The affective function is subdivided into three sub-functions: facilitation, softening, and challenging (Holmes, 1995). These functions deal specifically with what Brown and Levinson (1978) term ‘positive and negative politeness’. The concepts of positive and negative politeness are closely intertwined with the notions of face and face threatening acts. The concepts of face and face threatening acts were discussed in early work by Goffman (1967) and further developed by Brown and Levinson (1978). Brown and Levinson (1978) argue that all interaction is characterized by concern for one’s own and one’s interlocutors’ autonomy needs (labeled ‘negative face’) and his or her desire to be liked (labeled ‘positive face’). Any threats to those concerns are considered face-threatening acts (FTAs). Facilitative tag questions can be used by a speaker to show a positive interest in and solidarity with the addressee. This speaks to both interlocutors’ desires to be liked and accepted, which correspond with Brown and Levinson’s (1978) concept of ‘positive face’. An example of a facilitative tag question would be
“I understand what you are saying about going to jail, okay?” These types of tag questions invite the addressee to contribute to the discourse” (Holmes, 1995, p. 81). In doing so, they are also often used to induce addressees to speak at length (Cameron et al., 1988). Softeners, conversely, mitigate speech that might otherwise be interpreted as a demand, a criticism or an order, all of which would threaten the addressee’s desire for autonomy, or ‘negative face’. An example of this would be “I’ll give him the number to call you and you pick up the phone, okay?” Holmes describes them as “negative politeness devices, used to attenuate the force of negatively affective utterances, such as directives” (Holmes, 1995, p. 81). Both of these types of tag questions are used to build a positive relationship with the addressee, which is an integral part of successfully asserting influence.

However, tag questions can also be used to challenge an addressee or express disbelief in his or her stated view of reality. An example of a challenging tag question would be “Well that seems a little extreme, doesn’t it?” Tag questions, when used for this purpose, are “confrontational strategies [which] may pressure a reluctant addressee to reply or aggressively boost the force of a negative speech act” (Holmes, 1995, p. 80). It is clear then that tag questions, though they all conduce organized talk, can vary dramatically above the level of the utterance in their discourse properties and below the level of the utterance in terms of grammatical and phonological content. Such variation contributes a great deal to the feature’s social meaning potential, widely expanding the indexical field of the feature (Moore & Podesva, 2009, p. 479).

As Moore and Podesva (2009) claim in the quote above, tag questions can vary below the level of the utterance, where they can have canonical tag question structure such as “It is true, isn’t it?” or invariant tag question structure such as “It is true, right?” Tag questions can also vary above the level of the utterance, with various communicative functions such as facilitative,
softening, challenging, and modal functions (Holmes, 1995). The best way to determine which types of tag questions are occurring is to “[examine] their internal composition and by situating them in their broader discursive and social stylistic contexts” (Moore & Podesva, 2009, p. 447).

In one recent study, Hepburn and Potter (2009) analyzed Child Protective Service calls and found that facilitative and softening tag questions are particularly common during ‘crying sequences’, where the caller is momentarily unable to continue communicating due to extreme emotionality. The authors note that at those times in the call, Child Protective Officers sympathetically acknowledge the mental state of the caller and tend to soften the presumptive nature of describing the caller’s psychological state or circumstances with a tag question (Hepburn & Potter 2009, p. 10). The tag questions Hepburn and Potter (2009) encountered in this particular context were affiliative and had a weak response requirement, which the authors argued made them well suited to keeping callers on the line during moments of extreme emotionality. However, it is important to note that just because tag questions are ‘facilitative’ or ‘softening’ does not mean that they are not coercive. They are still being used to strategically influence an addressee’s behavior in a way that is favorable to the institutional representative.

To summarize, power is maintained, pursued and enacted through language using overt or covert discursive strategies. Questions have a long association with institutional power in the literature due to the structural and topical constraints questions place on the addressee’s next turn, as well as the inequality of access for questioners and addressees to the discursive shaping of reality in institutional interactions. Tag questions, which are a subset of questions, have an even more complex relationship with power. Originally considered both a linguistic choice of the powerless and a tool for interrogation, research on tag questions has shown that affective tag
questions are generally a tool utilized by powerful interlocutors. Different types of affective tag questions, such as facilitative tag questions and softening tag questions, build solidarity, while others, like challenging tag questions, are more aggressive in nature. Facilitative tag questions in particular have been shown to keep emotional interlocutors talking and build relationships between law enforcement and civilians by appearing to invite the civilians to co-construct their shared reality with law enforcement. However, the highly influential nature of tag questions suggests that covert power can be engaged through facilitative tag questions in order to bring the addressee’s perception of reality to match the questioner’s perceived reality. This polysemy of power and rapport building suggests that facilitative tag questions are a particularly valuable linguistic strategy for crisis negotiators in their efforts to resolve crises with no casualties.

Based on all the findings discussed in this section, I posit that facilitative tag questions have the ability to serve as a uniquely effective tool for simultaneous rapport building and influence assertion in crisis negotiations. They appear to minimize the power differential by projecting an inclusive approach to decision-making, which is valuable when the negotiator is offering the subject the illusion of control. However, facilitative tag questions actually reinforce the negotiator’s power because they invite the subject to accept the negotiator’s view of reality. This speaks to the polysemy of tag questions as strategies signaling both power and solidarity simultaneously. Nevertheless, as Moore and Podesva (2009) noted, the aspects that tag questions index are contextually dependent. Later in my analysis, I will offer examples of the importance of ‘contextual intelligence’ (Voss, Subject Matter Expert interview), and its relation to situating the negotiator’s strategic use of tag questions in the context of the immediate power relations.
However, before I address that complex issue, I will introduce the discourse that served as data for this paper and discuss the methodology used for its analysis.

III. Data and Methodology

Background on the Data

The data for this study comes from transcriptions of all or a good portion of the discourse of five crisis incidents, which took place in the United States during the 1980’s. There are approximately 8,000 lines of discourse across the five different incidents, which were transcribed by federal law enforcement personnel and obtained from other researchers, as well as a former crisis negotiator. Three of the incidents are cases where the subject was conducting a criminal activity, such as robbing a bank, but is interrupted by the arrival of law enforcement. In two of these three cases, the subjects take hostages from inside the bank in order to negotiate for their own freedom. In the other criminal case, the subject barricades himself inside the house of an older couple as the police curtail his escape route. One incident has an optimal outcome where the hostage is released and the subject surrenders himself to the police. The second had a less optimal outcome where the hostage is recovered but the subjects commit suicide. In the third case the outcome is unknown.

