

University of Tikrit
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English Grammar

Assertive and Non-Assertive Forms in Negation

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1. Introduction

One of the important effects of negation in English grammar is the change it causes in certain words and expressions within a sentence. When a sentence becomes negative, some words that are commonly used in affirmative statements are usually replaced by alternative forms. These alternatives are known as **non-assertive forms**, while the forms used in affirmative statements are called **assertive forms**.

Consider the following examples:

Affirmative

- I have some money.

Negative

- I do not have any money.

The word *some* is an assertive form, while *any* is its corresponding non-assertive form.

Similarly:

Affirmative

- She has already finished the assignment.

Negative

- She has not finished the assignment yet.

The word *already* is assertive, whereas *yet* is non-assertive.

The distinction between assertive and non-assertive forms plays a significant role in English grammar, as it helps speakers produce natural, grammatically correct sentences.

2. What Are Assertive Forms?

Assertive forms are words and expressions that normally occur in affirmative or positive statements.

They are called "assertive" because they typically express certainty, affirmation, or positive assertion.

Examples

- some
- somebody
- someone
- something
- somewhere

- already

Examples in Sentences

- I bought some books.
- Somebody called this morning.
- She knows something about linguistics.
- We met somewhere in Baghdad.
- They have already arrived.

These forms usually appear in positive contexts where the speaker assumes the truth of the proposition.

3. What Are Non-Assertive Forms?

Non-assertive forms are words and expressions that generally occur in:

1. Negative sentences
2. Questions
3. Conditional clauses
4. Comparative constructions
5. Other non-affirmative contexts

Examples

- any
- anybody
- anyone
- anything
- anywhere
- yet
- ever

Examples in Sentences

- I do not have any money.
- Did anyone call?
- If you need anything, let me know.

- She has not arrived yet.
- Have you ever visited London?

Unlike assertive forms, non-assertive forms do not imply the existence or certainty of something.

4. Major Assertive and Non-Assertive Pairs

4.1 Some ↔ Any

Assertive

- I need some water.
- She bought some books.

Non-Assertive

- I do not need any water.
- She did not buy any books.

Questions

- Do you have any questions?

Notice that *any* is preferred in questions because the answer is not known.

4.2 Somebody / Someone ↔ Anybody / Anyone

Assertive

- Somebody is waiting outside.
- Someone called you.

Non-Assertive

- I did not see anybody.
- Has anyone arrived yet?

4.3 Something ↔ Anything

Assertive

- I want something to eat.
- She found something interesting.

Non-Assertive

- I do not want anything.
- Did you find anything interesting?

4.4 Somewhere ↔ Anywhere

Assertive

- They went somewhere after dinner.

Non-Assertive

- They did not go anywhere.
- Have you been anywhere recently?

4.5 Already ↔ Yet

Assertive

- She has already completed the assignment.
- They have already left.

Non-Assertive

- She has not completed the assignment yet.
- Have they left yet?

This pair is one of the most frequently used in English.

5. Non-Assertive Forms in Questions

Questions often require non-assertive forms because the speaker is uncertain about the answer.

Examples

- Do you have any suggestions?
- Has anybody seen my notebook?
- Did anyone call me?
- Have you ever visited Turkey?

The use of assertive forms in ordinary questions is generally avoided.

Incorrect:

- Do you have some questions?

Preferred:

- Do you have any questions?

7. Non-Assertive Forms in Conditional Sentences

Non-assertive forms commonly appear in conditional clauses.

Examples

- If you need any help, call me.
- If anyone asks, tell them I am busy.
- If you find anything unusual, report it.
- If you go anywhere, let me know.

Conditional clauses express possibility rather than certainty; therefore, non-assertive forms are appropriate.

8. Summary

Assertive and non-assertive forms constitute an important aspect of English grammar and are closely connected with negation. Assertive forms such as *some*, *somebody*, *something*, *somewhere*, and *already* typically occur in affirmative contexts. Non-assertive forms such as *any*, *anybody*, *anyone*, *anything*, *anywhere*, *yet*, and *ever* are commonly used in negative sentences, questions, conditional clauses, and comparative constructions.

Understanding the distinction between these forms helps learners produce natural English, avoid common grammatical errors, and interpret meaning more accurately. Mastery of assertive and non-assertive forms is therefore essential for both grammatical competence and effective communication in academic and everyday contexts.