

Chapter Six

Getting information

Grammar focus. Questions.

Introduction.

Questions are basic to the give and take of social interaction. In fact, on average we either ask, answer, or at least hear a question once in every 40 words of conversation. Since we learn language best by interacting with others, it is important that English language learners recognize and respond to questions in appropriate ways if they want to maintain social relations with other English speakers. However, since questions seldom occur in writing and often have a different form and function in academic texts than in conversation, English language learners may be bewildered by the questions they encounter as they interact with others. As an introduction to some of these problems, let's do two awareness activities. The first addresses what a question sounds like, the second, how we are expected to respond to questions. To help us identify how questions fit into our social activities, all the examples in this chapter are based on swimming as a fitness activity.

Awareness Activity 6.1. The sound of questions.

How can you tell that someone has just asked you a question? Most languages mark a question by having a musical pitch that rises at the end of the sentence. Others add a special question word at the beginning or the end of the sentence. What does English do? Remember in Chapter One how we listened to

the musical pitch of the voice in the discussion of tag questions? Let's try the same with the following statements, questions, and commands to see if we can find some interesting patterns. Have someone read the following sentences to you. Take note of how the pitch of the voice rises and stays high or rises and falls after the word in the focus position, i.e. the most strongly stressed word.

- It's noon already. Time to swim. (statement)
- Grab your suit and join us. (command)
- Which pool should we swim in today? (wh-question)
- How much time do you have? (wh-question)
- Can we finish in time? (yes/no-question)
- Do you need a towel? (yes/no-question)
- The pool's closed today? (unmarked yes/no-question)

Did you notice that the statement, the command, and the wh-questions all had the same rising-falling intonation pattern? Only the wh-words *where* and *how* at the first of the sentences indicated these two were questions rather than statements or commands. There were two signals for the yes/no-questions. Rather than a special question word, there was a special word order. Instead of the expected SVO, the auxiliary verbs *did* and *can* were moved ahead of the subject. However, the primary question indicator was the rising pitch on the last word, the pattern that most languages use. Note that in the unmarked yes/no-question, only the rising intonation indicated that it was a question. In other words, if English language learners are listening for the rising intonation pattern

that most languages use to mark questions, they will miss the important wh-questions that are directed their way.

Awareness Activity 6.2. Questions and discourse.

What went wrong with this telephone conversation between a native speaker of English (B) calling a friend to go swimming and the friend's roommate (A)? The friend's roommate is not a native speaker of English.

Ring, ring

Speaker A. Hello.

Speaker B. Hello. Daisy?

Speaker A. (pause) No.

Speaker B. Does Daisy live there?

Speaker A. (pause) Yes.

Speaker B. Is she home?

Speaker A. (long pause) DAISY!

Notice that speaker A doesn't know how questions work in telephone conversations. When the caller, speaker B, doesn't recognize the voice of the person answering the phone, saying the name of the desired person with a rising intonation pattern means more than *Is this Daisy?* It is also an implied request to call Daisy to the phone, if she is there, or to indicate that she is absent or that this is the wrong number. To simply give the classroom answer *yes* or *no* is inappropriate. Notice that the caller, perhaps reacting to the pause before the answer, suspects that this is the wrong number and asks if Daisy lives there. Notice another inappropriate answer. If she lives there, the question implies a

request to call her to the phone if she is there or to explain that she is absent. A simple *yes* does not suffice. The caller then voices the implied request of the previous question by asking if Daisy is home. The expected answer would be *Yes, I'll get her* or *No, she isn't*. Instead, after a long pause, A simply calls Daisy's name.

Grammar.

Before we look at how discourse and pragmatics influence the use of questions, let's look at how *yes/no*-questions and *wh*-questions are formed.

Yes/no-questions. The rule of thumb for creating *yes/no*-questions is to take the first auxiliary verb and move it ahead of the subject. The auxiliary verb that is moved around is often called the **operator** in grammar books. The verb *be* is always considered an operator, whether it serving as an auxiliary verb or not as long as it appears first in the verb slot of the sentence. This process is usually called **subject auxiliary** or **subject operator inversion**. Notice that these questions can all be answered *yes* or *no*, hence the name *yes/no*-question.

