**Lecture 1. Negation[[1]](#footnote-1)**

There are many different ways of forming negatives in English. Although the most common way is with not, we can also use adverbs, quantifiers and prefixes to make the meaning of a sentence or a word negative.

NEGATIVE STATEMENTS

**A**  We use not/n't with verbs to make the meaning of a sentence negative. We add an Using not auxiliary (do, does, etc.) in the negative present simple and past simple of all verbs with verbs except be, and the negative imperative of all verbs:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **affirmative** | **negative** |
| **imperative** | Talk to me! | Don't talk to me! |
| **be** | He's outside.  We're waiting for you. | He's not! He isn't outside.  We're not/We aren't waiting. |
| **present or past simple** | I like Colombian coffee.  They finished early. | I don't like Colombian coffee.  They didn't finish early. |
| **perfect tenses** | They have arrived.  They had seen the film. | They haven't arrived. They hadn't seen the film. |
| **modal verbs** | We must leave soon. | You mustn't leave yet. |
| **infinitives** | I told you to go.  To stop now would be silly. | I told you not to go.  Not to stop now would be silly. |
| **participles** | Having seen the film, I understand the hype. | Not having seen the film, I don't understand the hype. |

In short answers with verbs of thinking and believing, e.g. think, hope, believe, imagine, we often put not after the verb:

'Has Susannah decided to call her daughter Brittany after all?

~~‘I don’t hope~~ I hope not!’

B We can use not in front of positive quantifiers (e.g. much, many, a lot of) to make the meaning of a clause or phrase negative:

Not many people want to be referees - it's a lot of hassle and not much money.

We can use not (+ adverb) with adjectives to make the meaning negative:

Howard found/thought the climb not (too) difficult but not (particularly) easy either.

!!! Putting not before an adjective weakens the adjective, but it does not give it the same strength as an adjective with the opposite meaning, e.g. not difficult does not have exactly the same strength of meaning as easy, particularly if we add an adverb after not like too or particularly:

The maths exam was easy. The maths exam was not too difficult.

(The speaker is more confident of passing the exam in the first example.) We can also use not before an adjective with a negative prefix:

Spanish has a tense system **not dissimilar** to that of English. (= a bit similar to)

The tap water here is **not unpleasant** to drink now they've removed the fluoride.

(= not awful, but not nice) The descriptions above are much less positive than the following:

Spanish has a tense system similar to that of English.

The tap water here is pleasant to drink now they've removed the fluoride.

С We use no to introduce negative replies:

‘Have you been here before?' 'No, I haven't.'

We do not combine no with a verb to make a negative statement:

~~I have no been-here before.~~ / have **not** been here before.

We usually use not + any with a noun to express an absence or lack of something:

They won't get any help from Janice.

However, we can use no in front of nouns, instead of not ... any or not ... a/an:

They'll get no help from Janice.

We can often use no + noun and not... a/any + noun interchangeably, although no is usually more emphatic or more emotionally loaded than the neutral not ... a/any:

There isn't any reason to change policy at this stage, (neutral statement).

There's **no** reason to change policy at this stage, (more emphatic statement).

She's not a dancer, (statement of fact about her job).

She's no dancer! (statement of opinion about her ability to dance). We can use no with different, good and with comparatives:

Low-impact aerobics is basically no different from the normal type, but it's kinder on the legs and feet. (= very similar to)

Next-day courier is no faster than first-class post. (= isn't (any) faster than) Come on! This cafe is no more expensive than the one down the road. Let's eat! (= This cafe charges the same prices as the cafe down the road.)

D There are a number of expressions which we use to give negative meaning to a sentence, e.g. never, neither ... no, none, not only, not ... for, no sooner ... than:

The English village is neither as pleasant nor as unchanging as it is believed to be.

The German assault would have lasted longer if it had**n’t** been **for** the harsh Russian winter.

!!! English rarely uses a double negative, i.e. two words with a negative meaning in the same clause, as most people consider this to be incorrect:

~~Sorry, but I don’t know nothing about that!~~

Sorry, but I don't know anything about that! I know nothing about that! But double negatives are possible if we intend to make an affirmative:

I don't know nothing about Etruscan history – I know a little about it!

(In spoken English, nothing is stressed in this sentence.)

We can put not only at the beginning of sentences for emphasis:

Not only did they monitor the landings, they also recorded all their dates and times.

Note that we use question word order when we use not only in this way.

**E** When we use verbs like think, suppose and believe to introduce a negative idea, we prefer to make the introductory verb negative, not the verb in the subordinate clause: (*I* think the later train **won**'t be cancelled.)

I **don**'t think the later train will be cancelled.

If we make the subordinate verb negative rather than the introductory verb, it can express surprise or appear emphatic:

*I* thought that you didn't smoke! When did you start?

!!! We do not use hope in this way:

*~~We~~* ***~~don’t hope~~*** *~~the reunion will be too painful for you.~~*

We hope that the reunion **won't** be too painful for you.

With verbs such as seem, expect, appear + infinitive, we use either of these patterns: He doesn't appear to be interested. He appears not to be interested.

!!! With introductory verbs such as tell and ask + infinitive, we change the meaning when we make the introductory verb negative:

The doctor told me not to take the pills, (prohibition)

The doctor didn't tell me to take the pills. (= The doctor omitted to tell me ...)

