

**“Is loin the same as filet mignon?”:**



**Answers to yes-no questions in native-speaker discourse**

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A, B, and C are at the meat department of a grocery store. A is a non-native speaker of English while B and C are native speakers of English.

1.     A:     *Is “loin” the same thing as filet mignon?*  
       B:     *Well, I’m not sure about that. Does it look like filet mignon? Let me see...*  
       A:     *Yeah, that’s what I think. I just want to know if it’s the same thing. Is it?*  
       B:     *I don’t know. Mom, is “loin” the same thing as filet mignon?*  
       C:     *Well, tenderloin is, I think, but as far as I know, loin is not... but it might actually be tenderloin and the store just abbreviated it on the label and wrote “loin”.*  
       A:     *All I want to know is if they’re the same thing, yes or no! I don’t need to know the whole history behind it!*  
       B:     *Well, you know better than to ask us if you want a direct answer!*

This is a transcript of a recalled conversation. Speaker A asks a yes-no question which seeks either a positive or negative answer. According to the grammar taught to English as a Second Language (ESL) students in ESL textbooks, there are four possible answers to this question:

2.     1. *Yes, loin is the same thing as filet mignon.*  
       2. *No, loin is not the same thing as filet mignon.*  
       3. *Yes.*  
       4. *No.*

None of the multiple responses he gets, however, fits the patterns he has been taught to expect. What is the basis of this discrepancy? How do native speakers of English typically answer yes-no questions? This is the question I will strive to answer in this paper. First, I will attempt to provide a definition of yes-no questions as provided by two reference grammars of English. I will evaluate the information provided in those sources as to the format of answers we can expect from yes-no questions. I will also look at several ESL grammar textbooks and how they define yes-no questions as well as how they teach students to construct their own answers to such questions. Secondly, I will

discuss my usage study, in which I look at a dataset of yes-no questions and answers in an attempt to provide a more accurate understanding of actual native-speaker responses to questions that fit the definition of “yes-no question”. To conclude, I will use my findings to provide suggestions to textbook writers and ESL teachers as to how they might write materials that aid students in learning both how to answer yes-no questions as well as what to expect from native-speakers when they are asked yes-no questions.

### **What are yes-no questions, and how do we answer them?**

Questions are classified according to the type of responses expected by them. This classification system thus puts a great deal of emphasis on responses and what type of replies can be expected from questions. In their classic reference grammar, Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik (1989) identify three types of questions based on the type of reply they expect; those that expect affirmation or negation of a proposition are called “yes-no questions” (p. 806). Quirk et. al. go into great detail describing the anatomy of a yes-no question and how to determine whether or not a particular question is conducive (meaning that it “may indicate that the speaker is predisposed to the kind of answer wanted or expected” (p. 808)). Examples of neutral or non-conducive questions are as follows:

3. *Have you ever been to Florence?*
4. *Does David like sushi?*

In such questions, there is no assumption expressed on the part of the question asker as to the orientation of the response. Examples of conducive questions are:

5. *Did someone take out the trash?*
6. *Haven't you ordered the flowers yet?*

Thus, according to Quirk et. al, the question in example 5 anticipates an affirmative answer (“yes, Jane did”), as signaled by the assertive form “someone”, while in example 6, a negative answer is expected (“no, I’ve been to busy”).

Maximum conduciveness is said to be expressed by yes-no questions formed by the combination of a statement and a tag question:

7. *You paid the phone bill, didn't you?*

8. *This weather is depressing, don't you think?*

Examples 7 and 8 both expect an affirmative answer. Rising or falling tone in a yes-no question formed with a tag question may also affect the interpretation of assumptions and expectations from the answer. For example, according to Quirk et. al., a negative assumption and negative expectation are expressed by a negative assumption with falling tone:

9. FALLING TONE

He doesn't like his JÒB, DÒES he? (p. 811).

In this example, the person asking the question expects a negative response, such as “no, he hated it from the start.”

Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) add that yes-no questions are not limited to inverted question form or to statements with tag questions, but may also take the form of uninverted questions “posed in statement form but anticipat[ing] confirmation or denial/negation of a positive or negative presupposition” (p. 214):

10. A: *Mary doesn't want to go anymore.*

B: *She's feeling tired?*

Since B's statement is conveyed as a question through the use of rising tone, Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman point out that syntax alone cannot be used as a test of whether or not an utterance is a yes-no question (see also Schegloff 1984 on this point).

Quirk et. al. assert that "any utterance of a question that has the illocutionary force of an inquiry may be answered by *I don't know* or *I'm not sure*, or by a refusal to answer..., or by an evasion... , or by a challenge to a presupposition of the question" and that while "questions primarily have the illocutionary force of inquiries... they are often used as directives conveying requests, offers, invitations, and advice" (p. 806). While Quirk et. al. do provide information about the expectations of the *orientation* of answers to yes-no questions, they do not address the issue of the *form* we can expect such answers to take.

Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman pick up where Quirk et. al. leave off, and explain that despite the fact that ESL grammar textbooks often teach students to answer all questions with a full form, "it is unlikely that the response to a yes/no question will be in the form of a full sentence" (p. 212). Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman hold that a full answer to a yes/no question may even give the listener the impression that the speaker is annoyed by the question:

11. A: *Did you bring my shirts to the cleaner's?*

B: *Yes, I brought your shirts to the cleaner's.*

The answer may convey to the native speaker of English an underlying sentiment of "*don't you trust me? Don't you think I can remember what I have to do? Did you think I was so irresponsible that you had to remind me?*". This has obvious implications for the ESL teacher who should, in light of the potential negative effect expressed by a full-

sentence answer to a yes-no question, not insist on their students answering such questions with full sentences, as they often do (p. 212). According to Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman, alternative, more common formulaic answers include “yes” or “no” plus copula, or “yes” or “no” plus the auxiliary verb. An example of the latter is:

12. A: Is Leo hungry?

B: Yes, he is, *or* No, he isn't.

Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman state, however, that these short forms are also fairly uncommon and cite an unpublished paper by Winn-Bell Olsen (1980), who explains the form of responses to yes-no questions used by native speakers. Winn-Bell Olsen

discovered that native speakers were much more likely to answer questions with a direct “yes” (or its colloquial variants, e.g., “yup,” “yeah,” “uh huh”) or a direct “no” (or its variants, e.g., “nah,” “nope,” “uh uh,”), each often followed by some sort of expansion. Indirect affirmations, denials, or hedges... accounted for a rather large percentage of answers as well. Finally, a significant portion of the answers were formulaic expressions of confirmation or denial (e.g., “I doubt it”) (Winn-Bell Olsen 1980; as cited in Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, p. 216).

These two reference grammars of English are thus not very helpful in providing the language teacher with insight into the forms that answers to yes-no questions may take.

### **How do ESL grammar textbooks define yes-no questions?**

The information provided by reference grammars about answers to yes-no questions is thus disappointing. Unfortunately, ESL textbooks do not provide much more enlightenment. Azar (1989) does not present yes-no questions in the main body of her popular textbook *Understanding and Using English Grammar*, however, the topic is included briefly in an appendix of supplementary grammar units, under the heading “questions”. Two charts address the “forms of yes/no and information questions” and

“shortened yes/no questions”. No instruction is devoted to the forms of answers to such questions. Following is a small portion of the chart:

	Auxiliary Verb	Subject	Main verb		
(a) She lives there.	Does	she	live	there?	If the verb is in the simple present, use <i>does</i> (with <i>he, she, it</i> ) or <i>do</i> (with <i>I, you, we, they</i> ) in the question. If the verb is simple past, use <i>did</i> .
(d) He is living there.	Is	he	living	there?	If the verb has an auxiliary (a helping verb), the same auxiliary is used in the question. There is no change in the form of the main verb.