- I am swimming with you. >>> Am I swimming with you?
- I can swim in this pool. >>> Can I swim in this pool?
- I have seen you here before. >>> Have I seen you here before?
- Yesterday we were in lane one. >>> Yesterday were we in lane one?
- When we get there, the pool will be open. >>> When we get there, will the pool be open?

Notice that the operator is merely moved ahead of the subject, not to the first of the sentence. Note too how the pitch or tone of the voice rises at the end of these questions.

If there is no operator, the auxiliary verb *do* is inserted as the operator and the tense and verb agreement is attached to it since the tense markings are always on the first auxiliary if there is one. This new operator is then moved ahead of the subject.

- He swims with me. >>> Does he swim with me?
- He swam with me. >>> Did he swim with me?
- Yesterday you saw my towel. >>> Yesterday did you see my towel?

Rules of thumb. Forming yes/no-questions

1. Invert the subject and the first auxiliary (the operator). *Be* in its conjugated forms (*am, is, are*) is always an operator even if it is the main verb.
2. If there is no operator, insert *do* before the verb and transfer the verb agreement and tense to the *do*. Then do the subject operator inversion.
3. Have the pitch or tone of the voice rise at the end of the sentence.

Wh- questions. Wh-questions are asked when special information is unknown or unclear, such as the location, the participants, the object, the reason, the manner, or the time. In these cases, an appropriate question word (*where, who, what, why, how, or when* respectively) is placed at the beginning of the sentence. Notice that most of these question words begin with *wh-*, hence the name wh-question. If the wh-word is serving as the subject of the sentence, the

sentence continues in the expected SVO pattern. If however the *wh*-word is asking for information that would normally appear after the verb, in other words, in the O position, the same subject operator inversion that was needed for yes/no-questions applies. In other words, an operator typically follows a *wh*-word. Answering the question reveals whether the *wh*-word is the subject of the question or is based on information that would normally be found after the verb in the O position. Notice that the intonation on these *wh*-questions is the same as the pattern for their answers. The pitch or tone rises on the word in the focus position and falls afterwards rather than rises as it did with yes-no questions.

- Who was at the pool with you? John was.
- Where did you leave your clothes? I left them in my bag.
- Which pool do you like the best? I like this one.
- Where can we change? We can change over there.

Rules of thumb. Forming *wh*-questions

1. Place at the beginning of the sentence an *wh*-question word that directs attention to the type of information that is missing (e.g. *who* for people, *what* for things, *when* for time, *where* for locations, *why* for reasons, *which* for choices, and *how* for methods or manners.
2. If the *wh*-question word is followed by the subject (S) of the sentence rather than the verb (V), apply subject operator inversion.
3. Maintain the same intonation pattern as for a statement.

Who and whom. Though many English teachers and some grammar books hate to admit it, the English language is changing. The prescriptive rule states that the question word *who* is used only when it is the subject of the sentence (*Who is coming?*). *Whom* is used otherwise (*Whom did you see? To whom did you give your towel?*) In other words, *who* is used in cases where the pronoun *he* might appear in the answer, *whom* where *him* might appear. Notice that *whom* and *him* both end in *-m*.

- Who is swimming here? He is.
- Whom did you see in the showers? I saw him.
- To whom did you give your towel? I gave it to him.

However, in present day English *whom* has disappeared from conversation and most writing. When it does appear, it usually comes after a preposition, as in the last example. However, this sounds very formal in conversation. Usually the preposition is left at the end of the sentence (**stranded** in linguistic parlance) and *who* is used.

- Who did you give your towel to? I gave it to him.

Pragmatics and Discourse.

Questions in conversation.

As mentioned earlier, questions are an integral part of conversation.

However, we need to know more than simply how to form them. How are we supposed to respond? As we saw in AA 6.2, questions can serve not only to get information but to promote conversation and direct actions. As a result, they are

answered in different ways. Not only that, only about half of questions in spoken English follow the grammatical pattern outlined above. Let's take a closer look at yes/no and wh-questions to see how they work.

Yes/no-questions.

Let's look first at how yes/no-questions are answered and then at alternative ways of forming them.

Answering yes/no-questions. The discourse rule for questions seems simple enough. Answer yes/no-questions with yes or no, adding a short answer that repeats the auxiliary serving as the operator. If there is more than one auxiliary, they too may be used in the answer.