The other two incidents are grouped under the category of ‘non-hostage’ situations. As discussed previously, these are cases where subjects hold individuals who are known to them against their will in an act of emotional distress with ill-defined goals (Noesner, 1999). In these cases, the individuals taken against their will are labeled ‘victims’ instead of ‘hostages’ (Voss, Subject Matter Expert interview; Noesner, Subject Matter Expert interview). In one of the cases,
the outcome was optimal, where the subject released the victim and then surrendered himself to the police. However, the outcome of the second case was significantly less optimal, as the subject shot and killed one of the victims, released two, and then committed suicide. In describing the outcomes of these incidents, I purposefully avoid the term ‘unsuccessful’ when describing the negotiations and their outcomes, as the final decisions made by the subjects can only be controlled to a certain extent by the negotiator (Vecchi, Subject Matter Expert interview). Figure 3 offers a visual representation of the data described above:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incident</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bank_1</td>
<td>One hostage-taker holding elderly couple hostage in their home</td>
<td>Hostages released, Subject surrendered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bank_2</td>
<td>Two hostage-takers holding one hostage in the bank</td>
<td>Hostage released, subjects committed suicide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bank_3</td>
<td>One hostage-taker holding one hostage in the bank</td>
<td>Outcome unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic_1</td>
<td>Man holding baby in home</td>
<td>Victim released, subject surrendered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic_2</td>
<td>Man holding two daughters and stepson at home, wants to trade the children for their mother</td>
<td>One victim killed, two released, subject committed suicide</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3: Crisis Negotiation Transcripts

As I only have complete transcripts for two of the five incidents, I chose to examine the effects of each negotiator’s uses of tag questions in the immediate discursive context, rather than utilize the outcome of the entire negotiation as a factor in my analysis. By this I mean that I examined whether or not the immediate interactional goal was achieved, such as whether or not the
negotiators were able to influence the subjects to extend deadlines or decide against shooting their partners, instead of factoring in whether or not the subjects surrendered and released the hostages unharmed.

Subject Matter Expert Interviews

I supplemented my analysis of the discourse with subject matter expert interviews. I interviewed five former FBI crisis negotiators; all five had long careers as crisis negotiators and have written books or spoken publically about their experiences. In addition, they all contributed in some way to the development or instruction of FBI crisis negotiation training. As a researcher, it was important for me to ground my study in both the previous literature and the past experiences of practitioners. Since I have never engaged in a crisis negotiation, the subject matter expert insights were extremely helpful in understanding where my conclusions fit into law enforcement’s current understandings about how these volatile interactions unfold. I wanted to learn what discursive strategies they believe work, and which ones should be avoided in the pursuit of successful negotiations. By interviewing the experts, I hoped to gain valuable background knowledge and insights into the development of crisis negotiation training. As a consequence of this foundation, I hope the findings discussed in this paper will be valuable to both the research community through a deeper understanding of the functions of tag questions in crisis negotiations and to the law enforcement community through insights into how different types of tag questions and other discourse strategies can be effectively utilized in high-stakes interactions.

I connected with most of these men using Milroy and Milroy’s (1978) ‘friend of a friend approach’. After my first interview with Christopher Voss, a retired FBI Special Agent who
served as the lead international kidnapping negotiator and one of the lead CNU instructors in the FBI's National Crisis Negotiation Course, I inquired about other current or former negotiators who might be willing to share their experiences with me. Voss gave me the names of three others, and offered to introduce me to them via e-mail. This led to three more interviews: the first with Charles Regini, a retired crisis negotiator with the CNU, the second with Dr. Gregory Vecchi, a retired Unit Chief of the FBI Behavioral Science Unit and seasoned hostage negotiator with the CNU, and the third with Gary Noesner, a retired Unit Chief of the CNU and Chief Negotiator for the FBI. The final subject matter expert, Dr. Thomas Strentz, was a founding member of the FBI Behavioral Science Unit and is currently serving on the board of The California Association of Hostage Negotiators (CAHN). I was directed to him when I requested access to audio recordings or transcripts of old crisis negotiations from CAHN, and my request to interview him followed naturally from our communications regarding data access.

**Analyzing the Data**

I took a mainly qualitative, data-driven approach to analyzing the discourse of the five transcribed crisis negotiation incidents, with the inclusion of some quantitative elements. I first read through the negotiations multiple times, noting interactional features and discursive patterns that seemed potentially meaningful for gaining linguistic insights into crisis negotiations. From this I noticed that questions appeared to be doing a variety of different things in these high-stakes interactions. As in the research of Benkendorf, Prince, Rose da Fina, & Hamilton (2001), it was from these data-driven observations that “themes emerged and research questions were generated” (p. 202; see also Agar, 1980; Johnstone, 2000).
For each of the five interactions used as case studies for this analysis, I coded each of the crisis negotiator’s questions as either a direct question (DQ) or a tag question (TQ) based on the syntactic form presented in the transcript. If a question appeared in the form of a declarative sentence with the addition of a canonical or invariant tag, such as “You haven’t woken them up yet, have you?” or “I need you to show some good faith here, okay?” the question was coded as a tag question (Holmes, 1986; Hepburn & Potter, 2009). If the question appeared in a single interrogative form, such as “What kind of weapon do you have in there?” the question was coded as a direct question. While there are certainly other forms of questions that are denoted via intonation, I was limited to what was present in the law enforcement transcription and what the addressees acknowledged as a question based on their responses. In my coding, I also documented the transcript page number where each question occurred, the preceding assertions of the tag questions, the type of tag used (i.e. ‘right’, ‘okay’, ‘isn’t it’, etc.), and the functional category from Holmes’ (1995) taxonomy in which the tag question belonged.

