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((Assertive and Non- Assertive Sentences))

Assertive and Non- Assertive Sentences

- **Introduction**

There are some words which are mainly used in affirmative sentences. Examples are: **some, once, already, somebody, something, sometimes, somewhere, someone** etc. These words are often called **assertive words.**

There are numerous items that do not naturally occur outside negative, interrogative, and conditional clauses; for example: We haven't seen any soldiers *We have seen any soldiers. These items (which may be determiners, pronouns, or adverbs) are the non-assertive forms.

We do not usually use assertive words in questions and negatives. Instead we use other words like **any, anything, anybody, ever, yet** etc. These words are often called **non-assertive words.** The following examples will illustrate their forms:

Assertive Sentences	*Non- Assertive Sentences*
We've had *some* (lunch)	We *haven't any* (lunch)
I was speaking to *someone*	I *wasn't* speaking to *anyone*
I saw him *somewhere*	I *didn't* see him *anywhere*
She was *somehow* surprised	She *wasn't* in *any way* surprised
They *sometimes* visit us	They rarely /never/don't ever visit us
He helped to *some* extent	He *didn't* help *at all*
They've arrived *already*	They *haven't* arrived *yet*
John is coming *too*	John *isn't* coming *either*
They ate *too* many (cakes)	They *didn't* eat *very many* (cakes)
He's still *there*	He *isn't* there now *any longer*
I like her *a great deal*	I *don't* like her *much*
He's been *a long way*	He *hasn't* been *far*
She was away *a long time*	She *wasn't* away *long*
He saw one or *other of them*	He *didn't* see *either* {one, AmE) of them

- **Assertive Words in Questions**

Assertive words are sometimes used in questions and negatives. This, for example, happens when we want to give a positive feeling to the sentence.

- **Did** you want **something?** (Suggests 'I think you want something'.)

Non-assertive forms

More Than One Non-Assertive Form

If a clause contains a negative element, it is usually negative from that point onward. This means that the non-assertive forms must normally be used in place of every assertive form that would have occurred in the corresponding positive clause:

I've never travelled *anywhere* by air yet

I haven't ever been on *any* of the big Hners, either

No one has ever said *anything* to either of us

Not many of the refugees have *anywhere* to live yet

The non-assertive forms even occur in positive subordinate clauses following a negative in the main clause:

Nobody has promised that *any* of you will be released yet

That wouldn't deter anyone who had *any* courage.

Assertive forms, however, are equally likely in such cases; and more generally, assertive forms do occur following a negative, so long as they fall outside the scope of negation.

- **Negation and Non-Assertion**

While Yes/No questions normally challenge the validity of a predication as a whole, negation rejects it. There is a similarity between Yes/No question sentences and negative ones in that both of them involve an operator. Negative sentences require also the insertion of (not) between the operator and the predication. Questions and negations are also similar to each other in that they both belong to the Non-assertive system. A sentence can be non-assertive in one of two ways: by being negative or by being a question as shown below:

- **Somebody** knocked at the door. (Assertive)

- Did **anybody** knock at the door? (Non-assertive)

- I have bought **something**. (Assertive)

- I haven't bought **anything.** (Non-assertive)

- I have been to the US **once.** (Assertive)

- Have you **ever** been to the US? (Non-assertive)

- She has **already** arrived. (Assertive)

- She hasn't arrived **yet**. (Non-assertive)

Although the main markers of non-assertion are negative and interrogative clauses, it happens sometimes that the some series are conversely used in negative and interrogative clauses and that the any series are conversely used in the positive declarative clauses. Consider the following examples:

1. X contributed more than anyone to the destruction of Iraqi economy.

2. Did somebody call last night?

3. Would you like some apple juice?

The use of the non-assertive anyone in the first sentence is related to the fact that the basic meaning is negative, as appears in the paraphrase:

•Nobody contributed more to the destruction of Iraqi economy than X. So, it is the basic meaning of the whole sentence which ultimately determines the choice of the some or any series. While the use of the assertive somebody in the second sentence can be explained in terms of positive presupposition:

Somebody suggests that the speaker expected a call last night, the use of the assertive some in the third sentence can be explained as a sincere invitation to lead the addressee to accept it.