

## II. INTERROGATIVES, INTERROGATIVE PRONOUNS, AND SENTENCE-ENDING PARTICLES

### 1. Inventory of basic interrogative sentence patterns:

- a. ...吗？ 你会说汉语吗？
- b. Positive/negative choice type:  
...SV 不 SV? 学中文容易不容易？  
...FV 不 FV...? 他来不来？ 你平常看报不看？ 你平常看不看报？  
...AV... 不 AV...? 你喜欢唱歌不喜欢？ 你喜欢不喜欢唱歌？ 你喜不喜欢唱歌？  
(with "verbal completion aspect") ...了没(有)...? ...有没有...?  
你听见了那件事没有？ 你有没有听见那件事？
- c. Choice type (using the exclusive "or" 还是，cf. Lesson I.1.i.)  
...还是...？ 他是英国人还是美国人？ 你想喝咖啡还是喝茶？
- d. Tagged-on "...呢" type:  
Antecedent statement, subj. 呢？  
(the "subj. 呢" part can be translated as "..., and what about...?")  
我们家有四口人，你们家呢？  
  
Job applicant: 我教过美国和欧洲历史... Interviewer: 亚洲历史呢？你也能教吗？  
Note: The antecedent statement and the "tagged-on question" may be spoken by different speakers; and the *subject* of the tagged-on question may parallel the *object* of the antecedent statement (e.g. 亚洲历史 parallels 美国和欧洲历史, object of the antecedent statement).
- e. Rhetorical question (confirming an assumption):  
...吧？ 美国人都会开车吧？ 你能听懂我说的汉语吧？

The interrogative forms using 呢 and 吧 tend to be eschewed by native-English speakers, perhaps because comparable patterns are not commonly used in the English language. However, these two forms are very basic and frequently used in Chinese. Therefore, aside from comprehending these two patterns, students should practice using them actively.

呢 and 吧 both have additional usages aside from their function in interrogative sentences. The various usages of these two particles are reflected by different intonation. These usages will be the subject of part #8-9 in this lesson.

- f. Questions using interrogative pronouns (also called "question words," QW for short): This type of question, which requires a "fill in the blank" type of answer, will be elaborated in #2.

### 2. QW questions, which involve the use of interrogative pronouns (什么、什么时候、什么地方、为什么、谁、哪个、哪儿、怎么、几个):

- a. Examples: 你为什么来 I.U.P. 学习呢？  
为什么你要来 I.U.P. 学习呢？  
什么地方能买到最好最便宜的衣服？  
谁知道这个字的意思？

你长大以后要做什么？	not: 你长大以后，什么你要做？
老师，我们每天要学几个生字？	not: 几个生字我们每天要学？
你最喜欢吃什么菜？	awkward: 什么菜你最喜欢吃？
厕所在哪儿？	not: 哪儿是厕所？
你是什么时候到北京的？	awkward: 什么时候你到北京？

What's wrong with the sentences in the right column above? How would you fix them? Why are some native English speakers prone to make such errors? You wouldn't make that kind of error yourself 吧? ☺

- b. Adding the particle 呢 at the end of this type of question to impart a "softening" effect: When a QW-type question has a accusatory or challenging tone (e.g. "Why are you late for class?" "Teacher, how many vocabulary items do you want us to memorize each day?"), the tone of voice can be eased a bit by added the particle 呢 at the end. This usage is favored by women, although it's perfectly fine for men to use it as well. However, regardless of one's gender, over-using this form gives the speaker a non-assertive image.

老师，我们每天要学几个生字？	老师，我们每天要学几个生字呢？
你怎么又迟到了？	你怎么又迟到了呢？
今天你想吃什么菜？	今天你想吃什么菜呢？

An additional *subtle nuance* imparted by the 呢 in the last sentence is reference to an antecedent (cf. 1.d.), something like "Well now, we had Cantonese dishes yesterday and Hunan dishes yesterday. What do you feel like eating *today*?"

- c. Rhetorical use of QW questions (often coupled with 呢): The implication is that the speaker has an assumption about something. The speaker's idea can be expressed by a declarative sentence, but using a rhetorical QW-type question makes the expression stronger and more lively. Compare the following pairs:

没有人知道。	谁知道呢？
别问我，我不知道。	别问我，我哪儿知道！
他不懂（跟他谈没用）。	他懂什么？（他懂个屁！）

3. Sentences containing "embedded" QW-type questions:

我真不明白 *他说什么*。 你能不能告诉我 *厕所在哪儿*？ 请你问她 *要什么饮料*。

Native English speakers tend to avoid this type of sentence in speaking Chinese, perhaps because they assume these sentences are complicated. However, this sentence pattern is actually quite simple and straightforward in Chinese. It behooves the student to practice using this pattern actively.

4. Sentences with positive/negative choice-type questions embedded (cf. 1.b.): The questions embedded within this type of sentences involve the notion of "whether...or not." Because this notion is often expressed in English by the word "if" (e.g. "I don't know *if* it will rain today."), direct translation into Chinese leads to misuse of the word 如果 or 要是, which mean "if" *only in the sense of "on the condition that..., supposing..."* In other words, the English word "if" has two very distinct meanings, and only one of them ("on the condition that..., supposing...") is equivalent to 如果 or 要是 in Chinese. The other meaning of "if" -

"whether...or not..." - is not translatable into Chinese by vocabulary usage; the notion is conveyed by using the positive/negative choice type question pattern (cf. #1.b.).

The following sentences are all incorrect. How would you fix them?

