

## Question and negation

### ‘Wh’-questions

We may now consider the wh-words of English as a special set of pro-forms diametrically opposed to the others in having the general meaning ‘It has not been known what this item refers to and so it needs to be stated in full’. This informal statement will account for the use of wh-forms in questions:

By such means, we can ask for the identification of the subject, object, complement or an adverbial of a sentence:

*They (i) make him (ii) the chairman (iii) every year (iv)*

*Who makes him the chairman every year?*

*Whom do they make the chairman every year?*

*What do they make him every year?*

*When do they make him the chairman?*

### ‘Yes-no’ questions

Besides wh-questions, which elicit information on particular parts of a sentence, there are questions which seek a *yes* or *no* response in relation to the validity of (normally) an entire predication:

*Is the girl now a student?*

*Did John search the room?*

*Had he given the girl an apple?*

Such questions normally open with an operator which is then followed by the subject and the predication.

Form *Wh*-questions which will precisely elicit, as answers, the underlined parts of the following questions.

- 1 DDT was sprayed over the area.
- 2 Samuel Pepys wrote an account of the fire.
- 3 He wrote an account of the fire.
- 4 He wrote an account of the fire.
- 5 The fire started in a bakery.
- 6 It burnt furiously.
- 7 It burnt for four days.
- 8 That happened in 1666.
- 9 Pepys’ account of it is the best.
- 10 Fires broke out every night during the war.
- 11 Twenty people were killed on the roads yesterday.
- 12 Three inches of rain fell last night.
- 13 It is four miles from here to the station.
- 14 It will only take you ten minutes to get there by car.
- 15 This castle was built during the fifteenth century.
- 16 The Aswan Dam was built to provide a reservoir for the Nile valley.

## Negation and non-assertion

Negative sentences involve the operator, requiring the insertion of *not* (or the affixal contraction (-n't) between the operator and the predication:

*The girl isn't a student.*

*John did not search the room.*

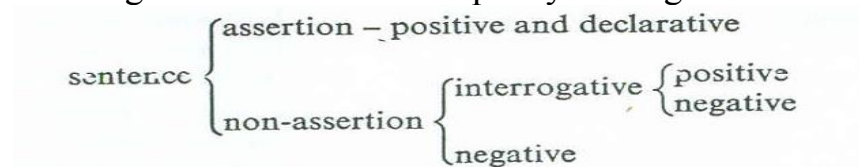
*He hadn't given the girl an apple.*

We need to see a further similarity between questions and negations.

Let us call a sentence the sentence below as *assertion*:

*He offered her some chocolates.*

Now, a sentence can be *non-assertive* in one of two ways: by being negative or by being a question. We do not therefore have two independent systems (*positive: negative*) and (*declarative: interrogative*), but rather an interrelated system in which *assertion* involves both 'positive' and 'declarative' while *non-assertion* has a subsystem either 'negative' or 'interrogative'. The relationship may be diagrammed thus:



Provide one of the following labels for each of the sentences below:

*assertion, positive and declarative*

*non-assertion, interrogative, positive*

*non-assertion, interrogative, negative*

*non-assertion, negative*

Support your choice of label by evidence such as *some* or *any*.

- 1 Have you finished this chapter yet?
- 2 None of us have finished it yet.
- 3 Some of the others have finished it already.
- 4 Then why haven't you finished it yet?
- 5 Have you got much to do?
- 6 I never have much to do in the evening.
- 7 But I have quite a lot to do in the morning.
- 8 I haven't much to do in the morning, either.
- 9 I have plenty to do in the morning, too.
- 10 Haven't you got anything to do, either?