I categorized the tag questions using Holmes’ (1995) taxonomy based on the speech event occurring and the surrounding discursive context. When the negotiator requested previously unknown information using a tag question, the utterance was coded as a modal tag question. An example of this would be “You haven’t woken them up, have you?” When the negotiator uttered an imperative such as “stay on the line” and then added a tag such as “okay”, the utterance was coded as a softener. The category of facilitative tag questions was more difficult to isolate, but was generally defined as tag questions which expressed a speaker’s solidarity with or positive attitude towards the addressee, or invited the addressee to participate as an agentive member in finding a desirable solution to the problem at hand. An example of this
would be “I’m open to suggestions, okay?”. Finally, when tag questions were used to directly challenge a subject’s worldview or values, or were otherwise confrontational, the utterances were categorized as challenging tag questions. An example of this would be “you’re a grown up, right?”. However, it was not always so clear which type a tag question belonged to, as occasionally I could make the argument for two different types. When that occurred, I chose the category I thought the tag question seemed more suited for based on the discursive context. As Cameron et al. notes, “tag questions, like other linguistic forms, are characterized by complex multi-functionality and diversity of meaning, so that a certain degree on arbitrariness is to be expected in any functional classification” (1989, p. 85).

Once I had categorized all the tag questions, I then calculated the percentage of tag questions out of the total number of questions asked by the crisis negotiator for each transcript. The table illustrating these findings can be found on page thirty-three. I also calculated the percentage of each type of tag question in order to see which types occurred most frequently in each transcript. Finally, I compared the percentage of total tag questions in all the hostage negotiation transcripts with the percentage of total tag questions in both of the non-hostage negotiations transcripts using a 2x2 Chi-Squared Test. This allowed me to test whether there was a statistically significant difference in the percentage of tag questions between the two types.

For my qualitative analysis, I took an Interactional Sociolinguistic approach to discourse analysis, utilizing the previously discussed theoretical notions of power and institutions that are foundational to Critical Discourse Studies (CDS). Interactional Sociolinguistics is “a theoretical and methodological perspective on language use that is based in linguistics, sociology, and anthropology” (Schiffrin, 1996, p. 307). It is focused on situating meaning-making in context
and examining the creation of relationships and identities through interaction. This approach is
rooted in the work of John Gumperz (1982) and Erving Goffman (1967). Much of the research in
this field deals with issues of politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1978), narrative (Schiffrin, 1996;
De Fina, 2003; Hamilton, 2010), constructed dialogue (Schiffrin, 1993; Tannen 2007), framing
(Goffman, 1974; Tannen & Wallat, 1993; Gordon, 2015), and positioning (Davies & Harré,
1990; van Langenhove and Harré, 1999), among many other linguistic strategies related to the
construction of identity and community. For my analysis of the crisis negotiation transcripts, I
applied Tannen’s (1994) framework of the polysemy of power and solidarity as well as previous
research on interactional frames (Tannen & Wallat, 1993, Gordon, 2015).

Based on the context surrounding each tag question, I determined the function of each tag
question using Holmes’ four distinctions: modal, softening, facilitative, and challenging.

Looking particularly at the facilitative and softening tag questions, I observed that certain
patterns in the immediate goals of the negotiators were apparent across the transcripts. In the
following section, I present these patterns and offer some examples of how tag questions fit into
the interactional and overarching strategies of crisis negotiators.

IV. Findings and Discussion

In my examination of the five crisis negotiation incidents, I found that negotiators can use
facilitative and softening tag questions as polysemous discursive tools to simultaneously exercise
power and build rapport with a subject. However, I found that facilitative and softening tag
questions are underutilized tools in these interactions with respect to their attested value in both
the literature and the interactions themselves. In making these claims, I must address two
assertions: 1) tag questions are used with low relative frequency, and 2) they are useful in crisis negotiations. In this section, I will offer a brief quantitative analysis to support the first assertion and a qualitative discourse analysis of the crisis negotiations to support the second assertion. In this qualitative analysis, I argue that facilitative and softening tag questions reinforce the negotiator’s framing of the interaction as ‘collaborative problem solving’, minimize the severity of the offenses committed by the subject, and suggest “solutions and alternatives that are suitable to both” the subject and the negotiator (Vecchi, 2009, p. 28). Facilitative and softening tag questions accomplish this by appearing to invite the subject to co-construct the reality of the situation and offer the subject the illusion of control, when in fact the negotiator is guiding the subject to the negotiator’s desired conclusion. However, the efficacy of facilitative and softening tag questions for achieving these goals is contextually dependent. For example, when a subject asserts his or her power through the use of threats, refusals to answer the negotiator’s questions, or claims to the role of questioner, one would expect to find fewer facilitative or softening tag questions from the negotiators, because these types of tag questions would work to further minimize the perceived power of the negotiator in the minds of subjects who are already asserting a dangerous degree of control over the situation.

*Tag Questions: Frequency*

In order to ascertain the frequency of tag questions in the discourse, I coded all the questions that appeared as either tag questions (TQs) or direct questions (DQs). This allowed me to examine how often the crisis negotiators chose to employ tag questions as opposed to other questioning strategies. The table in Figure 4 illustrates the overall percentage of tag questions in each transcript:
In this table, it is clear that tag questions were undeniably the less preferred option when choosing questioning strategies. The case of Domestic_1 is interesting, as the difference in the percentage of tag questions is significantly higher when compared to the next highest percentage of tag questions using a two-sided, two-sample test for equality of proportions with continuity correction (a special case of a 2x2 Chi-squared test), with a p-value of 0.0003181 when $\alpha=0.01$. I first wondered whether this difference was attributable to type of negotiation, but Domestic_2, the other non-hostage case, has a significantly lower frequency of tag questions than Domestic_1, with a p-value of 1.259e-05 when $\alpha=0.01$. However, a closer look at Domestic_2 found that this case is not a prototypical ‘non-hostage’ situation. In the Domestic_2 incident, the subject has very specific demands for law enforcement: he wants to trade his common law wife, who the police have in protective custody, for his daughters and stepson that he is holding in the house. Therefore, despite being a domestic incident in which the highly emotional subject knows the victims (McMains & Mullins, 2015), it does not fit the requirement for ill-defined goals in Noesner’s (1999) definition of non-hostage situations. This suggests that perhaps the two categories are less distinct than they might appear. Because of this complicating factor, data from
more incidents would be required in order to make any definitive claims about the connections between negotiation type and tag question usage. However, I discovered that perceived relative powerlessness and power cut across the two types of crisis situations relations, and that it is actually the subject’s perceived relative power vis-à-vis the negotiator that influences negotiators’ use of tag questions and their effects.