(Azar 1989, p. A8)

In contrast to Azar’s relegation of yes-no questions to an appendix, Riggenbach and Samuda (2000) devote two pages of a 381-page text to the topic in their intermediate ESL grammar textbook *Grammar Dimensions: Form, Meaning, and Use*. Little mention is made of answers to yes-no questions, but the text does instruct students that “when a statement form question is used, the speaker usually expects the listener to agree” (p. 51). For example, the yes-no question “She’s a cheerleader?” anticipates an affirmative answer, such as “yes, she is”. All exercises, however, involve the formation of yes-no questions, and the form that answers should take is not even addressed in the text. The book comes with an accompanying CD-ROM, however, and to its credit yes-no questions are given generous attention on the computer program. “Yes/No Questions” is one of thirty-four categories on the program (albeit it is number 34), and has two levels. The first level has three activities, two of which involve the form of yes-no questions, and the third, finally, involves answering yes-no questions and is entitled “Short Answers”. The exercise involves choosing the correct form of the yes-no question from a selection of

four (only one of which is correct). If the correct question is chosen, the student is given the opportunity to choose the correct form of the answer, only one of which is correct. This activity is disappointing, though, as the “correct” answer is always presented in standard full form:

13. ***Choose the correct form of the question:***

- Does you have new jewelry?
- Do you have some new jewelry? [correct]
- Do you have a new jewelry?
- Do you have jewelry any?

***Choose the correct form of the answer:***

- Yes, I does have some new jewelry.
- Yes, I do have any new jewelry.
- Yes, I do have some new jewelry. [correct]
- Yes, I have any jewelry. (Larsen-Freeman 1997, CD-ROM)

The “Grammar Help” icon for this section is equally unhelpful; clicking it gets the response: “there’s no help for this topic.” The second level in the yes-no question category also has three sections. The first is a review of negative yes-no questions in which students are asked to change statements into negative yes-no questions. While providing good practice, the section does not address the issue of the response assumptions associated with negative yes-no questions. In the second section, students are asked to turn a statement into a yes-no question, and in the third section the user is asked to write the appropriate tag question to change a statement into a question. While again providing good practice, the meaning and assumptions of tag questions are not discussed.

Fuchs, Westheimer, and Bonner (1994) take a different approach to teaching ESL students how to ask questions in their intermediate ESL grammar textbook, *Focus on Grammar*. Rather than extracting questions from the language and putting them in a category of their own, they are interspersed with other aspects of grammar. Eighteen



sections of the book (organized primarily by verb tenses) contain charts and explanations of yes-no questions as the varying tenses are used with them. While in most cases, this text deals primarily with the format of yes-no questions, the so-called "Grammar Notes" following each grammar unit occasionally suggest answers to questions that go beyond the standard short and long forms:

14. We often use *I'd rather not* to refuse an offer, suggestion, or invitation.  
A: Would you like some dessert?  
B: I'd rather not. I've had enough to eat (p. 275).
15. In short answers, you can use the modal alone or *have (got) to*.  
Does Anne live near here? She could. I run into her a lot.  
Does she still work at Wilson's? She may not. I saw a new clerk there (p. 310).

Though the forms of answers to yes-no questions are not explicitly addressed in this text, Fuchs et. al. provide more realistic examples than the other two popular grammar texts examined.

**How do native-speakers actually answer yes-no questions?:  
What the literature says.**

Most of the research that has been done on yes-no questions has focused on how people *ask* the questions rather than on how they *answer* such questions. Richards (1977) is apparently the only scholar who has published on answers to yes-no questions in a professional journal. In order to determine what forms are used to answer yes-no questions, Richards analyzed both written English (a sample of modern novels and plays) which represented nearly 600 question and answer sets, as well as spoken English. For the spoken English, Richards recorded informal interviews in which participants were told they were being interviewed about a cultural topic and not for linguistic purposes,

which yielded 280 sets of yes-no questions and answers (1977, p. 137). After examining the data, Richards established six classes of answers and grouped data into the classes. His findings revealed that less than 10% of the written answers and less than 20% of the spoken answers contained an auxiliary or verb repetition from the question, such as:

16. A: Would you like fish for dinner?

B: Yes, I would.

As noted, this is the form that is most often taught in ESL textbooks, if answers are taught at all.

One weakness of Richards' study is the source of his data, 60% of which was drawn from works of written fiction rather than from unplanned oral discourse. In addition, it appears from the few representative examples of question-answer sets that Richards' corpus consists primarily of British English. While this is not a weakness of his research, it should be stated from which dialect a data sample is drawn, given that there are significant dialectal differences between British and American English.

In an unpublished paper, Frantz (1996) builds on Richards' argument that the short-form responses presented to students in ESL texts are not representative of the actual responses to yes-no questions in native-speaker discourse. His study examines responses to yes-no questions in transcribed "face-to-face interactions only" (p. 3) between eight pairs of speakers, half of which were native speaker dyads and the other four were native - non-native speaker dyads. Frantz identified yes-no question/answer tokens in his transcripts and categorized the form of responses according to categories adapted from those identified by Richards (which will be explained in detail in the next section of this paper). Frantz found that the three most common response types were:

- Words or short expressions which are synonyms of “yes” or “no” or which have a meaning between the two. (e.g.: “So, is your diet working? *Not at all.*”)
- “Yes” or “no” or a synonym, without the verb or auxiliary from the question, but with additional qualification or comment. (e.g.: “Do ya like Mrs. R.? *Uh huh. She’s a nice teacher.*”)
- Comment, qualification, or other type of response, without “yes” or “no” or a synonym, and without the verb or auxiliary from the question. (e.g.: “Do you... have contacts? With other Japanese students? *Actually, there is [an] ... association called Japanese friends association or something like that but uh, we have only one or two events*”) (pp. 6-7).

The most significant of Frantz’s findings is that the form taught by most ESL textbooks (yes-no plus personal pronoun plus auxiliary) was not among the most common forms used in the conversations he analyzed. One weakness of Frantz’s study is that he does not identify the size of the sample that he looked at or the contexts of the conversations he analyzed. Without knowledge of the frequencies of answer types Frantz found, we cannot have confidence interpreting the findings he reports, and though the transcripts he used were of “face-to-face interactions,” we do not know how well the subjects knew each other and thus we do not know the formality of the conversations; level of formality may predict the distribution of answer types to these questions (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, p. 217).

### **How do native-speakers actually answer yes-no questions?: The study**

This study builds on and extends both Richards’ and Frantz’s work by analyzing a different corpus of data. Richards’ study focused on written, rather than spoken, language and while this perhaps provides us with an understanding of how yes-no questions are answered in general, the reasons for his decision to use novels and plays is not discussed, and we cannot expect his findings to fully reflect spoken language. Written language is meant to reflect spoken language, and thus a direct analysis of the spoken language only might provide even novelists and script writers with a better

understanding of how people speak. Frantz's study improves on Richards' original idea through the analysis of spoken conversations, though Frantz does not inform the reader of the number of yes-no question-answer sets he was able to find in data from four sets of conversations. In this study, I will, like Richards and Frantz before me, look at how native speakers *answer* yes-no questions, but I will attempt to improve upon their studies by looking at a greater variety of data sources, quantifying my findings, and giving more information about data sources.

