Section 22  spoken grammar

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possible further activities

Students don’t need to produce structures like those illustrated here, but it’s good for them to be aware of their existence, so that they are not confused if they meet examples. The illustrations are just intended for students to read. However, you may like to suggest that they look for more examples of questions in which the opening verb and subject have been dropped. They are common in speech, and also in advertisements (which often use spoken grammar). Students studying in English-speaking countries should be able to find plenty; others could look at advertisements on the internet or in English-language magazines.

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language notes

Topicalisation: spoken sentences may be built up quite differently from written sentences, not necessarily with the order subject-verb-object. Other pieces of information may be moved to the front to maintain focus on the topic of conversation, to give them more importance, or to set the scene for what follows. Students don’t need a productive knowledge of these structures, but it’s good for them to be aware of their existence.

In some languages, structures like these may be common in writing. Speakers of these languages need to realise that in English they are mostly confined to informal speech, and may be out of place in formal writing.

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language notes

This kind of ellipsis is restricted to informal speech, and to writing (as in advertisements) that imitates speech. There is no need for students to produce sentences like this themselves, but it’s helpful for them to be aware of the existence of the structure.

Students who have been told NOT to drop pronouns may be a little confused when they find that there are cases where it happens. As in all subjects of study, things get less simple as one progresses.

possible further activities

Elliptical questions: advertisements See the notes for page 305.

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language note

This kind of ellipsis is perfectly common in both formal and informal language, and students need an active knowledge of the basic structure if they are aiming at reasonably natural and correct English.
possible further activities

**What came before?** Give students the ends of some sentences or exchanges using auxiliary verbs (perhaps taken from or based on examples in this lesson). Ask them to write possible beginnings. Like this:

- *but I didn't.* ‘You said I would get lost, but I didn’t.’
- *I have.* ‘Please phone Andy.’ ‘I have.’

Some possible endings:

- *It is.* … but it isn’t.
- *I do.* I can’t.
- *but I couldn’t.* … but I am.
- *but I was.* … and I will.

**Personalisation** Ask students to complete some or all of the following sentences.

- *I've never.* … but I probably could have.
- *I didn't.* … but I should have.
- *I haven't.* … yet, but I might one day.
- *I thought.* I …, but I wasn’t.
- *I wanted to.* …, and I did.

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**language notes**

Students are likely to find question tags complicated - irritatingly so, because the equivalent in other languages is often a single word, for instance the equivalent of ‘No?’.

This is an area where intonation practice is valuable – the function of a question tag depends on whether the voice rises or falls. ‘Pronunciation for grammar’ will help with this.

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possible further activities

**Requests** In pairs, students prepare, practise and perform short two-part exchanges.

One makes a request with a negative sentence plus question tag (rising intonation); the other replies appropriately. Like this:

- ‘You can't lend me a pen, can you?’ ‘Sure. Here you are.’
- ‘You couldn't make me some coffee, could you?’ ‘Sorry, I'm busy.’

Replies don’t have to be polite; just realistic:

- ‘You couldn't iron my jacket, could you?’ ‘Iron it yourself.’

**Asking and confirming** Give students a list of questions about Britain, the US, or some other country that they haven’t been to. Their job is to ask the questions with question tags, using a falling intonation if they are sure of the answer, and a rising intonation if they aren’t.

Like this:

- [Is Scotland a part of England?] ‘Scotland is a part of England, isn’t it?’ [rising intonation] ‘No, it isn’t.’
- [Is Boston in the east?] ‘Boston is in the east, isn’t it?’ [falling intonation] ‘Yes, that’s right.’

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**language notes**

It’s important for students to realise that one-word answers (‘Yes’ or ‘No’) may not be considered polite, so that these ‘short answer’ structures are important in conversation.

Students often find reply questions confusing – they may suppose that the speaker didn’t understand, or doesn’t believe them:

- ‘I've just been to London.’ ‘Have you?’ *‘Yes, I just told you!’*
possible further activities

**Personalisation**  Get students to make lists of yes/no questions to ask each other (say, five each). Then they ask and answer their questions, using short answers in their replies. Or it can be done as a class survey, with students each asking all the others one question, noting the number of affirmative and negative answers, and reporting back.

**Agreeing and disagreeing**  Say some things that students can agree or disagree with (e.g. ‘It’s Tuesday’ ‘You’re German’ ‘You like swimming’ ‘You can speak Greek’). Students reply with short answers.

**About yourself**  Say some things about yourself (true or not). Students respond with reply questions and appropriate expressions.

‘I’ve just won a million dollars in a lottery.’ ‘Have you? Great!’

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**language notes**

This is another complex set of structures which may have simpler equivalents in students’ languages (perhaps the equivalent of ‘I also’ etc).

**possible further activities**

**Things in common**  Give students five or ten minutes to work in pairs, finding as many things in common as they can. They report these using the structures practised in the lesson. For example:

- Her birthday is in March, and so is mine.
- He doesn’t eat meat, and nor do I.

You might like to give points – the more unexpected the points in common, the better.

‘I’m learning English, and so is she.’ – ‘No points’
‘He’s never been to a rock concert, and nor have I.’ – ‘Three points.’
‘She collects antique Scottish coins, and so do I.’ – ‘Twenty points.’

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**language notes**

Note that these forms are relatively fixed. ‘I don’t think so’ is normal, while ‘I think not’ is unusual; ‘I hope not’ is normal and ‘I don’t hope so’ very unusual (though of course the unusual forms will be understood).

**possible further activities**

**Short dialogues**  Students prepare, practise and perform short dialogues containing two or more (but not too many) of the expressions practised in this lesson.