

Negative inversion exercises with answers

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Rewrite the following sentences using the inverted sentence structure. The first word of nine of the sentences has been given to you. Be sure to add a full-stop at the end of your sentences. Click [Score me] to see your score. DanUnder no circumstances should you stop watching this video! Only here will you get the full inversion explanation. Are you ready? Let's invert!Inversion happens in English for emphasis, dramatic purpose or formality. In order to invert, the normal sentence order of subject verb object is changed in some way. Let's find out how. Go! 'Never had I met someone so interesting.' Now English has a group of adverbs which limit the meaning of a verb or make it negative. Examples are never, hardly, no, only...and there are others. In order to change normal sentence order, we move the negative adverbial to the beginning of the sentence and we invert the auxiliary verb and subject. So: 'I had never met someone so interesting.' becomes 'Never had I met someone so interesting.' In cases where the tense does not use an auxiliary verb in the affirmative, such as the present simple or the past simple, one must be added. So, for example: 'I rarely go outside.' becomes 'Rarely do I go outside.' And 'She seldom worked very hard.' becomes 'Seldom did she work very hard.' However, there is another level to this. Some negative or limiting adverbials require you to complete a whole clause before the inversion takes place. It's kind of a two stage process. So, for example: 'I didn't know what to do until I saw what had happened.' becomes 'Not until I saw what had happened did I know what to do.' In this case, 'Not until I saw what happened' is the adverbial clause. The inversion takes place after this, in the main clause. And this is common with adverbs like 'Not' and 'Only' in the following combinations: 'Hardly' works like this too, but in the case of hardly, the inversion happens within the adverbial clause. It is mostly used with the past perfect to signify that one action finished just before another started. And notice the use of the connecting time words 'than' and 'when' in the examples. Are you ready? Hardly had I got home than the dog started barking.' 'Hardly had he got into the bath when the phone rang.' Isn't it typical? Finally, we can use the expression 'little did they know' to mean...wait for it...they didn't know. It's extremely dramatic and it's often found within books. It can be quite sinister! For example: 'Little did they know that he had stolen all of their money.' 'Did you get it? Of course you got it! Now, for never have I seen such a big house! Hardly ever does he speak English at home. In no way can he be accused of such a crime. Seldom does he visit his grandmother. Scarcely did Mrs. Bran go to the dentist last year. Only today did she tell me she was married. Only with thinner can he remove that stain. So clearly does Mr. Harris speak English that we can understand him easily. Had the train been late, we wouldn't have got there on time. Were they in danger, they would phone you. Should we pay the bill, tell her to give us a receipt. How expensive it is! May be rest in peace Next to the president stood the reporters. Never do we go there by ourselves. In vain did we try to change his plan? Under no circumstances will I see him again. Everywhere has evidence of his crime. You are here: >> Home >> English Grammar Lessons >> Inversions Hundreds of more printable worksheets and teaching materials 1. GrammarBank Exercises eBook ✓ 2. GrammarBank Exercises eBook Vol 2 ✓ 3. Verb Tenses eBook ✓ 4. Simple Tenses Exercises eBook ✓ 5. Perfect Tenses Exercises eBook ✓ 6. Supplementary Tests eBook ✓ 7. Conjunctions eBook ✓ 8. Gerunds and Infinitives PDF (60 Pages) ✓ 9. Modals and Similar Expressions PDF (44 Pages) ✓ 10. Noun Clauses PDF (46 Pages) ✓ 11. If Clauses PDF (19 Pages) ✓ 12. Determiners PDF (28 Pages) ✓ 13. My Best Friend 1 ✓ 14. My Best Friend 2 ✓ 15. My Best Friend 3 ✓ 16-20. The Adventures of Foxy (5 Story Books) ✓ 1 ▲▲▲▲▲▲! Negative inversion is a phenomenon in which a declarative sentence begins with a negated auxiliary or modal, such as can't, ain't, or won't, followed by subjects like nobody, everybody and all of you. Below are several examples of this phenomenon: 1) a. Can't nobody beat 'em. (African American English; Labov et al. 1968) b. Didn't nobody get hurt or nothin' (Appalachian English; Wolfram and Christian 1976) c. Won't anybody hit us. (Alabama English; Feagin 1979) d. Cain't all o' ya go at once. (West Texas English; Foreman 1999) Negative inversion is also referred to as declarative negative auxiliary inversion (NAI) in Lisa Green's work. Who says this? Negative inversion is attested in African American English throughout the country (Labov et al. 1968; Labov 1972; Martin 1992; Martin et al. 1998; Sells et al. 1996; Parrott 2000; Green 2002, 2011a, 2011b; White-Sustaita 2010). It is also attested in the speech of white residents of the south, such as Alabama English in Anniston, Alabama (Feagin 1979), Appalachian English (Wolfram and Christian 1976, Montgomery and Hall 2004), and West Texas English (Foreman 1999). Syntactic properties Only in negative sentences Negative inversion is restricted to negative sentences. 