### **Methods:**

I started out with transcripts of three interviews that I conducted myself, and then sought out more interviews to enlarge my data pool after realizing that interviews seem to be a good source of yes-no questions. To the original three interviews, I added two transcripts of interviews done by a graduate student in the social sciences, transcripts of interviews done on television, and a transcript of a Supreme Court oral argument. Finally, I supplemented the interview transcripts with two transcripts of natural conversations between native speakers, in order to provide some potential for variety of yes-no question answer type. All interviews were face-to-face audio recorded with the exception of transcripts 4 and 5, in which non-verbal responses were also transcribed, and the majority of answer tokens analyzed were produced by native-speakers of American English, in contrast to Richards' study, which appears to have analyzed mostly British English. The data sources, representing a total of 8 hours of spoken discourse, are represented schematically in Table A:

**Table A: Data sources**

	<b>Data type</b>	<b>Data source</b>	<b>Sample #s</b>
1	Interview	my own transcript, interview with my mother	1-25
2	Interview	my own transcript, interview with lawyer	26-40
3	Interview	my own transcript, interview with legislator	41-47
4	TV talk show	Montel Williams	48-60
5	TV interview/talk show	Larry King Live	61-93
6	TV interview show	Jim Lehrer	94-102
7	TV interview show	Jim Lehrer	103-106
8	TV interview show	Charlayne Hunter-Gault	107
9	Conversation	existing transcript of 3 native speakers of English (graduate students)	108-119
10	Conversation	existing transcript of 2 native speaker boys (teenage)	120-128
11	Oral argument and defense in court of law	ACLU website transcript of Supreme Court hearing	129-146
12	Interview	NNS graduate student interview with NS graduate student	147-152
13	Interview	NNS graduate student with NS union leader	153-156

The first three interviews were conducted by myself while I was a graduate student in a social science field. They were about three different subjects, all unrelated to language. I was thus not in any way trying to elicit data for language analysis, making these interviews more representative of natural language than if I had been doing the interviews with yes-no questions in mind. I had, in fact, been instructed to avoid yes-no questions as a method of being an effective interviewer. Fortunately for the current research undertaking, I was a very inexperienced interviewer and asked a slew of yes-no questions. The theme of the first interview was immigration experience (my interviewee had immigrated from England over thirty years previously), the second interview was with a lawyer and was about experiences in law school, and the third interview was with a legislator who represented the Asian community.

The first two television interview-talk-show transcripts used in this study can be categorized as an intermediary between conversations and interviews. The first is a

transcript of an episode of Montel Williams (a television talk show) about a weight loss plan. The second is a transcript of an interview-conversation between Larry King and Andy Rooney, a television writer.

The next two television news interviews were between Jim Lehrer and two native speakers, the first with the then-current director of the CIA and the second with a proponent of "family values". The last television interview was between Charlayne Hunter-Gault and a native speaker who is not clearly identified.

The transcript of the Supreme Court oral argument was obtained from the American Civil Liberties Union website on the Internet, and looks at first glance as nothing more than a presentation of legal material, but on further observation can be likened to a more informal interaction between professional peers, which includes joke-telling and personal references.

The two transcripts of native speakers in natural conversation are not a rich source of data, providing only twenty-one instances of yes-no question-and-answer sets (samples 108-128) in 23 pages of transcript, but I include these because of their potential to provide examples of yes-no questions serving the function of making simple requests, something I did not expect to find in more formal interview situations.

Finally, two additional interviews were conducted by a graduate student in the social sciences. While the interviewer in this case was a non-native speaker, the interlocutors in both cases were native speakers. In addition, the non-native speaker has near-native command of the English language and has been educated in English since junior high school. The first of these interviews was between this graduate student and

one of her classmates, and was about the political situation in Yugoslavia. The second interview was with the leader of a graduate student union.

### **Analysis:**

My rationale for this study is to fill the gap between, on the one hand, what reference grammars and ESL books say about the form of answers to yes-no questions, and what native speakers actually do, on the other, by undertaking a contextual analysis of answers to yes-no questions. Contextual analysis, as described by Celce-Murcia (1980) “sets out to uncover as much information as possible regarding the meaning, function, and frequency of the form(s) [in question, and is] similar to much of the work that has been done under the rubric of usage studies” (p. 44). The difference between contextual analysis and usage studies is that the former have a “broader scope and empirical, data-based methods” (ibid.), which implies that they are more reliable than usage studies, especially when the latter base conclusions on author intuition and hunches which are not validated by empirical data. Contextual analysis is useful to the ESL teacher because “the two sources of information that ESL teachers have easy access to, i.e., reference grammars and ESL textbooks, usually do not provide information to help them formulate definitively accurate answers to frequently asked questions” (p. 46). The source of data is important, and Celce-Murcia supports the use of “empirical data derived from ... relevant samples of uncontrived written and spoken discourse” (p. 48). In the case of yes-no questions, there are few examples of yes-no question and answer sets in written discourse, with the exception, perhaps, of the “instant messaging” conversations that take place online and to which access is not yet easily come by. Literature such as the novels and plays used by Richards (1977) attempt to emulate natural spoken

discourse, but since they are merely an approximation, I believe that it would be more practical to go directly to the source: transcribed oral discourse, and thus I have chosen to analyze just that.

## Results:

### *Answer Classes*

I have classified my data according to the framework as formulated by Richards and Frantz. I will analyze the data and discuss the types of answers I found in the order that I classify them, and I will discuss their frequencies.

Both Richards (1977) and Frantz (1996) classified answer types into six classes. I initially used the classes employed by Frantz, but found as I was trying to classify them, that I needed additional categories for the answers that did not fit well into the original six classes. For example, according to my classification, the question *do you like my sweater?* might be answered in a number of ways:

<b>Sample</b>	<b>Answer format</b>	
(a) Yes, I do.	yes-no + auxiliary	(Class 1)
(b) Yes.	yes-no	(Class 2)
(c) Uh huh.	synonym of yes-no	(Class 3)
(d) Yes, but it looks like the elbows are wearing out...	yes-no or synonym without verb or auxiliary from Q	(Class 4)
(e) I do like it, where did you get it?	verb or auxiliary from Q but without yes-no	(Class 5)
(f) It's a beautiful color and the style is very fashionable.	Comment without yes-no or auxiliary but with affirmation or negation implied	(Class 6)
(g) Do you mean the one you're wearing right now?	clarification question	(Class 7)
(h) Hey, speaking of sweaters, they're having a sale...	hedge, explanation, or meaning between yes and no	(Class 8)
(i) [other – answers I cannot otherwise classify]	varies	(Class 9)



Class 1: Class 1 is the standard form answer (short or long) as presented in ESL textbooks, and consists of “yes” or “no” plus a personal pronoun plus the auxiliary (though not necessarily in that order). Typical Class 1 answers from my data include:

17. Your neighbor, is she or he American? *Yes, he is.*
18. Did that group get along? *No! They did not get along!*
19. But do you feel differently about the local government? *Yes, I do.*

Class 2: Class 2 is a simple answer of “yes,” “no,” “yes please,” or “no thank you”; examples from the data set are:

20. So, did I answer the question? *Yes, yes.*
21. So, once you planned to stay, did you take any steps towards gaining citizenship? *No.*
22. They were fourteen huh? *Yes.*

Class 3: Class 3 differs from Class 2 only in that it is composed of synonyms of yes or no, either single words or expressions. Examples of answers from my corpus in Class 3 are:

23. It sounds like you feel more English than American? *Absolutely.*
24. You worked in a restaurant? *Yeah.*
25. As a new man on the block you wanna [clean it up]? *Surely.*

Class 4: Class 4 answers, like Class 2 and Class 3 answers, include “yes” or “no” or a synonym, without the verb or auxiliary from the question but with extra information in the form of a qualification or comment:

26. Oh, okay, ya found it? *Ya, if I could only get it.*
27. So, you attended law school, right? *Yes. I went to the University of Pennsylvania law school from 1987 to 1990.*
28. Did they ever call on [you] for [your] thoughts? *No. Don doesn't ask for much advice from me*

Class 5: Class 5 answers contain a verb or auxiliary from the question, without “yes” or “no,” with possible additional qualification or comment:

