

Running head: YES/NO QUESTIONS

Grammar Lesson Plan
Positive Yes/No Questions Using *Can*
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Context

This lesson is designed for adult learners at a High Beginning to Low Intermediate proficiency level. It would be well-suited for a community ESL program serving immigrants from a lower L1 educational background and is has been designed specifically with Spanish L1 learners in mind.

Principles and Theory

With the activities selected for this lesson, I hope to implement Thornbury's (1999) grammar instruction priority of Focus, or "Learn a little, use a lot," as I have attempted to boil down a complex grammar topic to the most basic elements beginning learners need to know as well as provide a variety of activities to allow students to practice the forms. In my explanation, I made an effort to adhere to Thornbury's advice that "explanation is seldom as memorable as other forms of presentation, such as demonstration" (p. 30). My goal is that the short explanation, avoidance of metalanguage and use of visual demonstration to illustrate the subject-modal inversion will allow students to grasp the form without becoming confused or overwhelmed. Additionally, while the lesson provides an introduction to common modals used in yes/no questions, focusing on one specific modal (i.e. *can*) will help beginning students to become familiar with the subject-aux inversion pattern without the distraction of trying to remember multiple unfamiliar modals.

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Lesson Plan

Positive Yes/No Questions Using *Can*

Time frame: 90 minutes

Lesson Outcomes:

Upon completion of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Identify several common modal auxiliaries frequently used in yes/no questions
- Form yes/no questions with *can* in the simple present tense using subject-aux inversion when provided with the statement form of the sentence
- Ask and answer conversational yes/no questions using *can*.

Rationale for Learning Outcomes:

Asking questions is an important part of conversational English and is a highly useful skill in daily life. Question formation is a very confusing concept for most Spanish L1 students, due to the absence of an equivalent for the frequent use of the modal *do* in English questions. It is also uncommon to invert the subject and verb in Spanish questions, the difference in meaning between the statement and question being indicated by inflection alone (e.g. *¿Ella viene mañana?* Is she coming tomorrow? vs. *Ella viene mañana.* She is coming tomorrow.)

These differences can result in frequent errors with question formation for Spanish L1 English learners such as failure to invert S & V (*You are hungry?*), incorrect use of *do/does* (*Do you hungry? What you like to eat?*, etc.), and occasional addition of *do* even when another modal

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is present (*Does she can ride a bike?*). While these types of errors typically do not significantly impede comprehension, the inability to properly formulate questions can result in a great deal of frustration and embarrassment for the speaker. Although this is a somewhat advanced grammatical topic, it is important to begin introducing simple question formation rules even at beginning levels because it is such a necessary language function that if neglected, students will establish incorrect patterns that will inhibit their future ability to learn the correct forms.

Assumptions:

- Students are already familiar with the present tense, including *can*
- Students are able to make simple statements about themselves in the present tense using *can*

Materials needed:

- Highlighters
- Example Yes/No Questions Handout [Appendix A]
- Seven pieces of posterboard with the following words (plus ?) written in large lettering on each: *She / can / speak English / You / can / cook / ?*
- Modals Cards [Appendix B]
- Question Worksheets [Appendix C]

Warm-up (10 min)

- Ask several Ss a series of Y/N questions using *can* (which they will be able to easily answer):
 - Can you cook?

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- Can you swim?
- Can you ride a bike?
- Etc...
- Ask class if they can recognize what is the same about all these questions (the answer is either yes or no).
- Ask for additional examples of questions that have a yes or no answer (do not correct grammar explicitly; simply restate each question using the proper form).

Modal Awareness Activity (10 min)

- Give each S a highlighter and *Example Y/N Questions* handout [Appendix A]
- Instruct Ss to highlight the first word of each sentence and on a separate piece of paper (or the back of the handout) make a list of all the different beginning words
- Have Ss call out the words and write on board. Remind Ss that *am*, *is*, and *are* are all part of the *be* verb family. (Write these words close together on the board and draw a circle around them. Label the circle *be*.)

Grammar Explanation (10 min)

- Ask for three volunteers to come to the front (if Ss are shy, let them know they won't have to say anything!)
- Position Ss side-by-side in a line, facing the rest of the class. Give each S one piece of poster board (in the correct order) and instruct them to hold the pieces facing. The posters will show the sentence *She can speak English.*
- Next, tell the class that we are going to change the sentence to a question.
- Guide the Ss who are holding *she* and *can* posters to trade places.

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- Stand at the end of the line and hold up the ? poster, and have the class read aloud the question just formed.
- Repeat process with *You can cook* posters.
- Tell class the rule that **some words move to the beginning of the sentence when you turn it into a question.** Say that in this class they are going to learn the most common words that do this. (For Spanish speakers, you may want to contrast this change of word order with the way yes/no questions are formed simply by changing inflection and not word order: *Puedes nadar* [You can swim] vs. *¿Puedes nadar?* [Can you swim?])