'Positive inversion'— inversion in affirmative sentences—is not possible. Thus, the following examples are unacceptable: 2) a. *Can somebody beat 'em. (African American English; Parrott 2000) b. *Will everybody fit in that car. (West Texas English; William Salmon personal correspondence) Sentential negation The presence of sentential negation is obligatory. (Sentential negation is negation achieved by negating the auxiliary or modal&mdash, such as by turning can to can't or by turning would to wouldn't). The presence of a negative subject without sentential negation does not license negative inversion, so the examples in (3) are unacceptable: 3) a. *Can nobody beat 'em. (African American English; Parrott 2000) b. *Will none of the students go to the party. (West Texas English; Foreman 1999) Sentential negation must be achieved through the contracted morpheme n't and not through the uncontracted form not, so the examples in (4) are not acceptable: 4) a. *Can not nobody beat 'em. (African American English; Parrott 2000) b. *Will not none of the students go to the party. (West Texas English; William Salmon personal correspondence) c. *Will none of the students not go to the party. (West Texas English; Foreman 1999) Subjects Subjects are usually indefinite or quantificational (identifying a quantity of things or people). Acceptable subjects include everyone, nobody, anyone, some people, many people and others. Definite subjects such as pronouns and proper names, which are not quantificational, are not possible, so none of the following are allowed: 5) a. *Don't the police break up a fight. (African American English; Parrott 2000) b. *Won't they catch us. (African American English; Parrott 2000) c. *Wouldn't Sally and Jean help the poor man. (African American English; Martin and Wolfram 1998) Some quantificational or indefinite subjects are also ruled out, such as subjects beginning with few or some, making the following examples unacceptable: 6) a. *Don't few of them live around here. (African American English; Sells et al. 1996) b. *Didn't some people come. (West Texas English/African American English; Larry Horn personal correspondence) In embedded structures Negative inversion is possible in embedded structures with an overt complementizer such as that, as in the following examples: 7) a. I know a way that can't nobody start a fight. (African American English; Labov et al. 1968) b. She loves the fact that don't nobody like her. (West Texas English/African American English; Foreman 1999) Non-inverted counterparts Negative inversion constructions always have a well-formed non-inverted counterpart. Sentences exhibiting negative inversion are given in (11a) and (12a), and their non-inverted counterparts are given in (11b) and (12b): 11) a. Ain't nobody know about no club. (African American English; Labov 1972) 12) a. Didn't everybody go to the party. (West Texas English; Foreman 1999) b. Everybody didn't go to the party. (West Texas English; Foreman 1999) Note, however, that in West Texas English, the inverted word order is strongly preferred when the only elements with negative markers are the auxiliary and subject, as in (13), but when additional elements, such as nothin' in (14), bear negative markers, the non-inverted word order is also possible: 13) a. Ain't none of the students done their homework. (West Texas English; Foreman 1999) b. *None of the students ain't done their homework. (West Texas English; Foreman 1999) 14) a. Ain't nobody doin' nothin' wrong. (West Texas English; Foreman 1999) b. Nobody ain't doin' nothin' wrong. (West Texas English; Foreman 1999) Expletives In the southern white speaker varieties, negative inversion constructions are compatible with expletive subjects, as in (15): 15) a. They didn't nobody like him. (Alabama English; Feagin 1979) b. They can't many people say that. (Appalachian English; Dante Oral History Project) c. We don't any of us need anything. (Appalachian English; Montgomery & Hall 2004) d. There didn't five of em go to sleep, and I thought they was gonna be trouble. (West Texas English; William Salmon personal correspondence) (For more discussion of sentences like these and whether their initial pronouns should be treated as expletives, see our page on split