NEGATIVE QUESTIONS

**А** Negative questions are formed by adding n't to a form of be or to the auxiliary:

Haven't you seen Harrison Ford's new film yet?

Isn't the mayor opening the new supermarket after all?

To be more formal, we can use not. We put this after the subject:

Is the mayor not opening the new supermarket after all?

We can use question words to introduce negative questions:

Why hasn't Stella contacted her solicitor yet?

**B** We can use negative questions to check or confirm that something is true or has happened, or to ask for agreement. We expect a positive (yes) answer:

Aren't you a member of a wildlife organisation? (= I think that you are.)

We also use negative questions to check or confirm that something isn't true, or hasn't happened. We expect a negative [no] answer:

You were quick. Wasn't the hairdresser busy? (= I think she wasn't busy.) Negative questions often express surprise that something isn't true or hasn't happened:

Haven't astronomers discovered a tenth planet? (= I thought that they had.) We can also use negative questions to express criticism or complaint, often with why.

Didn't you remember to post the letter? Honestly, I can't trust you to do anything!

Why didn't you tell me about your new boyfriend?

We can answer negative questions with yes or no. If a full answer would use an affirmative verb, we use yes:

'Hasn't the weather been dreadful recently?' Yes (it has been dreadful).'

If a full answer would use a negative verb, we use no:

'Wasn't the hairdresser busy?' No (she wasn't busy).'

Both of these examples agree with the speaker. We can also contradict the speaker, but we would then soften the response with an explanation:

Hasn't the weather been dreadful recently?' 'Well, no, I think it's been OK.'

'Wasn't the hairdresser busy?' Yes, she was actually, but she's very fast!'

We can use negative questions to try to persuade someone to do something:

Won't you come with us to the beach tomorrow? It'll be fun.

We also use this form of question to express opinions which expect agreement:

Don't you think that the new shopping centre is really ugly?

WORDS WHICH CARRY NEGATIVE MEANING

**А** Many English words, such as few, little or rarely, have a negative or restrictive meaning (i.e. they reduce the amount, frequency or degree of the word they qualify):

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **type of word** | examples | example sentences |
| **quantifiers** | few, little | There are **few** people who believe you.  I have little time to watch TV. |
| **adverbs of frequency** | rarely, seldom,  hardly, ever | The urban fox seldom ventures into gardens hardly ever |
| **adverbs of degree** | hardly, scarcely,  barely | *It is* ***hardly*** *liking that a thug will wait politely for the police.* |

The meaning of few and little is restrictive only without a/an. Compare:

*Water the fruit frequently as* ***little*** *as rain falls at this time of the year (almost none).*

*You’d better take an umbrella with you: there’s always* ***a little*** *rain at this time of the year (=a small amount).*

All these restrictive words are negative in meaning: we use a positive verb with them:

~~Many managers~~ **~~don’t hardly~~** ~~prepare for meetings at all.~~

Many managers hardly prepare for meetings at all.

!!! We also use an affirmative question tag with these words:

Higher-ranking police officers rarely meet the public these days, do they?

We can put the adverbs of frequency from the table above before the verb for emphasis:

Rarely did the church bells in our village ring out for something like a wedding.

**B** Some verbs contain a negative meaning, e.g. fail, deny, avoid:

I fall to understand your motivation for doing this. (= I don't understand)

Joe denied copying the essay from his best friend. (= said he hadn't copied)

!!! These verbs can be made negative and they can take a negative question tag:

The boy didn't deny copying the homework. (= He admitted it.)

Fran failed her driving test again, didn't she?

**C** We can make verbs, nouns and adjectives negative, with a negative prefix:

Incomplete information will delay payment of any benefit due. (= not complete).

Look at these examples of negative prefixes:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **part of speech** | **prefix** | **examples** |
| **verbs** | **dis-**  **mis-**  **un-**  **de**- | dislike, disconnect, disappear, disapprove misunderstand, misinform, mislead, misbehave unlock, untie, unpack, uncork, uncover, uncoil deregulate, defrost, decentralise, dethrone, devalue |
| **nouns** | **anti-**  **non-**  **in-**  **dis-**  **de-** | anti-freeze, Antichrist, anti-perspirant, anti-climax nonsense, non-smoker, nonfiction, nonconformist injustice, inconvenience, inattention, inactivity,  disadvantage, disinformation, dishonesty, disinfectant decentralisation, deforestation, decriminalisation |
| **adjectives** | **anti-**  **in- (il-,ir-, im-)**  **dis-**  **non-**  **un-** | anti-clockwise, anti-smoking, anti-social incomplete, inconvenient, insecure, incredible (illegal, illegible, irrelevant, irregular, impossible)  dishonest, disobedient, dissimilar, discourteous non-alcoholic, non-toxic, nonsensical, nonexistent  unfair, uncomfortable, unlikely, unavailable, unusual |

We can use words with a negative prefix in negative clauses:

Negative verb*: He reached down to the window, but* ***didn't unlock*** *it when he heard the cry from outside. (= didn't open it)*

Negative noun: *It* ***isn't anti-freeze****, it's anti-perspirant!*

Negative adjective: *Salaries here are* ***not unlike*** *those in the United Kingdom.*

1. Материалы подготовлены на основе: Foley M., Hall D. Advanced Learners’ Grammar. Harlow, Longman, 2003. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)