29. Those cost money, though, don't they? *Chief Justice Rehnquist, the basic*

- ones don't cost a thing.*
30. I mean actually will they be able to go back? *I do not think they will be able to go back right now at all.*
31. So, you had always assumed before that you'd go on to get a Ph.D.? *I guess I had, yeah. I guess it was kind-of a family business.*

Class 6: Class 6 answers lack yes-no or a synonym as well as lacking the verb or auxiliary from the question but still with affirmative or negative meaning:

32. But it *is* entertainment, is it not? It's not PBS. *Well, you can say that, but you could say that about JonBenet Ramsey and people say that's entertainment as well, which is sad, but...*
33. Would you be satisfied with that kind of wedding? *If we had like tuxes and a dress and everything and it was just like his immediate family and my immediate family then I might be.*
34. So there will be no cost involved in any part of this alternative to the parents? *Not if the listener uses those software programs. No cost at all.*

Class 7: Class 7 does not consist of answers at all, but rather of questions: clarification questions. Whenever an individual responded to a yes-no question with another question for the purpose of understanding the original question, the responses were included in this class:

35. There is [a law limiting length of presidential campaigns] in England, right? *Is that right?*
36. Does it make you angry to talk about it? *Do you mean about politics?*

Class 8: The answers that I include in Class 8 are not discussed in either Richards or Frantz. (Richards and Frantz included words or expressions that have a meaning between yes or no, but I have moved such words and expressions to Class 8.) Class 8 consists of hedges or explanations, or a meaning somewhere between yes and no or both yes *and* no. These answers may reflect either a lack of knowledge or avoidance of answering a question. Class 8 answers do not reflect a clear affirmative or negative meaning:

37. Is being a war correspondent tougher than other kinds of things to cover?

*Well, it's tougher in that it's more dangerous but there's always a story to tell, so in that sense it's easier...*

38. Was he a very good writer? *Well, I said this earlier in this broadcast, he did not let style interfere with what he was saying.*
39. Hillary – is she a poor campaigner? *I had said all along that she wouldn't run and obviously I'm wrong – I have no objection to Hillary, she seems quite charming and bright...*

Class 9: All responses that did not seem to fit into the previous 8 classes were put into Class 9. This includes non-verbal responses such as head nodding, responses that are unrelated to the question, and questions for purposes other than clarification of the original question:

40. Six? [*nods yes*]
41. Wanna go smoke a cigarette? *Huh? How many of those've ya got?*

I will now use these answer classes to evaluate the data that I collected in order to answer the question: *How do native speakers answer yes-no questions?*

### Findings

I identified 156 yes-no question and answer sets in my dataset. The distribution of the answer type is as follows:

Class	Answer format	Frequency	Percent
(Class 1)	yes-no + auxiliary	16	10
(Class 2)	yes-no	20	13
(Class 3)	synonym of yes-no	23	15
(Class 4)	yes-no or synonym without verb or auxiliary from Q	24	15
(Class 5)	verb or auxiliary from Q but without yes-no	18	12
(Class 6)	Comment without yes-no or auxiliary but with affirmation or negation implied	33	21
(Class 7)	clarification question	2	1
(Class 8)	hedge, explanation, or meaning between yes and no	17	11
(Class 9)	none	3	2
<b>Totals:</b>		<b>156</b>	<b>100</b>

\* Percent totals have been rounded off and thus may not add up to 100% in all cases.

The most common response type in these data is thus the Class 6 answer with 21.2% ( $n=33$ ) of responses classified as a comment without stating yes or no and without use of the auxiliary from the question but with a definite affirmative or negative meaning. In many cases, these responses are lengthy and the outcome of the answer is not offered quickly (see Appendix A to see all answers). This type of answer does not conform in any way with the forms ESL students are taught by their textbooks to expect. The second most frequent response type is Class 4, with 15.4% of responses ( $n=24$ ) falling into this category. Class 4 responses do contain a "yes," "no," or a synonym but do not contain a verb or auxiliary repeated from the question.

Type 3 responses were the next most common response with 14.7% ( $n=23$ ) of total responses, and consisted of a simple short answer of a synonym of yes or no without the supplement of a verb or auxiliary or explanation. Type 2 responses are very similar to Class 3 responses, and consist of a basic short answer of "yes" or "no," and 12.8% ( $n=20$ ) of responses can be attributed to this class. Responses that contain a verb or auxiliary from the question but do not make use of "yes," "no," or a synonym (Class 5) make up 11.5% ( $n=18$ ) of the answers. Finally, responses which are not always *answers* make up 10.9% ( $n=17$ ) of responses. These responses are made up of hedges, explanations, or responses with a meaning in-between yes and no but without clearly being affirmative or negative.

Classes 2, 3, 4, 5, and 8 represent the answers to yes-no questions that are not taught by ESL grammar texts. Together, they make up 86.5% ( $n=135$ ) of the responses in my dataset. None of them fits the form answer to yes-no questions suggested by ESL

grammar textbooks. On the other hand, answers composed in the classic full (*Yes, I did pick up the dry-cleaning*) or short form (*Yes, I did*) grouped in this study into Class 1, made up a mere 10.3% ( $n=16$ ) of the answers in my dataset. This is the form suggested by the ESL grammar texts examined, yet only one in ten answers was given in this form. The findings of this study make a very strong case for drastically changing how we teach students to answer yes-no questions.

### **Limitations**

This study was limited by the transcripts I had available to me. Most of the data I evaluate is formal or semi-formal oral discourse. Winn-Bell Olsen suggests that “the more distant the relationship between speakers or the more uncomfortable the situation, the more frequently speakers tend to use the standard short-form answers” (1980, as cited in Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman 1999, p. 217). Unfortunately, I cannot test this hypothesis due to the small amount of casual discourse in my dataset, but if Winn-Bell Olsen’s hypothesis is, in fact, true, it would mean that even fewer answers would be in the “standard short form” than I found. Further research should be done with a greater variety of data sources with more transcripts of natural conversation between native speakers. One potential source of additional data might be samples online messaging conversation such as those on AOL instant messenger. Another source might be transcripts of conversations with celebrities which take place online quite frequently.

One factor which may make it difficult to assess the frequencies of answer types is that there are individual differences in answer uses. Whereas one individual might tend to answer yes-no questions with hedges, another individual may answer such questions

with a short “yes,” “no,” or “I don’t know”. Different cultural or linguistic backgrounds are only two of many possible explanations for such differences.

Another limitation is that it was difficult to classify some answers into the 8 classes defined in this study. This may indicate that my categories need some fine-tuning and that they are not as clear as they should be. Subsequent studies might attempt to amend and/or modify the classes I suggested and used, as I did with Richards and Frantz’s classes. One such additional class might be one for “I don’t know” answers. I did not have a need for such a class and neither, apparently, did Richards or Frantz. Most of my data is of institutional interviews; interviewees were in positions of authority, and therefore unlikely to admit a lack of knowledge on the subject at hand. Rather, they may have been more likely to hedge their answers, thus explaining the large number of hedges in my data. In casual conversation, a person who is asked if there is milk in the refrigerator, for example, might actually say *I dunno* rather than guess at an answer if, in fact, that person does not know the answer.

Furthermore, it seems that only one yes-no question in my dataset was answered non-verbally, but this result is surely inaccurate due to the fact that most transcripts made available to me were on audio tape, which cannot represent non-verbal forms of communication. More in-depth observation of conversations and more thorough transcription are needed to answer the question of how many yes-no questions are actually answered non-verbally. It may be important for the ESL teacher to include lessons on non-verbal communication due to the disparity in meaning of gestures from one culture to the next: In India, for example, side-to-side head shaking means “yes”, and in Turkey tilting one’s head back means “no”. In France, a barely audible inhalation of a

short breath of air can mean "yes", and might be interpreted in the United States as surprise or even as a hiccup. A further cross-linguistic and cross-cultural issue which might be explored is the appropriateness of answer types. Class, social rank, age, and other factors may affect what sorts of answers are expected and are appropriate in a given culture. This research would move beyond the question of form and grammar, and into pragmatics. For example: In culture x, is it appropriate for a person of rank a to answer a questions asked by a person of rank b with a hedge?