subjects.) However, negative inversion constructions are incompatible with expletives in African American English, so the examples in (16) are ungrammatical for speakers of African American English: 16) a. *There didn't nobody laugh. (African American English; Martin and Wolfram 1998) b. *It can't no man round here get enough money to buy they own farm. (African American English; Martin and Wolfram 1998) c. *Dey didn't nobody see it. (African American English; Weldon 1994) d. *It don't nobody be drinking tea. (African American English; Green 2006) There are, however, some examples of such constructions in older varieties of African American English, such as the ones given in (17), which come from ex-slave diaries written in the mid-eighteen hundreds: 17) a. There couldn't many of them go to school. (African American English; Bailey et al. 1991) b. But they'd give me a note so there would' nobody interfere with me. (African American English; Bailey et al. 1991) c. dey didn' nobody hab ter stan' over 'em.... (African American English; Chestnutt & Sollors 2002) With negative concord Negative inversion is often said to co-occur with negative concord in African American English. The co-occurrence typically refers to the acceptability of subjects headed by no, as in (18a), and the unacceptability of subjects headed by any, as in (18b): 18) a. Don't nobody break up a fight. (African American English; Labov 1972) b. *Don't anybody break up a fight. (African American English) Other types of subjects that are not negative are possible, such as subjects headed by a and many, as in (19): 19) a. Ain't a damn thing changed. (African American English; Parrott 2000) b. Don't many of them live around here. (African American English; Martin 1993) Click here to see our database filtered for well-formed examples exhibiting negative inversion without negative concord in African American English. Click here to see the data aggregated by the properties of negative inversion and negative concord for well-formed examples in African American English. In the southern white speech varieties, however, both subjects headed by no and subjects headed by any are possible, as in (20) and (21): 20) a. Hain't nobody hardly believed it. (Appalachian English; Wolfram and Christian 1976) b. Didn't anybody seem to understand... (Alabama English; Feagin 1979) 21) a. Won't none of the students go to the party. (West Texas English; Foreman 1999) b. Didn't any of them answer the question. (West Texas English; William Salmon personal correspondence) Click here to see the database filtered for well-formed examples exhibiting negative inversion without negative concord in varieties other than African American English. Click here to see the data aggregated by the properties of negative inversion and negative concord for well-formed examples in varieties other than African American English. Two kinds of negative inversion? In the literature on African American English, negative inversion constructions are distinguished from existential negative inversion in which the auxiliary is the copula be (henceforth existential be). The two constructions look superficially similar, as a negated copula occurs clause-initially and is followed by an indefinite subject. Some examples of existential be constructions are given in (22): 22) a. Wasn't nobody home. (African American English; Labov et al. 1968) b. Ain't no farmer made money this year. (African American English; Martin 1993) It can be difficult to tell the two constructions apart because ain't can have several meanings. It can be the negative copula be+n't, but it can also be the negative perfect auxiliary corresponding to have+n't in Standard English or the negative past tense auxiliary do+n't. As evidence for there being two types of negative inversion, Labov (1972) points out that a sentence can be ambiguous between the two interpretations. The sentence in (23a) can be interpreted as an existential construction with an expletive followed by a subject relative clause, as in (23b), or as a negative inversion construction whose counterpart is in (23c): 23) a. Ain't nobody know about no club. (African American English; Labov 1972) b. (It) ain't nobody (that) know about no club. (African American English; Labov 1972) c. Nobody ain't know about no club. (African American English; Labov 1972) Additionally, while negative inversion constructions always have a well-formed non-inverted counterpart (as shown in (11) and (12)), this is not the case for existential be constructions. Existential be constructions are given in the (a) examples below, and their ungrammatical, non-inverted counterparts are given in the (b) examples below: 24) a. Ain't no trouble to make another trip. (African American English; Martin 1993) b. *No trouble ain't to