- Are you coming swimming today? Yes, I am. or No, I'm not.
- Can you swim a mile in 30 minutes? Yes, I can. or No, I can't.
- Do you wear a speedo when you swim? Yes, I do. or No. I don't.
- Have you been swimming here before? Yes, I have. or Yes, I have been.
or No I haven't or No, I haven't been.

However, researchers find that although yes/no-questions may be answered this way, more often they are answered with an expanded answer, often without a yes/no answer as in the following.

- Speaker A: Can you swim a mile in 30 minutes?

Speaker B: I wish I could but I've been sick and haven't gotten my strength back.

- Speaker A. Are you coming swimming today?

Speaker B. Naw, I've got too much to do. I'll try to make it next time.

They find that the short answers that we typically teach in class are used only when we want to be uncooperative or unsociable and wish to reveal as little information as possible. Most commonly, we ask yes-no questions to be sociable and to direct the discussion towards certain topics. Most answer *yes* (or *yep* or *yah* or *uh huh*) or *no* (or *nope*, *nah*, or *uh uh*) and add another comment or indirectly answer with such comments as *I guess so* or *Is the sky blue?*

The sociability factor in yes/no-questions is so ingrained in us that we have to be reminded when it is more appropriate to give the short answers that are taught in the classroom. I'm sure you've seen on TV where the lawyer examining a talkative witness on the witness stand says, *Please answer the question with a simple yes or no.* When the police stop us for speeding, we remind ourselves, or our children, to say a little as possible and to answer questions with a polite *Yes, sir, No, sir,* and little more.

Answering negative yes/no-questions. Negative yes/no-questions cause problems for learners from many parts of the world, in particular Asia and West Africa. Notice the difference between the following:

- Are you swimming with us today?
- Aren't you swimming with us today?

The first question is simply a question. The answer can be *Yes, I am,* or *No, I'm not.* The second, a negative yes/no-question, signals that the speaker expected that you would be joining them for swimming and now realizes that it might not be true. The answers to both questions would be the same if you are not joining

them. However, speakers from West Africa and Asia would answer the first one, *No* (meaning *I'm not*) and the second, *Yes*, (meaning *I'm not*).

This difference is important in classroom discourse since teachers often use negative yes/no-questions to politely suggest more appropriate behavior. For example, if a student is misbehaving, a teacher might ask *Don't you have something better to do?* with no response expected other than perhaps a *Yes, ma'am*. If a student is writing an essay with a pencil rather than the expected pen, a teacher might ask *Don't you have a pen?* as a way to suggest that the student change writing instruments. If a young student from Japan answers the teacher with *yes*, what does the student mean? *Yes*, he does, or *yes*, he does not?

Uninverted yes/no-questions. Note the form of the questions that the second speaker uses in response to the comment of the first speaker:

- Speaker A: Boy, the water felt good today.

Speaker B: You had a good swim?

- Speaker C: Hey, wait for me.

Speaker D: You're coming with us?

These statement questions do not have the expected subject operator inversion. Only the rising intonation indicates to the listener that they are questions. These are rather common in conversation.

Elliptical yes/no-questions. Note how the operator and sometimes the subject have been deleted from the following questions. Note too the intonation.

- You joining us in our lane?

- Been swimming long?

Elliptical questions are some of the most common yes-no questions in conversation. The rising intonation tells us that these are questions since the normal markings of subject operator inversion are missing. Perhaps the reason why the rising intonation pattern in yes/no questions persists whereas wh-questions have adopted the rising-falling pattern of statements and commands is that the wh- word is never deleted so the question signal is always there. With elliptical yes/no questions becoming common in conversation, without the rising intonation, the listener might not recognize when a question has been asked.

Exclamatory questions. These look and sound like yes/no-questions but are simply evaluative comments that expect no answer. Note that the intonation pattern at the end of the sentence can be rising or rising-falling. Notice too that they can be punctuated with an exclamation point rather than with a question mark.

- Wasn't the water great!

Rhetorical questions. These yes/no-questions simply introduce a topic that the speaker wants to comment on. Again, the intonation may be either rising or rising-falling. No answer is expected from the listener.

- Does swimming really make you healthier? I certainly think so.

Rhetorical questions are more common in writing than in conversation.

