

The background features a large, faded watermark of the University of Basrah logo. The logo is circular and contains a central emblem of a tree with an open book at its base. The text 'UNIVERSITY OF BASRAH' and 'COLLEGE OF EDUCATION FOR HUMAN SCIENCES' is visible around the perimeter of the logo, along with the year '1975' on both sides. The text 'جامعة البصرة' is written in Arabic at the bottom of the logo.

English Grammar
Fourth Year
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Week 5: The Simple Sentence

Lecture No. 13:

- Positive Orientation**
- Negative Orientation**
- Tag Questions**

Positive Orientation 1

Like negative statements, yes-no questions may contain nonassertive forms such as any and ever. The question containing such forms is generally neutral, with no bias in expectation towards a positive or negative response.

- The boat has left already.

Has the boat left yet?

- I live somewhere near London.

Do you live anywhere near London?

Positive Orientation 2

But questions may be **CONDUCTIVE**, i.e. they may indicate that the speaker is predisposed to the kind of answer he has wanted or expected. Thus, a positive question may be presented in a form which is biased towards a positive answer. It has positive orientation, for example, if it uses assertive forms rather than the usual nonassertive forms:

- **Did someone call last night?**
['Is it true that someone called last night?]
- **Has the boat left already?**
- **Do you live somewhere near Dover?**

These questions indicate that the speaker presupposes that the answer is yes: he merely asks for confirmation of his presupposition or assumption.

Negative Orientation 1

Negative orientation is found in questions which contain a negative form of one kind or another:

- Don't you believe me?
- Have they never invited you home?
- Aren't you joining us this evening?
- Has nobody called?
- Isn't your door bell working?

Negative Orientation 2

Negative orientation is complicated by an element of surprise or disbelief. The implication is that the speaker had originally hoped for a positive response, but new evidence now suggests that the response will be negative. Thus, Hasn't he told you what to do? Means: 'Surely he has told you what to do, hasn't he? I would have thought that he had told you.' Here there is a combining of a positive and a negative attitude, which one may distinguish as the OLD EXPECTATION (positive) and NEW EXPECTATION (negative). Because the old expectation tends to be identified with the speaker's hopes or wishes, negatively orientated questions often express disappointment or annoyance:

- **Can't you keep silent for some minutes?** [I'd have thought you'd be able to, but apparently you can't]
- **Isn't he eligible for application?** [I'd have thought he is eligible, but apparently he is not]
- **Isn't he ashamed of himself?** [I'd have thought he is ashamed, but apparently he is not]

Forming Tag Questions

The general rules for forming the most common types of tag question are:

- A. The tag question consists of operator and subject in that order, enclitic n't, if present, is attached to the operator. In formal English the negative particle is placed after the pronoun: did they not? is she not? That position is usual in informal English in Northern BrE dialects.
- B. The operator is generally the same as the operator of the preceding statement.
 - **I haven't seen you before, have I?**
If the statement has no operator, the dummy auxiliary DO is used, as for yes-no questions in general.
 - **She knows you, doesn't she?**
- C. The subject of the tag must be a pronoun which either repeats, or is in coreference with, the subject of the statement, agreeing with it in number, person, and gender.
- D. If the statement is positive, the tag is generally negative, and vice versa.
- E. The nuclear tone of the tag occurs on the auxiliary, and is either rising or falling.

Types of Tag Questions 1

Four main types of tag question emerge from the observance of these rules:

1. POSITIVE + NEGATIVE WITH A RISING TONE

He likes football, doesn't he?

2. POSITIVE + NEGATIVE WITH A FALLING TONE

He likes football, doesn't he?

3. NEGATIVE + POSITIVE WITH A RISING TONE

He doesn't like his job, does he?

4. NEGATIVE + POSITIVE WITH A FALLING TONE

He doesn't like his job, does he?

Types of Tag Questions 2

The meanings of these sentences, like their forms, involve a statement and a question; each of them asserts something, and then invites the listener's response to it. Sentence (1), for example, can be rendered 'I assume he likes football; am I right?', (3) means the opposite: 'I assume he doesn't like his job; am I right? Clearly these sentences have a positive and a negative orientation respectively. A similar contrast exists between (2) and (4). But it is important, again, to separate two factors: an ASSUMPTION (expressed by the statement) and an EXPECTATION (expressed by the question). On this principle, we may distinguish the four types as:

- **Positive Assumption + Neutral Expectation + S – T**
- **Negative Assumption + Neutral Expectation – S + T**
- **Positive Assumption + Positive Expectation + S – T**
- **Negative Assumption + Negative Expectation – S – T**

Intonation of Tag Questions

The tag with a rising tone invites verification, expecting the hearer to decide the truth of the proposition in the statement. The tag with the falling tone, on the other hand, invites confirmation of the statement, and has the force of an exclamation rather than a genuine question. In this respect, types (3) and (4) are like (though not as emphatic as) exclamatory yes-no questions with a falling tone. Compare, for example:

- **Isn't it wonderful weather!** With **It's wonderful weather, isn't it?**
and
- **Wasn't she Angry!** With **She was Angry, wasn't she?**

Invariant Tag Questions

Several other tag questions inviting the listener's response may be appended to statements and exclamations. They have the same form whether the statement is positive or negative, and take a rising tone:

- **They forgot to attend the lecture, am I right?**
- **They didn't forget to attend the lecture, don't they?**