Semantics: discourse particles
Back when we were talking about definite and indefinite articles…

DOG BITES MAN
PRESIDENT MEETS POPE
Back when we were talking about definite and indefinite articles…

DOG BITES MAN
PRESIDENT MEETS POPE

A dog bites a man
The President meets the Pope
Back when we were talking about definite and indefinite articles…

A dog bit a man
The dog bit a man
Back when we were talking about definite and indefinite articles…

A dog bit a man
The dog bit a man

→ same ‘meaning’ in one sense; the difference has to do with whether you’re supposed to know what dog I’m referring to.
Something similar going on with sentences…

Kyoo wa kin’yoobi desu ne  [Japanese]
today TOP Friday is NE
‘Today is Friday, right?’

Kyoo wa kin’yoobi desu yo
today TOP Friday is YO
‘Today is Friday (I assert)’

Kyoo wa kin’yoobi desu ka
today TOP Friday is KA
‘Is today Friday?’

ne: ‘I assume you know this’
yo: ‘I believe you don't know this’
A popular model for talking about how conversation works: the Question Under Discussion (QUD) model.
Where do your professors live?
QUD

Where do your professors live?

Where does your 24.917 prof live?  
Where does your 6.002 prof live?  
Where does your 7.22 prof live?  ….  

Where do your professors live?
Where do your professors live?

- Where does your 24.917 prof live?
- Where does your 6.002 prof live?
- Where does your 7.22 prof live? ....

Where do your professors live?

Well, my 24.917 professor lives in Somerville...
Where do your professors live?


Where do your professors live?

*Well, my 24.917 professor lives in Somerville*...

- Oh, where in Somerville?
- How about your 6.002 professor?
Where do your professors live?

- Where does your 24.917 prof live?
- Where does your 6.002 prof live?
- Where does your 7.22 prof live? ....

Where do your professors live?

Well, my 24.917 professor lives in Somerville...

**Contrastive Topic:** “I have chosen to break your question down into subquestions, and to answer one subquestion. There are still unanswered subquestions, the form of which you can find by taking the phrase that I have emphasized prosodically and replacing it with other salient things.”
How’d the students do on the test?

Well, Mary passed...
QUD

• a sneaky aspect of these theories: the questions don’t actually have to be asked. Imagine that I come into the room dripping wet; I might say:

    It’s raining.

    …not because anyone has asked “Why are you wet?”, but because I figure it might be a question on their minds.
This can lead to problems…
Imagine that I’m in your house, and all the furniture is covered with clothes. I might ask:

Are you planning to paint?
This can lead to problems…
Imagine that I’m in your house, and all the furniture is covered with cloths. I might ask:

Are you planning to paint?

It would be kind of weird if you just answer “No.”
QUD

This can lead to problems…
Imagine that I’m in your house, and all the furniture is covered with cloths. I might ask:

Are you planning to paint?

It would be kind of weird if you just answer “No.”

What I’m doing here is skipping QUDs…
QUD

Why are there cloths on all the furniture?

Are you going to paint?  Are you going to murder me?  Does your furniture dissolve in sunlight?  …

I skipped the real QUD and asked the sub-QUD that I thought was most likely. If you just tell me the answer to that one is ‘no’, I’m left with a bunch of sub-QUDs that I don’t understand the relevance of.
Some languages have particles that help with navigating in the QUDs and sub-QUDs…

A: Nadine ist in Italien.  
Nadine is in Italy.  
[German]

(later…)  

B: Geht Nadine heute Abend mit uns tanzen?  
Is Nadine going dancing with us this evening?  

No. Nadine is doch in Italy.
QUD

Some languages have particles that help with navigating in the QUDs and sub-QUDs…

A:  Hat Peter die Suppe selbst gekocht?

B:  Ja. Er hat doch den ganzen Abend daran gearbeitet.

Did Peter make the soup himself?

Yes. He worked on it doch all evening.

(...and you were supposed to know that)

[German]
QUD

‘unfocused doch’: I am giving an answer to a previously closed QUD, and the answer is the previously given one.

There’s also ‘focused doch’:

A: Ist Anna zu deiner Geburtstagsparty gekommen?  
   Did Anna come to your birthday party?

B: Zuerst hat sie abgesagt, aber dann ist sie DOCH gekommen.  
   At first she cancelled, but then she came DOCH.

[German]
QUD

‘unfocused doch’: I am giving an answer to a previously closed QUD, and the answer is the previously given one.

‘focused doch’: I am giving an answer to a previously closed QUD, and the answer is different from the previously given one.
A: Wie war das Wetter, als du in Rom warst?

B: Das Wetter war toll.

A: Wie war das Essen?

B: Sehr lecker.

A: Wie waren die Leute?

B: Die Leute waren sehr nett. Es war überhaupt alles sehr schön in Rom.

[German]

QUD

How was the weather when you were in Rome?

The weather was good.

How was the food?

Very tasty.

How were the people?

The people were very nice. It was überhaupt very nice in Rome.
QUD

A: Möchtest du ein Glas Wein? Would you like a glass of wine?
B: Nein, Danke. No, thank you.
A: Hättest du gerne ein Bier? Would a beer appeal to you?
B: Nein. Ich trinke überhaupt no
   keinen Alkohol. überhaupt no
   alcohol.

[German]

überhaupt: “I wish to shift from the QUD to a higher-level QUD,
and will now answer that one.”
QUD

A: Möchtest du ein Glas Wein?  
B: Nein, Danke.  
A: Hättest du gerne ein Bier?  
B: Nein. Ich trinke überhaupt keinen Alkohol.

Would you like a glass of wine?  
No, thank you.  
Would a beer appeal to you?  
No. I drink überhaupt no alcohol.

[German]

überhaupt: “I wish to shift from the QUD to a higher-level QUD, and will now answer that one.”

“Would you like a beer?”

“Let’s now switch to the bigger question: do I want any kind of alcohol at all? The answer is no.”
QUD

A: Ona muxa. Ubit’ ee!  It’s a fly. Kill it!  [Russian]
B: Ona zhe uzhe ubita.  It’s already killed zhe.

zhe: “The sentence I am uttering is true, and you seem to believe that it is false, even though the context is one in which you have enough evidence to conclude that it is true.”
A: Kumusta? How are you? [Tagalog]
B: Mabuti. Ikaw naman? Fine. You naman?
A: Kumusta?  How are you?  [Tagalog]
B: Mabuti. Ikaw naman?  Fine. You naman?

A: Sino ang mahilig sa tsokolate?  Who likes chocolate?
B: Lahat naman!  Everyone naman!

naman: “The previous QUD is now closed.”
A: Kumusta?  How are you?  [Tagalog]
B: Mabuti. Ikaw naman?  Fine. You naman?

A: Sino ang mahilig sa tsokolate?  Who likes chocolate?
B: Lahat naman!  Everyone naman!

**naman:** “The QUD before the current one is closed.”

“‘Fine’ answers the previous question, and now we’re moving to the next one.”

“‘Who likes chocolate?’ is a question that has an obvious answer; it was closed as soon as you opened it.”