Unit 52

Question tags (**do you? isn't it?** etc.)

A

Study these examples:

Have you? and **wasn't it**? are *question tags* (= mini-questions that we often put on the end of a sentence in spoken English). In question tags, we use an auxiliary verb (**have/was/will** etc.). We use **do/does/did** for the present and past simple (see Unit 51):

- 'Karen plays the piano, **does**n't she?' 'Well, yes, but not very well.'
- 'You didn't lock the door, **did** you?' 'No, I forgot.'

B

Normally we use a *negative* question tag after a *positive* sentence:

positive sentence +	*negative tag*
Kate **will** be here soon,	**won't she**?
There **was** a lot of traffic,	**wasn't there**?
Joe **should** pass the exam,	**shouldn't he**?

… and a *positive* question tag after a *negative* sentence:

negative sentence +	*positive tag*
Kate **won't** be late,	**will she**?
They **don't** like us,	**do they**?
You **haven't** eaten yet,	**have you**?

Notice the meaning of **yes** and **no** in answer to a negative sentence:

- You're **not** going out today, **are you**? { **Yes.** (= Yes, I am going out) / **No.** (= No, I am not going out)

C

The meaning of a question tag depends on how you say it. If your voice goes *down*, you are not really asking a question; you are only inviting the listener to agree with you:

- 'It's a nice day, **isn't it**?' 'Yes, beautiful.'
- 'Paul doesn't look well today, **does he**?' 'No, he looks very tired.'
- 'Lisa's very funny. She's got a great sense of humour, **hasn't she**?' 'Yes, she has.'

But if the voice goes *up*, it is a real question:

- 'You haven't seen Lisa today, **have you**?' 'No, I haven't.'
  (= Have you by chance seen Lisa today?)

You can use a *negative sentence + positive tag* to ask for things or information, or to ask somebody to do something. The voice goes *up* at the end of the tag in sentences like these:

- 'You haven't got a pen, **have you**?' 'Yes, here you are.'
- 'You couldn't do me a favour, **could you**?' 'It depends what it is.'
- 'You don't know where Karen is, **do you**?' 'Sorry, I have no idea.'

D

After **Let's** … , the question tag is **shall we**:

- **Let's** go for a walk, **shall we**? (the voice goes *up*)

After **Don't** … , the question tag is **will you**:

- **Don't** be late, **will you**? (the voice goes *down*)

After **I'm** … , the negative question tag is **aren't I** (= am I not):

- I'm right, **aren't I**?' 'Yes, you are.'

Auxiliary verbs (**have/do/can** etc.) ➜ Unit 51