Having established that tag questions are a less preferred option in the case studies used for this paper, I utilized Holmes’ (1995) taxonomy of tag questions to see which types of tag questions appeared most frequently when they do appear. I found that with the exception of Domestic_2, the most common type of tag question used by far was facilitative. As a reminder, an example of this type of tag question would be “You showed them you’re a stand up guy, right?”. This is in line with the findings of Cameron et al. (1988), who found that in asymmetric power relations more powerful interlocutors used facilitative tag questions more often than any other kind of tag question. Figure five illustrates the percentages of each type of tag question for each of the five different crisis negotiation transcripts:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Modal</th>
<th>Facilitative</th>
<th>Softening</th>
<th>Challenging</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bank_1</td>
<td>16.667%</td>
<td>66.667%</td>
<td>16.667%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bank_2</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bank_3</td>
<td>35.714%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>7.143%</td>
<td>7.143%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic_1</td>
<td>5.68%</td>
<td>79.55%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>2.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic_2</td>
<td>6.67%</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5: Types of TQs

It is interesting that the case that had the lowest percentage of facilitative questions, Domestic_2, also had the highest percentage of challenging tag questions. This suggests a crisis negotiation strategy that was more interrogation-like in nature (Shuy, 1998), which may have contributed to
its less than optimal outcome in which one victim was murdered and the subject committed suicide. In the next section, I will discuss in more detail how negotiators used tag questions to influence the subjects in each case to agree to a peaceful resolution of the crisis.

*Tag Questions: What are they doing?*

As we have seen in the literature, powerful interlocutors use tag questions in a variety of contexts to facilitate dialogue on the part of the addressee, soften criticisms, and induce agreement (Cameron et al., 1988; Holmes, 1995; Hepburn & Potter, 2009). I was interested to see what functions tag questions were accomplishing in this unique high-stakes interactional context. Three particular trends stood out to me: 1) the use of facilitative tag questions to reinforce a ‘problem solving’ frame (Tannen & Wallat, 1993; Gordon, 2015), 2) the use of facilitative tag questions to minimize the significance of the subject’s negative actions to date, and 3) the use of softening tag questions to turn orders into requests for the purposes of influencing the subject’s immediate behavior. This ‘problem solving’ frame corresponds to Taylor and Donohue’s (2006) “we-are-in-this-together context”. I use the concept of framing here in the sense of interactional frames, or “a definition of what is going on in the interaction, without which no utterance (or movement or gesture) could be interpreted” (Tannen & Wallat, 1993, p. 60; see also Goffman, 1974; Gordon, 2015). These functions of facilitative and softening tag questions correspond effectively with the goals outlined in the Behavioral Change Stairway Model (BCSM) for building rapport and influence with the subject.

*Tag Questions and Rapport*

The first example of a crisis negotiator’s use of tag questions to support a ‘collaborative problem solving frame’ comes from Domestic_1 at the beginning of the negotiator’s interaction
with the subject. In addition to wanting his girlfriend to come back to him, the subject was
avoiding a warrant for his arrest that was issued for a previous offense. The negotiator quickly
ascertains that there are two different issues, and the subject agrees that the warrant is the bigger
problem. However, as the negotiator is trying to talk to the subject about the warrant, the subject
continues to ask to speak with his girlfriend.

The following excerpt illustrates the negotiator’s attempts to remind the subject that he is
there to help him solve these issues. The N denotes the speech of the crisis negotiator, and the S
denotes the speech of the subject. The bolded elements highlight the tag questions utilized by the
negotiator, as well as the indicators of their success in the immediate interactional context. All
names and places are redacted, so names and places are indicated with the markers <NAME>
and <PLACE>:

Excerpt 1: Domestic_1

1. N: Well I’m gonna you know I’m not gonna say hey believe that right now, I haven’t talked
to the <NAME> yet. You wanna give me some time to work on that and I’ll call you
back?
2. S: Yes if you let me talk to my <NAME>.
3. N: Well she’s busy right now, you know, you and I can work this out, ok? Because I’m the
one who’s going to talk to the <NAME> for you. You know they got me out of bed in the
middle of the night and said there’s a guy up here, he’s got a problem. That’s what I’m
doing here, ok? So if I get up here in the middle of the night, let me work on it for you
alright? You understand what I’m saying?
4. S: I guess you can do what you want to.
5. N: I can’t do everything I want to. How about if you and I get together on this thing and
get it resolved ok? For openers <NAME> I’m not going to lie to you about anything,
ok?

The negotiator consistently reiterates the ‘collaborative problem solving’ frame by using
inclusive language, and much of that inclusivity is articulated through facilitative tag questions.
For example, the negotiator’s optimistic claim in line 5 “you and I can work this out” is
immediately followed by the tag “ok?” He uses the tag question to position himself and the
subject as teammates with the shared goal of solving the problem of the warrant. The negotiator reiterates this positioning in lines 11-12 when he says, “how about if you and I get together on this thing and get it resolved, ok?” Again, the inclusivity of the “you and I” is being complemented by the use of a tag question, which appears to minimize the hierarchical power relationship and build solidarity and closeness. This positioning is productive for the development of rapport between the negotiator and the subject, as is the negotiator’s promise not to lie (lines 12-13). Incidentally, this promise also ends in a tag question. The negotiator invites the subject to see the situation as he sees it and to trust that he is there to help solve the subject’s problems. The subject responds positively to these linguistic strategies. He does not reject the rapport-building overtures of the negotiator, since he does not refute the negotiator’s positioning or attempt to reframe the interaction in a different way. In fact, he seems to show hesitancy through his use of “linguistic hedging devices” (Holmes, 1986). Hedges are “words that convey the sense that the speaker is uncertain about what he (or she) is saying, or cannot vouch for the accuracy of the statement” (Lakoff, 1975, p. 53). These include lexical items like “I guess” (line 10) and “it’s hard to believe” (line 14) rather than “I don’t believe”.