Tag questions. We already have seen tag questions in the first chapter. They look like statements with a short yes/no-question attached. Their intonation pattern too can be either rising or rising-falling. Some studies have found that

about every fourth question in conversation is a tag question since one function of questions is to seek confirmation and to keep the conversation going.

- Swimming is so relaxing, isn't it?
- You left your suit in the locker, didn't you?

Alternative yes/no-questions. Sometimes yes/no-questions are used to present choices. Notice that this can be combined with a wh-question. The intonation pattern rises on the first choice and falls on the second rather than rises on both, as might be expected with a yes/no-question.

- Would you like to swim at the O'Dome or the Gator Pool?
- Where would you like to swim today? The O'Dome or the Gator Pool?

Wh-questions

Wh-questions are much less common in conversation than yes/no-questions since the main purpose of questions in conversation is to keep the conversation going rather than to seek information. However, they do occur and perform important social functions. Let's take a look at some of the discourse and pragmatic peculiarities of wh-questions in conversation.

Answering wh-questions. We answer wh-questions by supplying the missing information. Most commonly this is done without complete sentences.

- Who was at the pool with you? John. or John was.
- Where did you leave your clothes? In my locker.
- Where's my suit? Over there.
- Which pool do you like the best? The Gator pool.
- Where can we change? In the locker room.

Often in conversation the person asking the wh-question suggests an answer as a yes/no-question, often elliptical.

- How come the pool is closed? Is it a holiday?
- Where do you want to eat afterwards? The Swamp?

Uninverted wh-questions (pedagogical questions). We carefully teach students that the wh- word must be at the first of the sentence. Then the students hear the following on the streets or when they attend other classes. Note the rising intonation at the end, so unexpected with wh-questions. The first might be used to indicate surprise at a comment someone has made. The second two might be expected in a teacher-lead discussion in a fitness class, hence the name **pedagogical** or teaching question. They have the form of an oral fill-in-the-blank quiz where the question words mark the blanks that the student should fill with appropriate information.

- You went swimming where?
- Swimming every day signifies what?
- The butterfly was added to the Olympics when?

When more than one piece of information is asked for, only one of the question words is placed in the initial position.

- O.K., who's swimming where with whom?

Elliptical wh- questions. In conversation we might also hear the following.

Note that the operator has been deleted.

- Where you been swimming?
- What you using to keep your goggles clear?

The *where you* form is usually pronounced *whereya* and the *what you* form *whatcha*.

Emphatic wh-questions. There are a couple of ways to show surprise, dismay, or perplexity when asking wh-questions. One is to add an expletive after the wh-word. The following are some mild examples.

- Where on earth is my suit?
- What the devil do they mean closing the pool so early?
- Why the heck do they put so much chlorine in the pool?

An even milder way is to add a heavily stressed *ever* to the wh-question words.

- Wherever did you get those crazy goggles?
- However do you find time to swim everyday?
- Whatever does that lifeguard think he's doing?

Echo questions. Sometimes a wh-question is used to ask that an answer or a statement to be repeated (echoed) either because we didn't hear it clearly or we don't believe the answer. Notice too that the intonation rises at the end rather than rises and falls. Sometimes the wh-word stays in the position where the missing information would appear in the answer.

- Speaker A. I think I'll swim across Lake Alice.
Speaker B. You'll swim where?
- Speaker C. What is your name?
Speaker D. Membilibility.
Speaker C. What's that again?

Other social uses for wh-questions. Some wh- questions are so common in conversation that they have become fixed **formulaic** expressions or chunks that are useful for various social purposes. Here are some sample chunks that English language learners should learn to use.

Greetings

- How are you?
- What's happening?
- How have you been? or How ya been?
- What's up?

Personal reactions.

- How was the....? or How's the... (How's the water? How's the pool?)
- What do you think of? or Whadja think of....?

Inquiries. A conversational alternative to asking a *why* question is to attach a *how come* directly to a statement without making subject operator inversions.

- How come the pool is closed?

Suggestions. There are two common chunks for making suggestions. In the first the speaker says *how about* and gives suggested action in the –ing form.

- How about...? (How about swimming in this lane?)

The second resembles a negative yes-no question with the speaker saying *why don't you* (or *why doncha*) with the action given in the plain form of the verb.

- Why don't you....? (Why don't you swim in this lane?)