make another trip. (African American English; Martin 1993) 25) a. Ain't nothin' you can do about it. (African American English; Labov 1972) b. *Nothin' ain't (that) you can do about it. (African American English; Labov 1972) Furthermore, negative inversion constructions are incompatible with expletives in African American English, as shown in (16), while expletives can always occur in existential be constructions. Existential be constructions are given in (26a) and (27a), and their minimally different counterparts in (26b) and (27b) contain the expletive it: 26) a. Ain't no trouble to make another trip. (African American English; Martin 1993) b. It ain't no trouble to make another trip. (African American English; Martin 1993) 27) a. Ain't nothin' you can do about it. (African American English; Labov 1972) b. It ain't nothin' you can do about it. (African American English; Labov 1972) Green (2001) suggests that existential be constructions without the expletive are not restricted to negative sentences, which is another difference from examples of negative inversion. An example of a non-negative existential be construction is given in (28a) while its minimally different counterpart containing an expletive is given in (28b): 28) a. Should be some candy in the dish. (African American English; Green 2001) b. It should be some candy in the dish. (African American English; Green 2001) Finally, Foreman (1999) points out that the tag questions of existential be constructions target an expletive, as in (29): 29) Ain't no black Santa Claus, is there? (West Texas English; Foreman 1999) This fact contrasts with the tag questions of negative inversion constructions, which target the subject following the auxiliary, as given in (8)-(10). Semantic properties The semantic difference between a sentence exhibiting negative inversion and its non-inverted counterpart has been characterized in several different ways in the literature. First, the constructions exhibiting negative inversion are believed to be more emphatic than their non-inverted counterparts, per Labov et al. (1968) and Green (2002, 2011a, 2011b). Foreman (1999) notes that non-inverted sentences can have an interpretation that is not available in sentences with negative inversion. This is shown by the following pair of examples: 28) a. Many people don't like you, but many do like you, too. (Foreman 1999:21) b. *Don't many people like you, but many do like you too. (Foreman 1999:21) The non-inverted sentence can be interpreted as "There are many people who don't like you," while the sentence with negative inversion can only be interpreted as "Not many people like you." White-Sustaita (2010) suggests that clauses exhibiting negative inversion are associated with an existential interpretation. By contrast, non-inverted constructions are associated with a generic interpretation. Recent Survey Results The following map shows the results from a recent survey, with 361 participants. The red pins show people who accepted the sentence "He won't go, and can't nobody make him." The white pins show people who rejected that sentence. The background colors are based on the dialect regions from the Atlas of North American English. The colors show the average judgment in each of those regions. This map shows that negative inversion is widely accepted, but more so in the South than anywhere else. Negative inversion in popular culture Negative inversion has appeared in movies and music since at least the 1990s. In J.K. Rowling's (1997) Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone, the character Hagrid says "Can't nothing interfere with a broomstick except powerful Dark magic." The line "Well, I've heard it said, won't nothing bring you down like your hometown." But won't nothing bring you up like getting down" appears in the song "Beaumont Rest Stop" by Red Molly (2008). The title of the Kelly Rowland song "Can't Nobody" also includes an example of negative inversion. The construction has also been used by notable football players Cris Carter and James Harrison. Carter, a ESPN NFL analyst and NFL Hall of Fame receiver, said of his recovery from alcoholism, "When I quit drinking everybody's buying. When I was drinking, wasn't NOBODY buying." on the Mike & Mike show (Oct. 7th, 2014). Harrison tweeted "If I cant play then cant nobody play... Lights out!" on December 19, 2011. Page contributed by Sabina Matyiku on June 11, 2011 Updates/revisions: August 22, 2015 (Tom McCoy); June 20, 2018 (Katie Martin) Please cite this page as: Matyiku, Sabina. 2011. Negative inversion. Yale Grammatical Diversity Project: English in North America. (Available online at . Accessed on YYYY-MM-DD). Updated by Tom McCoy (2015) and Katie Martin (2018). References

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