

## *Some particularities of the English language!*

### *Does she (has or have) a book?*

*The Simple Present of the verb to have is slightly irregular, since the bare infinitive is have, whereas the form of the verb used in the third person singular is has. (she has, he has, it has)*

*do , does (for the third person singular) are auxiliaries to form questions and negative statements in the Simple Present.*

*When the auxiliaries do, does are combined with another verb, the other verb always has the form of the bare infinitive.*

*So, she doesn't have a book.*

### *Do you have/have you/have you got*

I was wondering whether you've done anything on your language blog regarding the uses of the phrases "have you got", "do you have" and "have you". I get the impression that "do you have" is the preferred form in America, whilst "have you got" is more usual in Britain. "Have you" is maybe considered rather old-fashioned in the UK these days; I'm not sure about its status in the US however.

To grammatically achieve a *yes/no* question in English, the question has to start with a verb. Not any verb, but an [auxiliary verb](#) (or 'helping verb'). (Verbs that aren't auxiliary verbs are called [lexical verbs](#).) If you have an auxiliary-less sentence, then you usually have to add an auxiliary to fill that beginning-of-question slot. So, if you want to ask if someone wants a pineapple, you have to add the meaningless (in this case) auxiliary *do* just to fill out the question structure and make it grammatical: *Do you want a pineapple?* rather than *Want you a pineapple?* But *have* can be either a lexical verb (as in *I have a pineapple*) or an auxiliary verb (as in *I have found a pineapple*, where *found* is the lexical verb and *have* is there as an auxiliary to carry the tense). Verbs that don't need *do*-support for question formation and negation are sometimes called *operators*.

So, let's assume that one needs a pineapple (as I do now that I've thought of pineapples). So you stand on the street corner and ask passing strangers for a pineapple (as I'm about to do).

Starting with the shortest of the possibilities we have:

#### **(1) *Have you a pineapple?***

Here we're using the [stative](#) meaning of *have*, 'to possess'. In the English of England\*, only the stative meaning of lexical *have* can be an operator. (In Scotland and Ireland it may be possible, according to Trudgill, to use a more dynamic meaning of *have* as an operator, as in *Had you pineapple for lunch?*) Operator use of stative *have* is said to be somewhat old-fashioned British [...], but it is hardly imaginable in American". Americans know of it, of course, from the nursery song *Baa, baa, black sheep (have you any wool?)*, but outside of storybook contexts, they wouldn't expect to run into it.

BrE prefers our next candidate:

**(2) *Have you got a pineapple?***

You can say this in AmE as well, but it's not the default way to ask for pineapple. *Have got*, of course, is sayable in non-questions as well. But considering that the British say it more than Americans, it's funny that Americans are more particular about what it means. [As we've discussed before](#), AmE makes the distinction between *have got* for possession (*I've got a pineapple*) and requirements (*I've got to go*) and *have gotten* for acquisition (*I've gotten a pineapple from the fridge*). Many language pedants (or [peevoologists](#), as they have come to be known in the trade) on both sides of the Atlantic (but probably more US than UK) insist that *have got* should be avoided in the possession or requirement senses because *have* alone is more elegant.

At any rate, because we can say *You have got some pineapple*, we can ask *Have you got some pineapple?* *Have* is an operator in all dialects in this context. What differs is whether you prefer to say it that way. We'll look at the numbers after considering the final, and most AmE, possibility:

**(3) *Do you have a pineapple?***

So, in this case, *have* is treated as a non-operator lexical verb, and *do* must come in and fill the operator space. This is the way we usually form questions with lexical verbs in English, and it's the preferred way for AmE speakers to form questions about possession.

Now what surprised me in investigating this was how much AmE prefers (3) over (2) (especially since I've seen *have got* [derided as an ugly Americanism](#) by uninformed BrE speakers). The result:

AmE: Do you have = 3092, Have you got = 99. So 31:1.

BrE: Do you have = 245, Have you got = 450. So 1:<2.

Now, whether the two corpora are really comparable is debatable, but it's worth noting that COCA is about 20% spoken language and BNC is just under 18% spoken--so it shouldn't be just a difference in spoken-versus-written proportions that is making the differences so stark.

So, the lessons of today are:

- If you are on a UK street corner, say *Have you got a pineapple?*
- If you are on a US street corner, say *Do you have a pineapple?*
- If you say *Have you a pineapple?*, you risk assault for non-normative behavior.