While my findings suggest that while we are teaching ESL students the forms of answers to yes-no questions which are traditionally taught, teachable, and formulaic, these forms are not the answer forms most commonly found in spoken English. There may be a need, however, to distinguish what is *taught* from what is *learned* and how those forms are used by the ESL student. This question could be explored in further research which evaluates NNS transcripts to see if they *do* in fact answer yes-no questions in the full-form way they are taught.

A final suggestion for further research is to use discourse analysis to evaluate yes-no questions rather than isolating them from their context. Looking at context might give the researcher a clearer understanding of the functions of the yes-no question and to establish whether there is a relationship between function of the question and answer type.

#### **Suggestions for teaching:**

Given my findings, that ESL grammar textbooks do not adequately address the issue of how to answer yes-no questions, ESL teachers are left with the task of supplementing their texts with materials of their own. Many ESL textbooks see the

presentation of grammatical forms as their primary focus, however students may be hindered by a lack of practice in using alternative forms such as hedges and non-standard forms. Rather than suggest that ESL grammars be rewritten to include data about the frequency of answer types, I suggest that ESL teachers include practice in answering yes-no questions in addition to the instruction of the standard forms associated with them.

What should be included in a lesson about how to answer yes-no questions?

- A discussion of the types of answers and the frequencies with which they are used.
- A discussion of non-verbal responses associated with yes-no questions.
- A discussion of how to hedge answers to questions that the person answering feels uncomfortable with.

Appendix B contains some sample materials to aid teachers in their instruction of answers to yes-no questions.

### **Conclusions**

My findings suggest that if ESL grammar texts decide to include materials on how to answer yes-no questions, greater attention should be paid to forms of elaboration and hedging rather than to the mis-named “standard form” answers which are, as I have found, not standard at all.



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# Appendix A: Question-Answer data set

#	Question	Tag?	Answer	Answer Type	Comments
11	So, you don't have much faith in the National government, right?	*	No, I don't.	1	
46	And it's directed towards the Asian community. Right, correct?	*	No, it's directed towards whoever. [+ explanation]	1	I expected positive answer, got negative
52	You used to work at a restaurant, did you not?	*	Yeah, I did.	1	
78	Probably nobody used this medium [media] better, right? Than Bill Clinton?	*	Well, I don't, after all, he didn't come off too good, he came off as well as he was able but... no, I don't think the medium served him well because he was exposed by it.	1	Type of answer 1 but not until later... 2 <sup>nd</sup> sentence
79	But don't you think he handles himself well with cameras and audiences, don't you think?	*	Well, he looks good, but his speeches are too long, no I don't think he's great at it.	1	Type of answer 1 but not until later... 2 <sup>nd</sup> sentence
12	But do you feel differently about the local government?		Yes I do. I feel that especially if you live in a reasonably smallish town I feel that yes, you can make a difference.	1	
18	Your neighbor, is she or he American?		Yes, he is.	1	
40	So, did other people feel like dropping out?		Yeah, you know, well certainly some percentage always does.	1	Hard to categorize answer
59	Plus a corvette? Plus you won a corvette?		Yes, I won a corvette, too.	1	
82	You think they might say, "I woulda done this, faced with the same thing?"		No, I don't think many Americans would have done what he did, but... I think...	1	
83	You think that most people say to themselves, "boy, faced with the same situation, I would've [lied]?"		I think they would've, yes.	1	But 'yes' is not in sentence-initial

	But you remained friends?		Oh, we remained close friends, yes.		position "yes" not in sentence- initial position
87	But you remained friends?		Oh, we remained close friends, yes.	1	
88	He didn't want to share that?		No, I don't think he did.	1	
92	Did that group get along?		Annnn... They used to have a roundtable every year... and it was a great show because they used to get arguing about all sorts of things. NO! They did NOT get along!	1	But not 1 until end of thought... not initially
117	Are you NOT so worried about the ring anymore?		No. I still am.	1	
137	And that's prohibitively expensive for the Carnegie Library?		Yes, it is, Your Honor. There is no dispute on that in the record.	1	
58	You also won the contest? For your age group, right?	*	yes...	2	
118	I don't think men understand that. Do they?	*	No!	2	
1	so when you first came [to the US], did you plan on staying?		No.	2	
2	[you fell in love and got married] to an American?		Yes.	2	
4	So, once you planned to stay, did you take any steps towards gaining citizenship?		No.	2	
9	Do you feel that there might be some other ways to make a change, um, politically without actually voting, do you think that there might be other ways to do that?		No.	2	
15	But you don't want to give up your English citizenship?		No.	2	
17	Do you ever speak about them [politicians] with anyone?		Oh, yes.	2	
20	So, you think that other foreign residents understand you better, understand your feelings better about the government?		Yes. Yes.	2	
23	Do you think that Americans might feel the same way that you do?		Oh, yes.	2	
31	So did I answer the question?		Yes, yes.	2	

41	So, you are on the board of the Asian Media Access?		Yes.		2
49	Eighteen?		Yes.		2
68	Don?		Yes.		2
93	Did management leave them alone?		Well, yes.		2
120	They were fourteen huh?		yes.		2
130	You're saying that any adult has a heckler's veto on the whole operation by simply saying I'm going to let my child watch it?		Oh, no. No, no. Absolutely not.		2
134	May I reserve the balance of my time?		Yes, Mr. Waxman.		2
144	I suppose we better let obscenity in too, then?		No.		2
133	Can Congress suddenly decide that all private telephone conversations will be monitored to see if there is indecent material going across the telephone that children will knowingly pick up?		I think the answer is no.		2
53	Our people in the audience, they're going to get that body ready for the new millennium, correct?	*	Right.		3
60	Wait, you finally quit the restaurant that you worked in, did you not?	*	Right.		3
85	A memo's a letter in a sense, right?	*	yeah		3
154	The Como and CTC, right?	*	Yeah, the CTC and Como.		3
13	It sounds like you feel more English than American?		Absolutely.		3
24	So, Americans and foreign residents alike feel this way?		I really do [agree].		3
27	So, you were there for 3 years?		Right.		3
30	You may be marked by the academic world in a way that you couldn't really get away from it, huh?		Right.		3
33	Well, you mean physical?		Yeah.		3
45	So, is that series, it's a cable series right, public access cable series?		Right.		3
54	Are they inspiring you right now?		Oh, yeah.		3
55	You worked in a restaurant?		Yeah.		3
56	You received what, \$10,000?		Yep.		3
57	You're the one that was picked on?		You could say that, yeah.		3

