

**13** **Tag questions** are short yes/no questions added to statements. They are conversation forms and seldom occur in writing except in reported speech. Sometimes tag questions are used just to keep the conversation going; other times the speaker is not absolutely sure of his statement and he is asking for confirmation. The two different situations are reflected in the intonation.<sup>1</sup>

Many languages have just one tag which is added to all statements:  
*n'est-ce pas?* *nicht wahr?* *değil mi?* *هیک می؟* *أليس كذلك؟*  
*है ना?*

English is more complicated. There is a separate tag for each sentence pattern. Observe the following facts about conversation questions:

<sup>1</sup> See Pronunciation helps.

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- a. When the statement is affirmative, the question is negative; when the statement is negative, the question is affirmative.

- b. When the verb in the statement is a single form of *be*, the verb in the question is the same form.

Taxes are high in College Town, aren't they?  
That's right, isn't it?

- c. When the verb in the statement is a single form of any verb except *be*, the verb in the question is that same form (simple, *-s*, or past) of *do*.

You live in an apartment, don't you?  
Professor Miller lives in an apartment, doesn't he?  
Six years ago the Allens lived in an apartment, didn't they?

- d. In most other cases, the verb in the question is the first auxiliary of the verb phrase.

You've owned this house quite a while, haven't you?  
It will be six years soon, won't it?  
You're not going to sell it, are you?  
We hadn't thought of selling it, had we?

- e. When the verb phrase in the statement is made with *used to* or *have to*, the verb in the question is *do*.

The Allens used to live in an apartment, didn't they?  
They didn't have to pay property taxes then, did they?  
They have to pay taxes now, don't they?

- f. The second word of a tag question is always the subject form of a personal pronoun (I, 6), or one of the expletives *it* (VIII, 6), or *there* (III, 11). It is never a noun or any other noun substitute.

This is a hard lesson, isn't it?

There are many tag questions in English, aren't there?

Learning all of them takes a long time, doesn't it?

You have only one tag in your language, don't you?<sup>2</sup>

- g. Statements made about one's self with the verb *be* are generally made in the negative, due to the lack of a contraction of *am + not* (I, 8). If the statement is affirmative, the full form must be used in the question. Though it sounds a bit pedantic, it is certainly quite acceptable.

I'm not late, am I?

I'm not going to see you again, am I?

I'm going to see you again, am I not?

- h. Responses to tag questions are the same as responses to any other yes/no questions. They vary according to facts and opinions.

**14** Verb with preposition in this lesson is *grow up*—to change from an infant to an adult.

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<sup>2</sup> In British English the tag for this question is *haven't you* (see II, 20a).