Modals Identification (15 min)

- Hand out a *Modals Card* to each S [Appendix B]
- Ask Ss if they recognize the words on this card (they are the same as the words in the first activity)
- Go around the room and have each S read one example question from the card
- Tell Ss these are the most common words that “move to the beginning” when forming a question.
- Instruct Ss to turn their cards face-down on the table in front of them. Have them call out words they remember from the list. Write the modals up on the board as Ss call them out.
- Next, erase the list on the board and instruct Ss to take out a piece of paper and number it 1-7. Ask them to make a list of as many of the words as they can remember.
- Walk around and observe which modals Ss remember. (Alternately, have Ss hand in their lists.)

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- After allowing a few minutes to recall as many words as possible, allow Ss to check their lists using the Modals Card.
- Tell Ss that **in today's class we will only be practicing *can*** and in future classes they will practice questions using the other words. (If Ss ask about the other modals in the list [e.g., *could, would, may should*], explain that many of the other words are used to ask someone to do something in a polite way.)

Question Formation Practice (25 min)

- Hand out Question Worksheets [Appendix C]
- Instruct Ss to read the sentences in the first column and circle the statement that is true for them.
- Next, instruct Ss to create a question to ask a partner. Use the first statement as an example and write on board: *I can cook. or I can't cook.*
- Ask Ss how they think they will turn this into a question for their partner.
- Remind them that *can* is one of the words that moves to the beginning of the sentence. Write *Can you cook?* on the board.
- Instruct Ss to complete the rest of the questions in their chart. Move around the room and check Ss' work, providing help and explanation as necessary.
- Group Ss into pairs, and instruct them to ask their partners the questions in the second column and record their answers in the third column by circling YES or NO. Bring two Ss to the front to model (S1: *I can cook. Can you cook?* S2: *No, I can't cook.*). Instruct Ss to alternate asking and answering questions.

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- After completing the worksheet with their partner, have Ss take their worksheets with them and find a different partner. Instruct them to ask their new partner questions about that person's first partner, substituting the first name or *he/she* for *you* in the questions (Can Maria cook? Can she swim?, etc.) Partner responds with the answers their first partner had given.

Conversational Questions with *Can* (15 min)

- Instruct Ss to think of two things they can do and two things they can't do.
- Divide the class into pairs and have Ss tell their partner the things they can and can't do and ask corresponding questions (as in previous activity).
- Have the class form a circle (in chairs or standing) and ask the person on their left one question they had just asked their partner. (S1: Can you drive? S2: Yes, I can drive. Can you ski? S3: No, I can't ski., etc.) Provide corrective feedback for errors.

Wrap-up (5 min)

Assign Ss homework of writing six Y/N questions using *can* to ask a partner at the beginning of the next class. (They can use ones from examples in today's class, or think of their own.)

Assessment Plan

I will use informal assessment to determine whether learning outcomes have been met. These assessments will include:

- Making note of which modals/be Ss are able to remember in Modals Identification activity

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- Monitoring Ss' ability to change statements to question form during question formation practice activity
- Observing conversational questions activity and listening for correct question formation

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References

Thornbury, S. (1999). *How to teach grammar*. Essex, England: Pearson Education Limited.

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Appendix A

Examples of Yes/ No Questions

1. Can you swim?
2. Is he married?
3. Are you busy?
4. Is she in your class?
5. Will you be at work tomorrow?
6. Would you like some coffee?
7. Could you open the door for me?
8. Should I lock the door?
9. Can I help you?
10. May I have one of these cookies?

Appendix B

Modals Cards

Important Words in Questions	Important Words in Questions
<p>Be (am, is, are, was were)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Is</u> she in your class? <p>Will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Will</u> you be home this weekend? <p>Can</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Can</u> I help you? <p>Could</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Could</u> I leave early today? <p>Would</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Would</u> you show me how to do it? <p>May</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>May</u> I ask who is calling? <p>Should</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Should</u> I put the cake in the fridge? 	<p>Be (am, is, are, was were)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Is</u> she in your class? <p>Will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Will</u> you be home this weekend? <p>Can</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Can</u> I help you? <p>Could</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Could</u> I leave early today? <p>Would</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Would</u> you show me how to do it? <p>May</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>May</u> I ask who is calling? <p>Should</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Should</u> I put the cake in the fridge?

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Appendix C

QUESTION WORKSHEET

Tell about yourself:

Ask your partner:

Answer:

I can cook/I can't cook.		YES	NO
I can swim/I can't swim.		YES	NO
I can play an instrument/ I can't play an instrument.		YES	NO
I can ride a bicycle/ I can't ride a bicycle.		YES	NO
I can sew/ I can't sew.		YES	NO
I can play soccer/ I can't play soccer.		YES	NO