- ✗你知道如果他会说汉语吗？
- ✗你知道不知道如果他会说汉语（吗）？
- ✗你得快决定如果你去不去，要不然就买不到票了。

The acid test for whether 如果/要是 is the proper translation for "if" is that this "if" must be followed by a "then" clause, and the "then" clause often contains the adverb 就. Furthermore, the 如果/要是 must be at the very front of the sentence or right after the subject (like a movable adverb).

如果你太忙，你不必来。  
你如果太忙，就不必来了。  
要是天气太热，我们就不去了。  
天气要是太热，我们就不去了。

The "whether or not" "if" is always in an embedded question, and not in a two-clause "if...then..." sentence:

我不知道他是不是中国人。  
请问他喝咖啡放不放糖。  
火车快要开了，你得快决定你要不要去。  
我怎么能知道他是不是中国人呢？

The 如果/要是 is rarely used in an embedded sentence. In the rare cases where the 如果/要是 "if" is used in an embedded sentence, the embedded sentence is not an interrogative sentence, but a "if...then..." sentence.

请告诉他如果他决定去，他必得快买票。  
信上说要是你今天晚上再不回家，我就要和你离婚了。

Note that while 如果/要是 is not at the very front of the above two sentences, it is at the very front of the embedded sentences.

5. In the next three sections, we will discuss several ways in which Chinese interrogative pronouns are used in non-interrogative functions.

Interrogative pronouns used as "indefinites" in negative sentences: Interrogative pronouns used as "indefinites" are generally translated into English as "any-," e.g. anywhere, anything, anyone. The negative aspect of these sentences is *not absolute*. For example, the notion of "I didn't go anywhere yesterday," as expressed by this pattern in Chinese, means "I didn't go anywhere in particular," and not "I absolutely didn't step out of the house." This is in contrast to the pattern discussed in #6.

昨天我没去什么地方，（就在校园里走了一下）。  
我去了那个晚会，可是没看到谁。

他没买到什么，（就买了一些普通的日用品）。  
你有多少钱？ 我没多少钱了。(I don't have much money left anymore.)

6. Interrogative pronouns used to convey the sense of *all-inclusiveness* - or if used with a negative verb, *all-exclusiveness*. This usage (both the all-inclusive and the all-exclusive) is normally coupled with 都 or 也, and is equivalent to "every..." or "no..., none" in English.

世界上哪儿都有中国人。  
这个餐馆什么菜都好吃。  
他们 24 小时都开门，你什么时候去都可以。  
他的脾气很不好，这是谁都知道的。  
今天我什么地方都没去。 not: 今天我都没去什么地方。  
你有什么问题都可以去问他。 awkward: 如果你有一个问题可以去问他。  
谁都不知道他们到哪儿去了。 not: 谁不知道他们都到哪儿去了。

In contrast to the pattern in #5, the negative form of this pattern is "absolute." Compare the following pairs:

今天我什么地方都没去。	昨天我没去什么地方。
去年在学校里，我什么都没学到。	去年在学校里，我没学到什么。
我刚到这个地方，谁都不认识。	虽然我在这儿一年了，可是还不认识什么人。

7. The sentence pattern "...QW...就 QW": equivalent to "-ever," e.g. "wherever, whatever, whoever."

什么时候方便就什么时候去吧。 weak or awkward: 你方便的时候就可以去。  
你什么时候方便就(都)可以去。  
谁先到，谁就可以占到最好的位子。  
weak or awkward: 先到的人可以占到最好的位子。  
从前在中国，人们的工作是政府分配的。一个人不是想做什么，就能做什么。  
weak or awkward: ……，一个人不一定能做他想做的工作。

8. As mentioned in #1.e., 呢 and 吧 both have additional usages aside from their function in interrogative sentences.

Various usages of the sentence-final particle 呢:

- a. Conveying continuation of an action or persistence of a situation: 呢 is used to reinforce the sense of continuation or persistence conveyed by 还. While it is often coupled with 还, its use is more customary than mandatory, i.e., its use is optional.

他还没起床呢。  
大家还在吃饭呢，你等一等吧。

- b. Sentence "nudger," to reinforce a point, often in contradicting an expressed view:

我才不要去呢！  
你说他很聪明？我倒觉得他有点笨呢。

c. Tagged-on "...呢" type question (cf. #1.d.):

他爸爸是中国人，（那）他妈妈呢？

他终于把上个星期的功课做完了，（那）这个星期的功课呢？

d. Tagged-on interrogative particle (cf. #2.b): This use of the 呢 is optional and imparts a softening effect.

中午吃什么？ or 中午吃什么呢？

你想去中国哪个大学留学？ or 你想去中国哪个大学留学呢？

9. Various usages of the sentence-final particle 吧:

a. Suggestion or mild command (mid-falling intonation).

下雨了，别去了吧！

我们一起去吧！

给我这个老同事一点面子吧！

b. Assent (mid-falling intonation).

好吧！那就一起去吧！

c. Rhetorical question (rising intonation).

老板也会一起来吧？

A: 你们不会用太多味精吧？ B: 您放心，我们这儿是一点儿味精也不用的。

d. Suspicion/skepticism/doubt (low-level intonation).

饭馆不会都已经关门了吧。

你没忘了今天晚上的约会吧。

这么紧张的中美关系不可能继续太久吧。

10. 贝 (bei): very colloquial, similar in meaning to 吧 (#9.a.), but with an additional tone of mild exasperation at, or disdain for, the person to whom the expression is addressed.

不想去就别去贝！

(implying: Don't pester me anymore about it, just don't go if you don't want to.)

你一定要去就去贝！

(implying: It'd really be best if you didn't go. But if you insist on going...)

就这样用手拿贝！ (showing a squeamish girl how to pick up an earthworm)

(implying: What a nitwit, there's nothing to this, just pick it up with your hand)