99	As a new man on the block you wanna [clean it up?]		Surely.	3	
108	He's leaving Wednesday?		Uh huh.	3	
111	Oh, you had it this Thursday? [ie - it has passed, over]		Yeah	3	
114	You've met Dave right?		Mm hmmm	3	
115	Was it John Marks or was it someone else who used to come to the house at two?		Yeah! That was him.	3	
116	Trees?		Uh huh!	3	
121	Ben? Did you use knives at Kenny's?		Oh ya.	3	
153	Because they've had it (a union) for a long time?		Uh huh.	3	
156	Does that make sense?		Yeah.	3	
26	So, you attended law school, right?	*	Yes. I went to the University of Pennsylvania law school from 1987 to 1990.	4	
8	So, you feel that votes make a difference?		Um, at the local level, definitely.	4	Function is really hard to determine in this case.
14	If you got an American citizenship do you think that you'd feel American?		No, I don't think that a piece of paper can make you feel different.	4	
21	Do you feel more comfortable speaking about it with them?		Yes, honestly because you know that you... Well, anytime that you, regardless of whether they're American or English or whatever, whenever you know that somebody is in agreement with the way you think then obviously you feel more comfortable with them than with somebody with an opposing point of view.	4	Actually, auxiliary is used (answer type = 1) but much later in explanation.
22	Do you think that you might feel better going into that conversation than you would going into a room with an American, born and raised in the US?		No, because there are people who have opposing points of view that are from England also. ...	4	
25	Do you feel that you're a member of anything, socially [silence] I don't mean like a member that you have to have a membership, I mean that somebody who is Thai might have a big group of		Um, no because I don't pick people, I don't pick my friends because of their religious or political backgrounds or the country that they come from, I pick them from the merit of the individual.	4	

28	Thai friends because of a common... camaraderie, do you have that with any group, here?			No [+ lengthy explanation]	4	I expected a positive answer but got a negative one	
37	But the um, the other lawyers, the lawyers on the other side are certainly not going to be nice?			Yes, it's adversarial.	4		
38	Did you think ever that you'd leave? That you would go back to doing what you were doing before?			Oh, yeah. I thought, this was a horrible idea, why did I do this? And but I felt like, you know, I've already left graduate school so I don't want to leave this too or I'll be a failure which, in retrospect doesn't make a lot of sense, I thought like, I have to stick this out. And um, 'cause I didn't know what else I would do. I think.	4		
43	I guess it appears that a great number, a great percentage of the Asian community arrived here since 1965, the change in the immigration law... Is that correct? That probably a good number, a good percentage?			Uh, most of the ones I know, yeah, have come here since then.	4		
47	Has that changed at all maybe in the last five years when acupuncture and Chinese herbs have come so into vogue?			No, [+lengthy explanation w/o auxiliary]	4		
65	Did you have any input? Did they ever call on [you] for [your] thoughts?			No. Don doesn't ask for much advice from me.	4		
70	The only time?			Yes... [elaboration]	4		
80	Is it all right if I disagree with you?			Yeah, I just think that most people, you're one of the few because most of the people who are IN the media who think that... he uses it well	4		
81	So the bag is mixed?			Yes. I don't think television has been all good to Bill Clinton.	4		
84	[do you] Hate being 80?			Oh my goodness yes, because I love my life and I'm gonna die. I don't think writers retire. What would I do? I'd go home and write. No.	4		
105	Do you think it's possible to have an agreement and teach civic virtues and traditional values			yeah it matters a lot less what people look like or where they're from or where they came to America from....	4		

	within the context of a society that is so pluralistic?				
122	Like um you're allowed to work like 3 hours a day on weekdays or something?			Ya some jack like that.	4
123	Ya but where are ya gonna put it. Oh right back there in that little crevice?			Ya that's where I had it at first.	4
124	Oh, okay ya found it?			Ya if I could only get it.	4
126	Are you sure all the frogs are still alive? [restated]			No? I haven't... I only saw one and that was the one that died...	4
128	D'you figure out how much yer getting'?			No. Not a clue yet.	4
142	So Congress could cure this constitutional defect as you see it simply by making it clear that the law applied everywhere?			No, it wouldn't cure the second problem.	4
103	So you're saying that the parents? are you citing the parents as part of the cause of this?			Sure, parents are crucial.	4
139	Those cost money, though, don't they?	*		Chief Justice Rehnquist, the basic ones don't cost a thing.	5
135	Is that still true?			Justice Scalia, it is still true.	5
10	Do you find the American political system confusing?			I find it very frustrating.	5
29	So, you had always assumed before that you'd go on to get a Ph.D?			I guess I had, yeah. I guess it was kind-of a family business.	5
63	Wasn't it a good movie?			It was, but I was so deeply involved with it...	5
64	Wasn't it a good script?			It was a very good script. But...	5
66	Do you think anyone's reputations have been hurt by the movie or the stories about the movie?			I don't think so...	5
75	Do you think we may get wary of people? Like George W. Bush, he's way ahead, do you think that can work against him?			OHI, there's no question it can work against him.	5
76	Is that one of his (Bill Bradley's) attractions? That we believe he's removed from it?			I think it IS and I'm not sure if it's going to hold up for a year.	5
86	Did he respond? (to the memo)			He didn't, but he changed it.	5
129	Mr. Waxman, does that technology require use of something called CGI?			It does	5
138	Was it construed, do you think, in a limited way?			I don't think that the term was actually construed in any particularly limited way in Denver area.	5
146	Does the Government have any interest in			Well, Justice Kennedy, we do not dispute that the	5

	protecting children who do not have parents available in the home or do not have adequate parental supervision?			Government has a legitimate interest in protecting some children from some forms of speech that could be found indecent. But the problem with this law is, in order to achieve that objective, it completely bans all of that speech from adults and also bans it from the substantial portion of minors who themselves have first amendment rights, under Bolger and Erznoznik, to have access to the banned speech.		
147	Do you think that would kind of determine how US policy was shaped in the two instances?			I think, in part, that reflects US policy. But I think that when you look at Kosovo, I am very weary to argue that US is somehow more forceful there because they see it more apparent that the Servs are wrong...	5	
150	Is Yugoslavia having an especially hard time?			I think Yugoslavia was having an especially hard time because they had all those loans.	5	
151	I mean actually will they be able to go back?			I do not think they will be able to go back right now at all.	5	
152	Do you see this solution as effective?			I do not consider them effective at all.	5	
155	Do you think their organizing have been helpful in that?			I think their organizing was helpful.	5	
3	So, you did stay longer than your initial plan, right?		*	Well, I had saved up enough money to go back and I felt, well.... [explanation: affirmative]	6	
48	So you found a magazine on that [weight loss] did you not?		*	Believe it or not, it was at a grocery store.	6	
51	In the ad it said you could win some money, correct?		*	It was a corvette.	6	
113	Was that Kendall? Last year?			Kendall was helping us.	6	
62	But Plummer got Mike down [acting]?			Indeed, oh, it was perfect.	6	
110	Did you set a date or anything?			Not officially ha! ha!	6	
131	Isn't the scope of the risk involved very much related to what the Government can do by way of avoiding that risk?			I don't think there's any question about it.	6	
6	Did you feel pressure by the government?			Well, it was kind-of frowned on. [+ affirmative explanation]	6	
7	So, voting isn't particularly important to you?			Actually, I wish I could vote now, but at the time, you know, 34 years ago, that didn't bother me. But recently now I wish that yes, that I could vote, but I'm not about to give up my citizenship so that I could vote.	6	
19	Do you talk about politics differently with			Well, I don't know that many other foreign residents, but	6	