Later on in the same incident, the negotiator and the subject have a discussion about the baby being held by the subject. The negotiator reiterates the ‘collaborative problem solving’ frame established earlier and uses tag questions to establish that they are on the same page about the rights and responsibilities of being on this team:

**Excerpt 2: Domestic_1**

1. N: Yeah well you said something there that made me think you are a pretty right guy and 
2. that’s about if I talk to my <NAME> we’ll arrange for something to have the baby taken 
3. care of. Let’s- let’s talk about that for a little bit. 
4. S: Well 
5. N: You know- you know what I’m asking? I’m asking for some- some good faith here. It 
6. means I’ve told you that I’d do my best for you on this warrant and see if we can’t
In lines 5-7 the negotiator explains what good faith means in terms of what he has already done or promised to do. The implication in this tag question is that if the negotiator showed good faith, then it is the subject’s responsibility to also show ‘good faith’ (line 5) as part of this teamwork arrangement. This use of tag questions, as well as the use of inclusive language such as ‘we’ (line 6, line 13), ‘us’ (line 12), ‘let’s’ (line 3), and ‘together’ (line 12), effectively furthers the ‘collaborative problem solving’ frame. What is interesting is that these tag questions, like the ones encountered by Hepburn and Potter (2009) in their study of Child Protective Service calls, have a weak response requirement. In fact, only three of the seven tag questions in these two excerpts come at the end of the negotiator’s conversational turn. This suggests that the tag questions are not necessarily being used to elicit a response but instead are being used by negotiators as a linguistic strategy to highlight the closeness of their individual relationship with the subject and diverting the focus from the asymmetry of the power relationship in the present context. The subject’s repetition of ‘yes’ (line 8, line 10) as well as his repeated utterance ‘Mhm mhm’ (line 15) indicate that he is engaged with the negotiator and aligned with the negotiator on the issues of the warrant and the child.

**Tag Questions and Minimization**

Tag questions are also integral to the development of minimization. Vecchi et al. (2005) explains that, “Minimization serves to downplay negative behavior exhibited by the person in
crisis” (p.545). In the following example from Bank_1, the negotiator highlights the fact that at this point the charges are minimal, despite the fact that the subject shot at a police officer and is in possession of two hostages:

**Excerpt 3: Bank_1**

1. **N:** You haven’t committed any great crime so far, you know?
2. **S:** How’s that cop doing?
3. **N:** No, he’s alright.
4. **S:** He’s alright.
5. **N:** That’s right, the bullet just grazed his head he’s- he’s fine. As a matter of fact, they’re only gonna keep him for observation.
6. **S:** So what am I looking at?
7. **N:** Well you- you know you got hostages. If you continue with your hostages you you're looking at serious problems. If you surrender to me we can resolve the matter. What- do you know what are we talking about? Lousy burglary?

By making this assertion in the form of a facilitative tag question, the negotiator offers the subject a window into his assessment of the situation. The negotiator claims that the subject hasn’t “committed any great crime” (line 1) up to this point, with the caveat of “so far” (line 1), indicating that the subject still might commit a great crime depending on his upcoming decisions. However, the negotiator ends this claim with the tag question “you know?” which signals a request for corroboration. In this case, the assertion is challenged in line 2, when the subject asks, “how’s that cop doing?” This prompts further minimization on the part of the negotiator.

However, I would argue that the minimization overall is still successful, because the subject is considering the negotiator’s point of view. The subject points out the inconsistencies in this minimized perspective (line 2), since it seems incongruent to him that he shot a police officer but committed no “great crime” (line 1). However, he then asks, “So what am I looking at?” (line 7). This signals engagement with the following logical process: if I accept your assertion that I haven’t committed any great crime, then what is the consequence for my actions to date? This allows the negotiator to further develop a more attractive view of reality in which all parties
come away from the incident with minimal damage. Because of this, the negotiator’s use of facilitative tag questions in this instance results in a successful minimization of the subject’s negative behavior. By engaging him in a discussion about the minimization via the tag question “you know” (line 1), the negotiator creates an opportunity to deescalate a dangerous situation.

A different kind of minimization takes place in this example from Bank_2. Bank_2 is a complicated case, because although it began as a hostage situation, it ended as a suicide intervention for the hostage-takers. There is a large uptick in tag questions when the negotiator realizes that the hostage-takers are considering suicide. In the following example, the main subject in charge of communicating with the police is talking about suicide and going to hell. The negotiator uses tag questions to minimize the current problems faced by the subject in an effort to convince them to reconsider suicide:

**Excerpt 4: Bank_2**

1. S: I’m gonna end up there anyhow.
2. N: No, you never know.
3. S: You sure that aint where we at now?
4. N: Well things could get a lot worse.
5. S: **No I done been through the worse part.**
6. N: You have? I can’t hardly believe that.
7. S: Yeah.
8. N: **You’re not dying from a disease or something like that, are you?**
9. S: No I’m not.
10. N: Suppose you got a healthy body and a healthy mind, right?
11. S: **I wouldn’t bet on that.**
12. N: Well hell, that’s quite a bit, just that one right there. What? Well I don’t know what to tell you, you know, your friends talking to you and trying to give you advice, and these people who know you and like you
13. S: I’ll let you know something at three o’clock.

The negotiator uses facilitative tag questions to draw the subject’s attention to the aspects of his life that are still fine to induce his agreement that “things could get a lot worse” (line 4) and death does not have to be imminent. At first glance they might seem like modal tag questions, but the context suggests that the negotiator knows the subject is not “dying from a disease” (line
8). The assumption of knowledge in the word “suppose” in line 10 furthers the argument that the tag questions share the same function: to minimize the subject’s difficult situation rather than to gather information about him. By the end of this excerpt, the subject seems less sure of his decision. Instead of insisting again that he is going to shoot himself and his partner who came up with this suicide pact, the subject offers a non-committal response saying he’ll let the negotiator know “something” at three o’clock (line 15). In this case, tag questions are used to invite the subject to co-construct a less grim version of reality, where life still holds some value. By inviting the co-construction, the negotiator gets the subject to see reality his way while still appearing non-confrontational and concerned.

Tag Questions and Influence

I also found that facilitative and softening tag questions were often present when the negotiator was attempting to influence specific actions or choices considered by the subject. In particular, softening tag questions were used to mitigate threats to the subject’s negative face when the negotiator sought to influence the subject’s decision making. As mentioned previously, Brown and Levinson (1978) argue that all interaction is characterized by concern over one’s own and one’s interlocutors’ autonomy needs (labeled ‘negative face’) and desire to be liked (labeled positive face). Direct orders are a serious threat to the subject’s negative face, and so the negotiator uses softening tag questions instead of direct orders to influence the subject’s decisions without appearing too authoritative. In this next example from Bank_3, the negotiator is “stalling for time” (Noesner, 2010). The subject has threatened to kill the hostage if the police do not provide him money and a getaway vehicle, and the stated deadline is fast approaching.
The negotiator broaches the possibility of a deadline extension with the subject in the following way:

**Excerpt 5: Bank_3**

1. **N:** Well would you give us another- would you give us another twenty minutes? Because we
2. are really doing the best we can but another twenty minutes would help us. If you’ll- if
3. you’ll give us until- **give us until one thirty, will you?** We’ll try and get it there by five
4. after. **If I can’t by five after I’ll call you, but stretch it out until one thirty, will you?**
5. **S:** Yeah, you deal with me pal.
6. **N:** I will I’ll deal with you.
7. **S:** Okay.
8. **N:** **Just hang in there, okay?**
9. **S:** Okay.
10. **N:** You’ll give us until one thirty?
11. **S:** **Ah against my better judgment I’ll give you until one thirty.**
12. **N:** Okay.