Challenging an opinion, statement, or request. These wh-chunks are elliptical and are used to challenge whatever the other person has said. They consist of only the question word *what for*, *since when*, *how come*, or *why*.

- A. Let's stop after 20 laps.
B. What for? We've got plenty of time.
- A. They're closing the pool at 1.
B. Since when? I didn't see any announcement.
- A. I like this pool better.
B. How come? The other one is closer.
- A. Let's use the lockers over there.
B. Why? There's more room over here.

Questions in Writing.

There is much less to say about questions in writing since they are so much less common. Most appear in fiction, particularly in dialog, where they have the same characteristics as questions in conversation. When they appear in journalism and academic prose, they tend to have a different form and function than questions in conversation. Perhaps the chief difference in form is that in journalism and academic prose, questions tend to be in full form with complete answers. In conversation about half of all questions are elliptical or tags. The answers in conversation also tend to be elliptical.

Whereas in conversation yes/no-questions overwhelmingly predominate, wh-questions make up half of the questions in journalism and academic prose. Since

academic prose and journalism have the form of a monologue, questions tend to be didactic or rhetorical, guiding the reader through the flow of information.

- How then will we know if we have been exercising enough? There are at least three things we can do to check up on ourselves,

Questions and social networks.

How can you tell if people are being polite, angry, concerned, or indifferent by the way they use and respond to questions? The answer is not as easy as you might think. We all interact with different social groups, some more public than others. We all probably use questions in similar ways in such public situations as school or work.

But how about more private situations such as those found in the home, at church, or with friends? We saw in Chapter Three that different social groups develop different varieties of English. Since questions play such an important part in our interactions with others, we might expect different rules to develop in these different groups as to how to ask and answer questions. In AA 6.2 we saw the miscommunication that can take place when people from different ethnic groups do not follow the same discourse rules for how to respond to questions on the telephone. Let's look briefly at two other examples of cultural differences in the use of questions, one from male-female speech and one from English as a foreign language (EFL).

Male and Female Speech. In North America men and women come from different subcultures. In spite of coeducation, friendship networks, and family ties, they spend much of their lives interactionally segregated. Their friendships and

their activities are mostly with people of the same sex. Within these social networks, women and men use language differently. For example, women are taught to use speech to be supportive of each other so as to create and maintain relationships of closeness and equality. As such they tend to use questions to show solidarity and agreement. Men, on the other hand, are taught to use language as a type of posturing, to challenge others and to present their own ideas, thus establishing an individual identity. As such they tend to interrupt, ignore comments of others, give put downs, and promote their own suggestions and ideas as they try to control the conversation.

Because of these differing communication strategies, men and women use questions and answers differently. Women are more likely than men to use tag questions, especially with rising intonation, as confirmers to promote solidarity. They are also more likely to answer questions so that the answer sounds like an elliptical yes/no-question with rising intonation thus eliciting cooperation, as in the following.

- A. When's dinner?
- B. In ten minutes?

As they listen to answers to questions, they tend to say *mm hmm* as a sign that they are listening, not necessarily that they are agreeing with the statements.

Men are more likely to use questions words as rejoinders (*Says who? What for? Since when?*) as they challenge what is being said. They are also more likely to use tag questions with a rising-falling intonation pattern as a

statement of fact. They tend to reserve their *mm hmm*'s to indicate that they agree with what is being said.

Thus when men and women converse with each other, there can be miscommunication. Men may think that women are indecisive because of the frequent rising intonation patterns in both questions and answers. They may think that women can't make up their minds because their *mm hmm*'s indicate that they are agreeing with what is being said and then seem to change their mind when it is their turn to speak. On the other hand women may think that men are rude because they are always challenging what is being said, are always pushing their own ideas, and through their lack of *mm hmm*'s showing that they aren't really paying attention to what women say.

EFL English. When people learn English in a foreign setting, their only contact with the language tends to come from textbooks and language teachers. We have seen that questions in textbooks serve a different function than questions in social interaction. Since they do not have many opportunities to interact with native speakers of English outside of class, they do not know how we use questions in social interaction. As a result they fall back on question patterns from their own language. Often that works, but there can be mismatches of communication styles. This is most apparent in how we use yes/no-questions to encourage conversation.

