3. Language Notes: Asking and answering questions in Chinese
Chinese, Part 4: Talking about your family

A very common kind of question to ask is one with a YES or NO answer. But in Chinese, there is no one word for YES or NO. Let’s look at some ways of answering:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>YES answer</th>
<th>NO answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nǐ yǒu yīgè gēge mà? Do you have an older brother?</td>
<td>Yǒu. I have.</td>
<td>Méi yǒu. I don’t have [one].</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The question depends on the verb: shì, qù, yǒu.

To answer YES, simply repeat the verb. The particle de can be added for emphasis.

To answer NO, put a bù in front of the verb. If the verb is yǒu, put méi in front.

There are different ways of asking questions with YES/NO answers:

1. By adding ma 唔 to the end of a statement:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>YES answer</th>
<th>NO answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

2. By adding a “tag” to the end of the statement. A common tag is dui ba 对吧 meaning “right?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>YES answer</th>
<th>NO answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nǐ de yéye nǐnài zài Melbourne zhù, dui ba? Your grandparents live in Melbourne, right?</td>
<td>Dui. 对</td>
<td>Bù dui. 不对</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tā yǒu yīgè jiējié, dui ba? He has a sister, right?</td>
<td>That’s right. 那是</td>
<td>No. (not right) 不对</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. By providing answer choices in the actual question. You include both the positive and the negative forms in the question:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>YES answer</th>
<th>NO answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Nǐ shì bù shì lǎo dà?  
Are you the eldest or not?  
(Are you or aren’t you the eldest?) | Shì de.  
是的  
I am. | Bú shì.  
不是  
I’m not. |
| Tā yǒu méi yǒu yīgè gēge?  
他有没有一个哥哥?  
Does he have a brother or not?  
(Does he or doesn’t he have?) | Yǒu.  
有  
He has. | Méi yǒu.  
没有  
No, he hasn’t. |
| Nǐ xǐhuān bù xǐhuān hē chá?  
你喜欢不喜欢喝茶?  
Do you like drinking tea or not? | Xǐhuān.  
喜欢  
Yes, I do. | Bú xǐhuān.  
不喜欢  
No, I don’t. |
| Nǐ yào bù yào qù Bēijīng?  
你要不要去北京?  
Do you want to go to Beijing or not? | Yào.  
要  
Yes, I do. | Bú yào.  
不要  
No, I don’t. |

This way of asking can sound blunt in English, but is very acceptable in Chinese.