Instead of having tag questions attached to assertions, as we have seen in previous excerpts, the negotiator uses tag questions after directives such as “give us until one thirty” (line 3) or “hang in there” (line 8). Without the tag questions these directives are very explicit assertions of power, since we expect that people in positions of power give directives, and powerless individuals follow them. This is problematic, since Christopher Voss posits, “the secret to gaining the upper hand in hostage negotiations is giving them the illusion of control” (Subject Matter Expert interview). By adding softening tag questions to directives, there is significantly less infringement on the subject’s perceived autonomy. In addition, the decision not to overtly reinforce the asymmetry of the power dynamic is helpful for building rapport with the subject.

It is clear from the excerpt that this strategy was effective in this instance. The two tag questions in the negotiator’s first turn (lines 3-4) both position the subject as the decision maker and turn the directives into requests. This prompts the response in line 5 “yeah, you deal with me pal”. The subject’s response indicates that he feels some sense of control, and the negotiator is
respecting his perceived power. This influences him to grant the negotiator’s request “against [his] better judgment” (line 11).

Another example where the use of softening tag questions influences real change occurs in the Domestic_2 transcript. The subject is reiterating his desire to trade his daughters and stepson for his common law wife, emphasizing that he is happy to release the children if the police comply with his demand. The negotiator uses tag questions to convince him not to wake up his daughters yet, since the negotiator and the subject have not agreed to a plan of action. The exchange occurs in the following way:

Excerpt 6: Domestic_2

1. S: Well like I said, the only way you will see is if <NAME> walk in, they will walk
2. out, all three of them. I will wake them up right now and let all three of them
3. walk out.
4. N: Don’t wake the girls up now until we decide how we are going to do this,
5. okay? Let them get a good night’s sleep. They don’t need to be involved in this.
6. S: Say what?
7. N: I said the girls don't need to be woke up and hear all this mess.
8. S: Yeah you right.
9. N: We can let them sleep. We can work this out without upsetting them.
11. N: I said we can work this thing out without upsetting them, okay?
12. S: When they wake up, they are going to see it.

In this case, the negotiator uses both a softening and a facilitative tag question to convince the subject not to wake up his daughters yet. In line 2 we can see the subject’s intended plan when he talks about “[waking] them up right now”. This is immediately followed by the negotiator’s directive “don’t wake the girls up now” (line 4), which is softened with the tag question “okay” (line 5). The phone connection is problematic throughout the whole transcript, which accounts for the “say what” found in both line 6 and line 10. The negotiator continues attempting to influence the subject to allow the girls to sleep, using the facilitative tag question “we can work this thing out without upsetting them, okay?” (line 11). This goes back to the first function of
facilitative tag questions identified in this paper: the reinforcement of the ‘collaborative problem solving frame’. Even if the subject doesn’t necessarily believe the utterance in line 11, he agrees not to go wake the girls up at that point, discussing an indefinite “when they wake up” (line 12) instead of the immediacy indicated by the phrase “right now” (line 2).

The examples presented here have shown the efficacy of facilitative and softening tag questions for 1) reinforcing the ‘collaborative problem solving’ interactional frame, 2) minimizing the seriousness of the subject’s negative behavior or general situation, and 3) mitigating the face threat of direct orders to influence the subject’s decision making. However, the efficacy of these tag questions is contextually dependent. In the next section, I offer examples of contexts where tag questions might be less effective, as well as a specific example of an instance where a negotiator did not employ “contextual intelligence” (Voss, Subject Matter Expert interview), and as a result used tag questions in ways that were ineffective for his immediate goals.

Counter-examples: Tag Questions and Discursive Empowerment

Despite the stable, overarching power relationship between the institutional negotiator and the civilian subject, power in discourse is inherently dynamic. Throughout the interaction, interlocutors become more or less powerful in relation to each other, depending on contextual and relational attributes such as the status of the rapport between the negotiator and the subject or the imminence of potential violence against the hostage or victim by the subject. While “there is tremendous power from a deferential approach” (Voss, Subject Matter Expert interview), it is important for negotiators to maintain ultimate control of the situation to achieve their desired end goal. Facilitative and softening tag questions are a useful tool when the overarching power
relations are not in question, since they minimize the commonly accepted hierarchical relationship without creating a relationship that is unfavorable for the negotiator. However, at points in the interaction where the subject perceives himself or herself as empowered over the negotiator, the assumption that law enforcement has ultimate authority is called into question. Instead, the subject sees himself or herself as the more powerful party in the negotiation due to his or her possession of a hostage or victim. In these instances, a more overt assertion of power by the negotiator may be more effective in contesting the subject’s aggressive escalation of the situation and reestablishing the institutional power of the negotiator.

In order to analyze how negotiators interact with empowered subjects, I will first offer some linguistic markers of and tools for empowerment in this interactional context. In crisis negotiations, subjects challenge the power of negotiators by making covert and overt threats and challenging the established roles of questioner and addressee. These linguistic features simultaneously serve as markers of empowerment and tools for the achievement and maintenance of that empowerment. As facilitative and softening tag questions minimize a perceived power dynamic in order to position the negotiator and the subject on more equal ground, they are not particularly relevant when the subject perceives himself or herself in a position of power over the negotiator. When these types of situations appear in the transcripts, facilitative and softening tag questions often do not appear at all. When they do, they do not seem to be effective in achieving the goals of the negotiator. This speaks to the need for negotiators to first assess the power dynamics of the interaction before choosing a discursive strategy in order to effectively build rapport with the subject and subsequently influence his or her decision-making.
One way that the subjects in these case studies highlight their perceived power over the negotiators is a refusal to participate in the expected distribution of roles where the negotiator is the questioner and the subject answers the negotiator’s questions. As I discussed previously, there is extensive research on the relationship between questions and power. In situations where the subject perceives himself or herself as more powerful than the negotiator, they contest the negotiator’s role of questioner in two ways: by refusing to answer the questions, or by taking on the role of questioner themselves. This can be seen clearly in the following example from Bank_1:

**Excerpt 7: Bank_1**

1. N: Which house <NAME>?
2. S: The house you got surrounded.
3. N: Well what’s the people’s names?
4. S: **You don’t have to know the people’s names.**
5. N: Well do you think it’s gonna do you any good to you know go any further?
6. S: **Think it’s gonna do me any good to walk outside the door?**
7. N: <NAME> let me tell you something. You surrender to me and I guarantee you’ll come out unhurt. What’s your problem?
8. S: **How many people do you have in custody for this already?**
9. N: How many do you think I have?
10. S: I’m asking you a question. If you don’t wanna answer it you don’t have to answer it, I’m just asking.

