

Lesson 12

“Wh” Questions

“Wh”-Questions

[(Aux) Verb (Neg) CP–S]

bebáa

interrogative pronoun

The subject of the lesson is Wh-questions (a very English term that owes its form to the fact that most English question words start with “wh”), questions that cannot be answered with “yes” or “no.” They are very simply formed in Láadan, but look so different from their English counterparts that they are likely to be awkward for English speakers at first.

In the interrogative pronoun, the interrogative “báa” is attached to the pronoun “be.” Since “bebáa” (who/what) is a pronoun, it also has plural forms “bebáazh” (who/what, few/several) and “bebáan” (who/what, many). These plural forms will be used less often than the singular— only when the questioner has reason to expect that more than one thing will satisfy her query. Plurality in an interrogative pronoun may seem foreign to English speakers, but it does provide additional opportunities to mark the plural— such opportunities being relatively rare in Láadan.

Additionally, if the speaker wishes to limit her query to persons or animals of only one gender, it is perfectly feasible to incorporate one of the gender suffixes: bebáahizh (who/what, single, female); bebáahid (who/what, single, male); bebáazhizh (who/what, few/several, all female); bebáazhid (who/what, few/several, all male); bebáanizh (who/what, many, all female); bebáanid (who/what, many, all male). Of course, the plural gendered forms are limiting the entire group that would answer the question to the gender specified; if the speaker wished to include both genders, she would not use a gender suffix to limit her question.

Formally, all questions begin with “Báa.” Less formally, since we have a form of the word “báa” embedded in the interrogative pronoun, “bebáa,” there can be no confusion that it’s a question being posed; therefore, in casual speech and writing we can omit the initial “Báa.”

Examples

Bíi thal shon wa.

Peace is good.

Báa thal shon?

Is peace good?

Báa thal bebáa?

Who/what is good?

Thal bebáa?

Who’s/what’s good?

Bíi néde om with wáa.

The person wants to teach.

Báa néde om with?

Does the person want to teach?

Báa néde om bebáa?

Who/what wants to teach?

Néde om bebáa?

Who/what wants to teach?

Bíi meháya withizh wa.

The women are beautiful.

Báa meháya withizh?

Are the women beautiful?

Báa meháya bebáazh?

Who/what (few/several) are beautiful?

Meháya bebáazh?

Who're/what're (few/several) beautiful?

Báa meháya bebáan?

Who/what (many) are beautiful?

Meháya bebáan?

Who're/what're (many) beautiful?

Bíi eril u ra áath wi.

The door clearly was not open.

Báa eril u ra áath?

Wasn't the door open?

Báa eril u ra bebáa?

What/who wasn't open?

Eril u ra bebáa?

Who/what wasn't open?

Vocabulary

aba

to be fragrant

bo

mountain

dan

language

dim

container

dizh

kettle

esh

boat

im

to travel

léli

to be yellow

mahina

flower

othel

to be blessed

Exercises

Translate the following into English.

1 Báa ril othel bebáa?

E: _____

2 Báa aril mehamedara bebáan?

E: _____

3 Báa eríli dudoth ra bebáa?

E: _____

4 Báa eril medi i menahada bebáazh?

E: _____

5 Báa rilrili nime míi bebáa?

E: _____

6 Báa aril medush mehal bebáan?

E: _____

Transform the following into “Wh”-questions. Translate into English before and after the transformation.

7 Bíi aril dathim shoná wo.

E: _____

L: _____

E: _____

8 Bé eril balin déelahá wa.

E: _____

L: _____

E: _____

9 Bíi ril merahíya ra dim wáa.

E: _____

L: _____

E: _____

10 Bíi híya i shane edemid wi.

E: _____

L: _____

E: _____

11 Bíi eril héeya lawida amedarahá wáa.

E: _____

L: _____

E: _____

12 Bé aril methad melalom belidá wa.

E: _____

L: _____

E: _____

Did the word “amedarahá” in #11 give you any trouble? From “amedara” (to dance) and “-á” (doer/maker), it means “dancer.” One note: “aá” is an allowed vowel combination in Láadan *within* a word or word-part; in fact we’ve seen it in the Evidence word “waá.” However, in this case, the “a” comes from “amedara” (dance) and the “á” from “-á” (DOER)—*separate* words/word-parts—so we do have to separate them with an “h.”

It’s perfectly understandable if the word “belidá” in #12 was difficult; it’s not the most transparent formation. “Belidá” comes from “belid” (house) and “-á” (doer/maker); a “maker of houses” is a “carpenter.”

Translate the following questions into Láadan. Then answer each question in Láadan with the supplied word and translate your answer into English.

13 What may be extremely hot?

kettle

L: _____

L: _____

E: _____

14 What (few/several) are beautiful(place)?

mountain

L: _____

L: _____

E: _____

15 What (many) aren't alien?

languages

L: _____

L: _____

E: _____

16 What will be yellow and fragrant?

flower

L: _____

L: _____

E: _____

17 Who intended to be good?

grandparent

L: _____

L: _____

E: _____

18 Who (few/several) promised to remember?

peace-scientist

L: _____

L: _____

E: _____

In #18, we see a verb, “dom” (to remember), that we’ve only ever seen as the first element of a Verb Complex (what in English we’ve been taught to call a “helping verb”) used as the second verb (as the main verb in the sentence). It’s important to remember that all verbs—even those we’re used to seeing as “helping verbs”—can be used in this way.

Answers

- | | | | |
|----|--|----|---|
| 1 | Who/what is blessed? | 13 | Báa rilrili owahul bebáa?
Bíi rilrili owahul dizh wo.
I suppose the kettle may be
extremely hot. |
| 2 | Who (many) will dance? | 14 | Báa ril mehóya bebáazh?
Bíi ril mehóya bo wa.
The mountains are beautiful(place). |
| 3 | Who, long ago, didn't try to follow? | 15 | Báa ril menée ra bebáan?
Bíi ril menée ra dan wáa.
I understand the languages are not
alien. |
| 4 | Who (few/several) spoke and began to
laugh? | 16 | Báa aril léli i aba bebáa?
Bíi aril léli i aba mahina wi.
The flower will be yellow and
fragrant, clearly. |
| 5 | Who might be willing to be amazed? | 17 | Báa eril nédeshub thal bebáa?
Bíi eril nédeshub thal hothul wáa.
I understand the grandparent
intended to be good. |
| 6 | Who (many) will have to work? | 18 | Báa eril medibé medom bebáazh?
Bíi eril medibé medom eshoná wa.
The peace-scientists promised to
remember. |
| 7 | I suppose the peacemaker will
needlework.
Báa aril dathim bebáa?
Who/what will needlework? | | |
| 8 | Upon my oath, the gardener was old.
Báa eril balin bebáa?
Who/what was old? | | |
| 9 | I understand the containers are not large.
Báa ril merahíya ra bebáazh?
Who/what (few/several) are not
large? | | |
| 10 | A mouse is small and furry, of course.
Báa híya i shane bebáa?
What is small and furry? | | |
| 11 | The dancer was afraid to be pregnant, I
understand.
Báa eril héeya lawida bebáa?
Who/what was afraid to be
pregnant? | | |
| 12 | I promise the carpenters will be able to
sing.
Báa aril methad melalom bebáan?
Who/what (many) will be able to
sing? | | |