	Americans than you do with English people or with other foreign residents?		when you're with foreign residents, whether they be from Spain, Norway, England, Germany [all of the examples she provides are of other Europeans...] or whatever, it's kind of an unspoken frustration, that you know how the other one's speaking, and you don't bring it up very often because it's frustrating, because there's nothing you can do about it, and you know that it is the way the system is and there's nothing that's going to change it.		
35	Did you have any anxieties going into law school, maybe your first year, going into your first year?		Well, interestingly, before law school I was pretty naïve about how horrible it is. And my first semester in law school, I think it's difficult for everyone, it was difficult for me. It's a very heirarchical environment maybe a little like the military, where I haven't been so I can't tell you precisely, there's kind-of an abusive feel to it, where professors ridicule you and make fun of you but there isn't a support coming from them. It's not "great, you got a good answer," it's actually, "you're a useless piece of shit and I have all the answers". It's very negative.	6	
36	Are all of the professors like that?		Well, they're trained to act that way. So, the professors who don't want to be like that try to find a way of being critical without being cynical, but they can't go as far as being supportive 'cause it isn't there in the system so.	6	
39	Did you have friends in your law school class or in your law school in general that maybe had some of the same feelings as you did about it?		Well, I, everybody hates law school, I think there's a consensus that people hate law school. But they, you know what, the people who don't hate law school are the people who were not liberal arts undergraduates. So they think, this is liberal arts and they're really excited. So the people who did have liberal arts think this is dreadful. So somebody who wanted to go to med school and changed his mind really likes law school because it's his first exposure to a lot of social science, I don't know, to words, so those are the people who like it, and then the people who come back from some time off, they think that being in school is like a vacation, a little like how I feel about grad school. It's nothing compared to having to work. So, those are the people who like it, everybody else hates it.	6	
42	And you are also a representative of the Asians in		At the legislature, I have spoken on behalf of the Asian	6	

	government?				communities, I have done work pro-bono services is what they call it, for what they call the state consultations of ..... Since about 198..., sometimes more than others because they don't always have staff people up here, so I cover some of their legislation for them or legislation that affects Asians where they should be hearing ...		
44	Is there any kind of I don't even know what I'd call it, a program to educate newcomers to this country as to how the government works and how they might be able to affect it, or no?				[affirmative explanation of programs in existence]	6	
61	Is this title a takeoff of the former president?				That was a shock when I saw his book come out at the same time... I don't know how that happened.	6	
67	Are there lots of confrontations about what to show on TV? Are there pieces we haven't seen? Were there any situations where the vote may have been 3-2 and they said, "we won't" [show the piece]?				There's no three to two vote at CBS - there's only one vote.	6	
69	Is the tobacco issue then one of the few times when the suits upstairs got involved?				The only time that I know of.	6	
77	So hypocrisy runs rampant?				I think there's a lot of hypocrisy	6	
94	Are they? Do we have information that they're in fact making a bomb? or have a bomb?				Our best estimate in the intelligence community, is that they have diverted enough material more likely than not, to manufacture at least one weapon.	6	
96	Is there, within the North we do know about what was going on on the North Korean leadership. Is there a consensus within their leadership? that this thing could lead a war they don't care? or they haven't figured it out yet? or what's going on?				Well, they certainly talked that way [+ explanation] ...	6	
97	So it's real. There is a real possibility this thing could blow up on us?				We have to take what they are doing and what they are saying seriously.	6	
98	Does it look like that that's where Ames got access to all these documents he wasn't supposed to have was through , the computers rather than through some cohorts within the agency?				It's too early to tell, but certainly one thing that may have happened is some access into parts of computer databases more than would have been authorized to him.	6	
102	Is a new CIA gonna come out of this?				Not an entirely new CIA but one that has I think with respect to some of its security policies a bit of a different	6	

104	Do you think that there is such an animal as American values?		focus... There aren't American values, or Chinese values, there are values and there are not values.	6	
106	The institutions through which values have been traditionally transmitted is there something wrong with them? or what.		Well, there are, problems with one institution, that values have been traditionally transmitted which is the family but that's not the only problem....	6	
107	What you're saying is that the Holocaust as we know it as we in the west have learned about it over a period of the last half century, simply did not take place?		Not anyone in the world has numbers and figures and methods.	6	
112	The [ ] of communication is a lot different isn't it?		Just writing. [yes]	6	
119	Would you be satisfied with that kind of wedding?		If we had like tuxes and a dress and everything and it was just like his immediate family and my immediate family then I might be.	6	
140	So there will be no cost involved in any part of this alternative to the parents?		Not if the listener uses those software programs. No cost at all.	6	
141	Does this statute, with respect to foreign speech, prohibit United States users to post information that goes abroad?		It doesn't specifically address that question at all, Justice Kennedy.	6	
143	Are there other nations that have regulated indecent speech in cyberspace?		Not that I know of, Justice Ginsburg. There may be. But there are other nations that have attempted to regulate the content of speech in cyberspace.	6	
73	You've watched the onset of 24 hour news... does that affect things like the Egypt Air crash? Do we overdo it?		I think it's very difficult to overdo news...	6	
74	There is in England, right? I think it's 60 days.	*	Is that right?	7	
34	Does it make you angry to talk about it?		Do you mean about politics?	7	
71	But it is entertainment, is it not? It's not PBS.	*	Well, you can say that, but you could say that about JonBenet Ramsey and people say that's entertainment as well, which is sad, but...	8	
100	Do you see this as an isolated security problem? Counter intelligence problem that has to be fixed? Or do you find that there is something fundamental and massive that must be done to change the CIA?		Something in-between....	8	
16	Do you ever talk about politics or government, or		I don't know any politicians.	8	misundersta

	politicians with anyone?			nding
32	Um, so you're sort-of disenchanted with the national-level politics but state-level politics, you feel that it's run well, well, less-corrupt, maybe?		[yes & no without stating either... very lengthy]	8
72	Hillary - is she a poor campaigner?		I had said all along that she wouldn't run and obviously I'm wrong - I have no objection to Hillary, she seems quite charming and bright...	8
89	Is it difficult to write for others?		It's... I wrote so much for other people over the years, that it was interesting to find...	8
90	Is being a war correspondent tougher than other kinds of things to cover?		Well, it's tougher in that it's more dangerous but there's always a story to tell, so in that sense it's easier....	8
91	Was he a very good writer?		Well, I said this earlier in this broadcast, he did not let style interfere with what he was saying. He wrote very directly.	8
95	Do we know where the bomb is? If they have one?		If they have already assembled one I really wouldn't, don't wanna get into that publicly but I think it's fair to say that the assessment of whether or not they have assembled something is as I said not entirely free from doubt.	8
101	Let me ask you specifically, did Ames in fact passed it the three times while he actually became a spy?		I don't want to get into his behavior, because of the trial...	8
109	But yer not going down in May?		I don't know. He um, I want him to come home because...	8
125	Are you sure y' still have enough frog... are you sure all the frogs are still alive?		Uh oh.	8
132	Wouldn't that be unconstitutional?		If you found it would be unconstitutional - I can think of instances in which it might actually constitute child abuse, which is this court's...	8
136	In other words, they would verify for anyone who could pay for it?		Well, there are two questions - two points. Most credit card companies simply will not verify for any price for a noncommercial transaction. They are not set up to do that. A few credit card companies will, but the record evidence showed they charge a dollars per verification for a noncommercial verification.	8
145	Mr. Ennis, do you think it would be constitutional to require all transmitters to tag their material?		Well, I think it would raise significant compelled-speech questions, Justice Stevens. Whether it be constitutional or not, I don't know.	8
148	Are these objections valid from an international		OK, I frankly don't know that much about international	8

149	law perspective? So do you think the way NGOs are approaching this conflict, is it sort of upholding the representation of the situation in Bosnia and Kosovo as an ancient conflict and the solution is to separate out the groups into different territories?		law. You know I have not systematically looked at how human rights groups have acted there. I am not aware. Although I would not be surprised if they indeed had because at some level it is impossible not to choose a side and to be completely unbiased and not in the middle of things. But I am not sure of their particular role.	8	
5	Ok, but did you feel pressure from people to become a citizen?		People acted surprised, but did I feel pressure? [pause] No.	9	
50	Six?		[nods yes]	9	Nonverbal response
127	Wanna go smoke a cigarette?		Huh? How many of those've ya got?	9	

## Appendix B

### Sample activities to teach students how to answer yes-no questions:

The purpose of the first activity is to open up a conversation on how to answer yes-no questions. It should be done without any significant introduction. Possible answers are listed after each question. NOTE: DO NOT INCLUDE SAMPLE ANSWERS ON STUDENT WORKSHEETS.