It is clear in this excerpt that the negotiator is struggling to maintain the role of questioner. In lines 2 and 4, the subject refuses to tell the negotiator his exact location and the names of the hostages. He then transitions from simply refusing to answer the questions posed to him to using his conversational turns to claim the role of questioner. However, the negotiator does not give up the role of questioner, which causes them to ask questions back and forth for six lines without a single answer being offered (lines 5-10). This causes the subject to reassert his power by pointing to his claims as questioner “I’m asking you a question” (line 11). This meta-discursive commentary positions the negotiator as being communicatively uncooperative, since the subject
is asking the questions and those questions require a relevant response from the negotiator according the formulaic structure of adjacency pairs (Schegloff, 1968; 2007). This leaves the negotiator in a discursively less powerful position, highlighting the need to reestablish the power relationship in the interest of the negotiator.

In situations like this, where the subject attempts to force the negotiator into the position of responder, I found no tag questions at all, let alone facilitative or softening tag questions. This is not surprising, since the functions that facilitative and softening tag questions fulfill are predicated on the negotiator’s control of the interaction. When the negotiators are in control, they can build rapport with the subjects by magnanimously minimizing the asymmetry of the power relationship. This more equal power relationship indicates a desire to work collaboratively with the subjects instead of interrogating them or demanding that they comply with demands. However, if a subject perceives himself or herself as more powerful than the negotiator, facilitative and softening tag questions are less effective.

Another linguistic strategy that subjects use to indicate their empowerment is by reminding the negotiator of the danger the hostages or victims are in; this is often done through direct and indirect threats (Holmes & Sykes, 1993; Shuy, 1993; Taylor & Donohue, 2006; Borowsky, 2011). Shuy defines a threat as a speech act that “is generated from the speaker’s perspective, is under the speaker’s control, and will lead to the listener’s detriment” (1993, p. 97). In this case, it is to the negotiator’s detriment if the subject kills the hostage or victim since “it is always the goal of the negotiation team to do everything possible to prevent any serious injury or loss of life (or further loss of life if that has happened already) to all involved parties” (Noesner, Subject Matter Expert interview). In the following example from Bank_3, the subject
is demanding money and a getaway car with a police radio, and he refuses to release the hostage until he escapes. Even more problematic, he is threatening to kill the hostage if his demands are not met:

**Excerpt 8: Bank_3**

1. N: Well we are gonna have to come up with a different plan because my boss won’t let me do that.
2. S: Well I’m afraid that you’re in a lot of trouble.
3. N: Why am I in a lot of trouble?
4. S: Well because she is.

In this excerpt, the hostage-taker links the state of the negotiator with the state of the hostage in order to highlight the power he holds over the negotiator as an extension of the power he holds over the hostage. This is a complete reversal of the expected power dynamic. While there is no overt threat articulated, in this context “a lot of trouble” (line 3) implies immediate danger. The subject shows awareness of what the negotiator wants or needs and his ability to choose whether or not the negotiator gets it.

Another example of threats from the subject comes in the Domestic_2 transcript. As previously discussed, this case is not a prototypical non-hostage case, since the subject has a very specific demand for the negotiator: give up the subject’s common law wife from protective custody, or he will shoot his own daughters and stepson. Having come to an impasse, the following exchange occurs:

**Excerpt 9: Domestic_2**

1. S: I aint sending nothing out until she come in. If she don’t come in, you don’t need to expect nothing.
2. N: That’s kind of cold, isn’t it?
3. S: What?
4. N: I mean that’s kind of cold. You aint giving me enough to go on here.
5. S: You aint giving me a damn thing to go on either. What are you giving me to go on?
6. N: Well, what do you want?
8. S: <NAME>.
9. N: I can’t walk with <NAME> up there, you know that.
10. S: You can’t do what?
11. N: I can’t walk her up there.
12. S: Well, like I said, that’s your problem. Then like I said, let me go because the time is ticking. When that spell hit me, it’s going to be hell to go tell the Captain.
13. N: When what spell hit you?
14. S: When the spell hit me to do whatever I got to do, it just hits me.

The “spell” (line 13) that the subject mentions is explained further as doing “whatever he’s got to do” (line 15), which is another covert threat of violence against his victims. This phrase “when that spell hits me” is repeated often in this particular interaction, and underscores the subject’s unpredictability. In this excerpt, the negotiator uses a challenging tag question in line three to confront the subject about his stance on negotiation of his demand. However, this only upsets the subject and causes him to become defensive, as we can see in line 6. His use of the word “damn” in the phrase “you aint giving me a damn thing to go on either” (line 6) underscores his frustration in not getting any cooperation from the negotiator. The negotiator’s continued refusal to bring the subject’s common law wife into the house prompts the subject to reiterate his threat to harm the children he holds in the house. In addition, the subject underscores the agency of the negotiator with the phrase “that’s your problem” (line 12). Rather than giving power to the negotiator, this relieves the subject of responsibility for any actions resulting from the negotiator’s refusal to meet the subject’s demands. It also indicates a rejection of the ‘collaborative problem solving frame’ and an attempt by the subject to influence the negotiator’s behavior, rather than vice versa.