For example, compare the following two conversations between friends.

1. Speaker A: Did you go to the movies last night?

Speaker B. Yah, we went to see Spiderman. Great movie. Have you seen is yet?

2. Speaker A: Did you go to the movies last night?

Speaker B. Yes.

Speaker A. Which movie did you see?

Speaker B. Spiderman.

Speaker A. Did you like it?

Speaker B. Yes.

Notice that conversation 1 is the way we would expect a conversation to go. The first question is more than a yes/no-question. It gives a topic for discussion. The person who answers is expected to make some sort of a comment and ask a question in return. Conversation 2 sounds more like a police interrogation than a friendly conversation. Speaker B seems indifferent, perhaps in a bad mood. However, this is the expected pattern in some countries. For example, in formerly communist Central and Eastern Europe, parents taught their children to tell the truth but to reveal as little information as possible to friendly people outside the family who might ask questions about personal activities. Because of the secret police system, revealing too much could result in the arrest of a family member. These minimal responses to yes/no-questions still persist with many people in these countries. As a result, English speakers who visit often feel like they are forced to pull information out of their new friends, as in the second conversation, much like a nosy busy body.

Reflections

Some Concepts.

- Questions play a key role in social interaction English.
- The form, function and frequency of questions differ widely between spoken and written English.
- Since questions play an important role in our socialization, their use varies according to our social networks.

Some Key Terminology.

- **alternative questions**—yes/no-questions that give a choice, (*Would you like ice cream or a rootbeer?*) Unlike regular yes/no- questions, they have rising-falling intonation.
- **echo questions**—wh- questions asked with a rising intonation that request a repeat or an echoing of an answer, either because the original answer was not understood or was not believed, (*I don't think I heard right. Where did they say they were going?*) They may be uninverted, (*They said what?*)
- **elliptical questions**—yes/no and wh- questions where the operator and sometimes the subject pronoun are missing, (*Coming along? Whacha doing here?*)

- **emphatic questions**—wh- questions that show dismay or surprise by adding an expletive or stressed *ever* after the question word, (*What on earth do you mean by that? Whatever do you mean by that?*)
- **exclamatory questions**—yes/no-questions that are really evaluative comments. No answer is expected, (*Wasn't the movie great?*)
- **formulaic questions**—question chunks used for greetings (*What's up?*), inquiries (*How come...?*), suggestions (*How about...?*), and challenges (*What for?*).
- **negative yes/no-questions**—English speakers often use negative yes/no-questions when something unexpected is happening, e.g. *Isn't it time that you were in bed?* when children are up past their bedtime. The answer is the same as if the question were a positive question. Yes, means *Yes, it is time.*
- **operator**—usually the first auxiliary verb. It is moved or copied to create different types of questions, (*He has seen the movie.* becomes *Has he seen the movie?* or *He has seen the movie, hasn't he?*) The verb *be* is always an operator if it is first in the verb position, (*He is here.* becomes *Is he here?*). If there is no auxiliary or *be* in the operator position, *do* is substituted with appropriate marking for tense and verb agreement, (*Mary swam the river.* becomes *Did Mary swim the river?*).
- **rhetorical questions**—wh-questions that are answered by the speaker. They are used to guide the listener through what the speaker or writer has to say, (*What would be expected in this case? Two things for sure, first...*)

- **stranded prepositions**—when the missing information is the object of a preposition, the conversational practice is to place the *wh*-word at the beginning of the sentence and leave or strand the preposition at the end, (*She is looking at something.* becomes *What is she looking at?*)
- **tag questions**—questions formed by adding an operator and a pronoun in a yes/no-question format to the end of a statement with reversed polarity, (*It's hot outside, isn't it?*) Sometimes called confirmers since that is their frequent role in conversation.
- **uninverted *wh*- questions**—sometimes called **pedagogical questions** because of their frequent use by teachers. The *wh*- word is left in the sentence where the unknown information is expected in the answer, (*The answer to this question is what?*)
- **uninverted yes-no questions**—questions that look like statements or even single words or phrases. Rising intonation is the only indication that it is a question, (*The car is ready?*)
- ***wh*-questions**—questions created by using questions words such as *who*, *why*, *when*, *where*, and *how* to discover missing content rather than a yes or *no* confirmation of information. The rule of thumb is to place the *wh*-word at the first of the sentence followed by subject operator inversion if the *wh*-word isn't functioning as the subject of the sentence, (*John is doing something.* becomes *What is John doing?* *Someone ate my sandwich.* becomes *Who ate my sandwich?*) They typically have rising-falling intonation at the end.