**Activity one:** By yourself, with pen and paper, write down how you might answer the following questions. If it helps you, write down your answer first in your native language and then in English. Would your answers differ in your native language and in English?

Girlfriend: *Do I look fat?*

Boyfriend:

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- No.
- *No, dear, in fact, have you lost weight?*
- *I don't notice those things. You look fine.*
- *Hey, I forgot, the football game is on TV!*
- *Huh?*
- *Yeah, I was thinking you had put on some weight recently.*

Brother to sister: *Can you lend me \$300? I want to buy a DVD player.*

Sister:

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- *No. Don't even bother asking again.*

- What do you need a DVD player for?
- I don't have \$300.
- Oh, I've seen really nice DVD players at Best Buy... I heard the JVC ones are nice.
- Ok, only if you promise to pay me back \$400 within 6 months.
- Why don't you ask Dad?
- Certainly! Here it is.

Mother to daughter: **So, are you two going to get married soon?**

Daughter:

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- Well, in fact, I wanted to discuss something with you...
- It's none of your business!
- I'll tell you when it's time.
- When the time comes.
- Actually, we don't want to get married. We don't see a need for such an arrangement.
- Yes, he proposed to me two days ago!!
- Is that the doorbell?

At a job interview:

Interviewer: **Do you like working with others in groups?**

You:

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- *Yes, in fact I am proud of my ability to get along well with others in a group setting.*
- *Yes.*
- *Uh huh.*
- *Well, not really.*
- *Actually, I prefer to work alone.*

Your friend: *Is your Mother a good cook?*

You:

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- *Yes, she's amazing. You should try her spaghetti sometime.*
- *Yep.*
- *Nah, not really.*
- *Don't tell her I said this, but her food is awful.*
- *Well, her food is interesting.*

To follow up this activity, the teacher should ask students the answers they wrote down for each question. The teacher may write these answers on the board or on an overhead. If variety is lacking, the teacher may append these answers with further examples. After all answers have been written on the board or an overhead, teacher and students should look at the forms of the answers together. Teacher can ask questions:

- Which answers seem appropriate?
- Which answers seem rude?
- Which answers would you never say?
- Which are the best answers for each question?

Activity two makes an attempt at classifying answer forms. Teacher should open the activity with a discussion of what a hedge is:

→ A hedge is a noncommittal or evasive statement.

How can a hedge best be described to students? With an example. Choose an example of a hedge from activity one. Then ask students to describe what that answer is doing: it's *not* answering the question. It's an answer that sticks with the subject but doesn't give a definite yes or no answer to the question. The instructor should elicit ideas about hedging from students by posing a question and asking them what methods they would use to *not* answer it.

Sample question to discuss: "**Do you like your ESL teacher?**"



- Sample hedges in response:
- *Miss MacDonald has been my teacher for such a long time. In fact, I have had her three years in a row.*
  - *I guess it depends on what you mean by like...*
  - *I don't know what makes someone a good ESL teacher.*

There may also be a need to be a discussion to explain the meanings of affirmative (yes) and negative (no) answers. If so, this may be discussed. For interest, it may be added that the terms "affirmative" and "negative" are often used in place of "yes" and "no" in the military.

### **Activity two - Answer types:**

**Instructions:** Interview a partner. This activity is designed to get you to practice how to answer yes-no questions. The questions are difficult and sometimes very personal. If you don't want to give your true opinion, you may "hedge" your response. Circle whether your partner gives you an affirmative (meaning "yes") response, a negative (meaning "no") response, a response that is somewhere between "yes" and "no", or hedges his/her response.

### **Interview questions:**

#### **1. Were you a happy child?**

Your partner's response:

affirmative    negative    yes and no    hedge

#### **2. Is your hometown a good place to grow up?**

Your partner's response:

affirmative    negative    yes and no    hedge

#### **3. Did you have a healthy breakfast this morning?**

Your partner's response:

affirmative    negative    yes and no    hedge

#### **4. Were you a good student in elementary school?**

Your partner's response:

affirmative    negative    yes and no    hedge

**5. Were you an obedient child?**

Your partner's response:

affirmative    negative    yes and no    hedge

**6. Do you plan to go to graduate school?**

Your partner's response:

affirmative    negative    yes and no    hedge

**7. Do you want to have children one day?**

Your partner's response:

affirmative    negative    yes and no    hedge

**8. Do you think there should be an age limit on alcohol consumption?**

Your partner's response:

affirmative    negative    yes and no    hedge

**9. Do you think women should be allowed to engage in armed combat (fight in war)?**

Your partner's response:

affirmative    negative    yes and no    hedge

This activity should be followed by a discussion of the strategies that students used to hedge their answers. This discussion may elicit the following strategies:

- A discussion of the subject at hand without disclosure of an affirmative or negative answer.

ex: Is your hometown a good place to grow up? *I grew up in Prague. We lived near the train station... that was the first place I met people who weren't Czech.*

- A change of subject – avoidance of the subject of the question.

ex: Do I look fat? *Hey, that's a pretty dress! Is it new?*

ex: Do you want to have children one day? *Did you hear that there was another suicide bombing today?*

- Bouncing back the question to the questioner:

ex: Do you think there should be an age limit on alcohol consumption? *Do YOU?*

Pose a request to students and ask them what strategies they might use to refuse it.

Sample question: Your girlfriend/boyfriend asks you "**will you come to dinner at my parents' house so that you can meet my parents?**"

Answer types to elicit:

1. Simply "no".
2. Explanation of why you can't go.
3. Hedge.

Without commenting on the strategies students come up with, have them discuss (in groups of two or three) how they might refuse the following requests. NOTE: SAMPLE ANSWERS SHOULD NOT BE INCLUDED ON STUDENT WORKSHEET.

**Activity Three - Refusing requests:** How do you send the message that your answer is "no" without directly saying "no" and risking being rude?

1. "Hey, I'm going to a religious service tomorrow morning. Will you come with me?"

- *No, I have a doctor's appointment.*
- *I don't believe in religion.*
- *No, thanks, I have my own religious beliefs.*
- *Uh, nah, it's not for me.*

2. "Bill and I are going to an amusement park Saturday. Wanna come?"

- *No thanks, I'm afraid of roller coasters.*
- *Nope, I have other plans. Thanks, though.*
- *I'd love to, but I have other plans.*
- *No.*

3. "My roommate is moving to Siberia to work on her dissertation... I know you're looking for a place to stay, so do you want to live with me?"

- Actually, I have already placed a deposit on an apartment. Thanks, though.
- I really would like to have my own place.
- I don't think we can get along. It wouldn't be a good idea.
- Not really.

4. "I'm on my way to an art museum, do you want to come with me?"

- No, I don't like art.
- The weather is so good, I'd rather stay outside.
- No, thanks, I'm not interested. Thanks for asking though.
- No.

5. "I'm going on a beach vacation for 10 days, but I can't find anyone to take care of my dogs. Hey, could you take care of them for me? I'd pay you..."

- I'm afraid of dogs... I don't think it would be a good idea.
- I haven't really taken care of a dog before so I don't want the responsibility.
- No.
- Oh, I think I'll be busy when you're out of town.

6. "My husband and I have tickets to the symphony tonight but our babysitter cancelled. Do you think you could take care of our children?"

- I have a date tonight...
- I don't have much practice taking care of kids. I'd be afraid of making a mistake.
- Oh, I have tickets to the symphony, too!
- No, but I'll take your symphony tickets so they don't get wasted!

To close the activity, a discussion could be held about what strategies students used to refuse these requests. What is an appropriate way to refuse a request? Is it ever o.k. to just say "no," or does an excuse need to be given? In English, we expect an explanation to follow the answer. Is this also the case in students' native languages and cultures?