One final example from Domestic_2 illustrates how necessary it is for negotiators to understand the context when choosing linguistic strategies like tag questions. About three quarters of the way through the transcript, the negotiator is attempting to convince the subject
that he should meet his common law wife outside the house. Up to this point, the subject has not changed his demand or his threats and has generally maintained the perception of empowerment. The negotiator tries to minimize the seriousness of the subject’s negative behavior in the following way:

Excerpt 10: Domestic_2
1. N: I mean you ain't even in no jam yet <NAME>, don't you understand that?
2. S: Naw -I don't understand.
3. N: So the only jam you're in is you know you got a woman that may or may not have done you wrong. And that's the only jam you're in right now.
4. S: You just said I shot at the car.
5. N: Well you said you didn't do that.
6. S: But you said I shot her, you said she told you I shot at her.
7. N: Then you get to court and say you didn't and then it's her word against yours. Isn't- and that's what the whole thing is, isn't? Her word against yours.
8. S: You finish talking?
9. N: Naw I'm not finish talking.
10. S: Well I'm finish. When you decide to bring her call back and if you wait too late everybody here will be history. This the last time. And like I, I done, that's the best I could do. This the last time. Every- I'm go start with him first. This the last time. She (unclear) you keep giving me the run around. You didn't get her here yet and I'm go start with him first. That's all I got to say and I'm fixing to start now.
11. N: (unclear)
12. S: You finish talking?
13. N: Naw I'm not finish talking.
14. S: Well I'm finish. When you decide to bring her call back and if you wait too late everybody here will be history. This the last time. And like I, I done, that's the best I could do. This the last time. Every- I'm go start with him first. This the last time. She (unclear) you keep giving me the run around. You didn't get her here yet and I'm go start with him first. That's all I got to say and I'm fixing to start now.
15. (unclear)
16. (unclear)

Despite the fact that the negotiator reframes the crisis situation as a domestic dispute in order to minimize the seriousness of the subject’s negative behavior, the subject does not accept the negotiator’s construction of the reality that it’s just a case of “a woman who may or may not have done you wrong” (lines 3-4). He points to previous facts stated by the negotiator about the situation as proof that the situation is as serious as it appears. The negotiator tries again to co-construct a less grim reality with the facilitative tag question “that’s what the whole thing is isn’t it?” (line 9). However, since the subject still perceives the negotiator as being in a subordinate position, he dismisses the negotiator in line 12 when he announces that he’s finished with the conversation. He then reiterates his threat to kill the children, beginning with his stepson.
The ineffectiveness of the tag question for minimization here is due to the contextual power relationship. In situations where the subject perceives himself or herself to be more powerful than the negotiator, inducing an interlocutor to see reality through your lens does not build solidarity; the solidarity built by tag questions comes from the perceived minimizing of the established power asymmetry by the negotiator. When that power dynamic is upended, the negotiator must use alternative strategies to build rapport and influence the behavior of the subject.

V. Conclusion

Based on my analysis of these five crisis negotiation transcripts, the division into two types of crisis situations was less relevant to the frequency of tag questions than the constantly changing power dynamics co-constructed by the subject and the negotiator. Across the different incidents, I found that facilitative and softening tag questions are an underutilized linguistic tool for building rapport and gaining influence over the subject’s decision making. These types of tag questions are particularly valuable for 1) reinforcing a ‘collaborative problem solving’ frame, 2) minimizing the significance of the subject’s negative actions, and 3) turning orders into requests for the purposes of influencing the subject’s immediate decisions. All of these functions speak to the polysemy of power and solidarity building. The ability to simultaneously create solidarity with the subject and influence the subject’s behavior using tag questions allows the negotiator to appear empathic and non-threatening, while still maintaining control of the overall situation at hand. These findings can be incorporated into the existing Behavioral Change Stairway Model,
as they offer an analysis of a specific linguistic feature, and highlight the ability of tag questions to assist with the BCSM’s rapport building and influence stages.

However, the usefulness of tag questions to achieve the aforementioned goals is contextually dependent. In situations where the subject perceives himself or herself as more powerful than the negotiator, tag questions are not able to effectively build rapport or assert influence. This is because the validity of using solidarity as a strategy to covertly assert power relies on the assumption that the negotiator has more power than the subject. When this expected hierarchy is upended, the negotiator is perceived by the subject to be in a less powerful position. Influence from this position requires different strategies than does influence from a position of power.

This analysis is limited by a number of factors. First, law enforcement officers transcribed the data used for this paper before I received it and I was not given access to the actual audio files of the incidents. As such, I was not able to check the accuracy of the transcripts or delve into non-content features of language such as intonation that might affect my study of tag questions in this context. The use of pre-transcribed transcripts is problematic, as transcripts “are not transparent and unproblematic records of scientific research but are instead creative and politicized documents in which the [transcriber] as author is fully implicated” (Bucholtz, 2000, p. 1440). Most of the transcripts were also anonymized, meaning that any individual’s name and place names were redacted from the transcript. This limited my ability to research the background of the crisis incidents as they might have been reported on at the time. However, the police-sensitive nature of this context required that I content myself with these anonymized transcripts and the little background information that was available to me through context clues.
or resign myself to using an even more limited pool of transcripts. In addition, most of the transcripts are partial. Only two of the five transcripts contain all the interactions between the negotiator and the subject. The other three either begin in the middle or end before the interaction ends, or both. For this reason, I chose not to examine the outcome of the negotiations as a factor in my analysis of tag questions, focusing instead on the success of the linguistic strategy in the immediate interactional context.

In order to expand on the research conducted in this study, it would be valuable to gain access to a larger number of complete transcripts of crisis negotiation discourse, as well as the audio that accompanies them. Although outside the scope of this study, the uses of challenging tag questions and the interactional problems that they create in this high-stakes context are a valuable area of study for any researcher interested in interactional trouble sources at the discourse level. Another potential direction for future research would be an examination of linguistic strategies to reestablish the negotiator’s power when the subject feels empowered without damaging the negotiator’s rapport-building endeavors. Some potential strategies might be for the negotiator to position the subject as ultimately responsible, i.e. “this is not my problem, it’s your problem” and reposition the negotiator as present to help the subject solve his or her problem, but not to solve it for them. Finally, a more in-depth study of subject empowerment is required to better understand how expected power relationships are upended and how the formerly less powerful individual maintains that power through a variety of linguistic strategies and extra-linguistic means.

Despite its limitations, this study contributes to linguistic understandings of how the polysemous nature of tag questions, and indeed many other discourse strategies, is utilized in an
array of discourse situations to shape relations of power and solidarity. In addition, the study suggests that bringing concepts and understandings from Interactional Sociolinguistics, Institutional Discourse, and Critical Discourse Studies into the arena of crisis negotiations can potentially add to the effectiveness of such negotiations and of crisis negotiation training programs.
VI. Bibliography