- **yes/no-questions**—questions which are formed by moving the operator ahead of the subject, called **subject operator inversion**. They can be answered with a simple *yes* or *no*, (*He is coming home.* becomes *Is he coming home? Yes, he is.*) They have rising intonation at the end.

Some Reflective Activities.

1. What went wrong? Explain the rule of thumb that was broken in the following sentences:
 - *Lives John here?
 - *Where you are going?
 - *Where did he be?
 - *Does she likes him?
 - Do you like pizza? *Yes, I like.
2. Teachers of younger children often use a rising intonation on all questions, whether wh- or yes/no. Why do you think that is so?
3. Although the United States is a multiethnic nation with millions of immigrants from around the world, within three generations, their families typically switch to English, even when they live in ethnic neighborhoods. Even though they have switched to English, they may use English questions in a pattern that differs from the rest of the population. (*Fun you want?*) What examples do you have of such differences from your own family or from your experience with others?

4. Read this conversation between two fishermen. Write out what they really said. What has been left out? What kinds of questions predominate? What are the characteristics of the answers? What are the implications for teachers whose students are learning English on the streets?

“Hiyamac”

“Lobuddy”

“Binearlong?”

“Coplours”

“Cetchenny?”

“Goddafew”

“Kindarthay?”

“Bassencarp”

“Ennysizetoom?”

“Couplapowns”

“Hittenhard?”

“Sordalike”

“Wachoosen?”

“Gobbaworms.”

“Fishanonaboddum?”

“Rydononaboddum.”

Grammar detective 6. The pragmatics of yes/no questions.

Let’s sharpen our ability to hear grammar being used around us. For this activity we’ll see what kind of English is being modeled to us on television.

Directions:

- Listen to conversations on a talk show. Name the talk show and the participants in the conversation. Take note of five yes/no questions and their answers. Be sure to write down not only the five questions but the responses, the setting and other circumstances surrounding the questions.
- Analyze your data. What social purpose did the questions serve? Were they really asking for information or were they directing the conversation or otherwise directing the behavior of the listener? What was the format of the answers or were the questions even answered?
- Be prepared to discuss your findings in class. What are the implications for English teachers?
- Write a two-page discussion of your findings to hand in. Be sure to indicate where you heard these questions and the circumstances. In your discussion include the questions you heard and their answers. .

Teaching Ideas.

1. **Question Catch.** Here's a good activity to help the students get acquainted while letting them practice their questions. Ask the students what kinds of things they might want to know about each other, such as name, hobbies, favorite foods, or activities. As they brainstorm, write the topics on the board. Then have everyone sit in a circle. Give a tennis ball, a soft small stuffed toy, or even a wadded up sheet of paper to one of the students. That student asks a question based on the topics on the board

- and then tosses the object to another student. That student then answers the question, asks the same or another question and tosses the object to someone else. The game continues in this way.
2. **Question Formation.** This activity helps those who are visual learners remember the grammar of question formation. Write out several short sentences, some with auxiliary verbs, some without. Write the sentences on 3 x 5 cards, one word per card. (You can keep these cards for other activities.) If a card has a main verb with verb agreement or with the past tense, on the other side write the plain form of the verb without the tense or verb agreement. Write other cards with *wh-* question words appropriate for the sentences you have selected. Prepare other cards with *do*, *does* and *did*. Place the sentences on the chalk rail and then have a student move the cards around and make appropriate substitutions of *wh-* words to make various questions. For verbs in the simple present with verb agreement or with the past, when you add the appropriate *do* operator, turn the verb card over so the plain form of the verb appears. That way they will see that the tense and the verb agreement has shifted to the *do*.
 3. **Who am I?** This version of the popular game Twenty Questions practices yes/no-questions. Have the students think of the name of a famous person, such as a political figure, a singer, or a movie star, or alternatively, someone well known locally or at the school. When it is their turn to be *it*, the rest of the class has twenty opportunities to ask yes/no-questions to gather enough information so they can make the identification.