

THE TENSE CARRIER IN NEGATIVE SENTENCES AND TAG-QUESTIONS

by Yao Shen

The importance of identifying the tense carrier and its positional relation to the subject of the sentence in simple affirmative statements and simple affirmative yes-no questions has been pointed out in a previous article (*The TESL Reporter*, Vol. 7, No. 1, Fall, 1973). This article demonstrates the significance of identifying the tense carrier in the formation of simple negative statements, simple negative yes-no questions, and tag-questions.

In simple predicates, expanded or unexpanded, the tense carrier (T) occurs only once. In an affirmative statement, it occurs after the subject (S) of the sentence: S+T. In a negative statement, this arrangement is observed. The addition is the negative function word which occurs after the tense carrier. This negative function word may be in the free form, *not*, or in the bound form, *n't*. In the case of *n't*, it is bound to the tense carrier. Such linguistic behavior may be seen in the following examples of negative statements.

S	+	T	
Henry		didn't	come
Carol		hasn't	been cooking
Juliet		wasn't	being told
The car		couldn't	have been fixed

S	+	T	
Henry		did	not come
Carol		has	not been cooking
Juliet		was	not being told
The car		could	not have been fixed

In simple affirmative yes-no questions, the tense carrier occurs before the subject of the sentence: T+S. In simple negative yes-no questions, this arrangement is observed. The

addition is one where the bound form, *n't*, together with the tense carrier, precedes the subject.

T	+	S	
Doesn't		Henry	come
Hasn't		Carol	been cooking
Wasn't		Juliet	being told
Couldn't		the car	have been fixed

The free form, *not*, continues to occur after the tense carrier. However, in relation

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to the subject of the sentence which follows the tense carrier, *not* may precede or follow the subject.

T	+	S	
Does not		Henry	come
Has not		Carol	been cooking
Was not		Juliet	being told
Could not		the car	have been fixed

T	+	S	
Does		Henry not	come
Has		Carol not	been cooking
Was		Juliet not	being told
Could		the car not	have been fixed

Two arrangements of tag-questions are most frequently referred to.

1. *Negative statement followed by affirmative question.* In the negative statement, the positional relation of the free form, *not*, and the bound form, *n't*, to the tense carrier, and their relation to the subject of the sentence remain the same as described. In the tag (yes-no) question, the positional relation of the tense carrier to the subject of the sentence also remains the same as described.

S	+	T		T	+	S
Henry		does	not come	does		he
Carol		has	not been cooking	has		she
Juliet		was	not being told	was		she
The car		could	not have been fixed	could		it
S	+	T		T	+	S
Henry		doesn't	come	does		he
Carol		hasn't	been cooking	has		she
Juliet		wasn't	being told	was		she
The car		couldn't	have been fixed	could		it

2. *Affirmative statement followed by negative question.* In the affirmative statement, the positional relation between the tense carrier and the subject of sentence remains the same as described. In the negative tag (yes-no) question, the positional relation of the bound form, *n't*, to the tense carrier, and their relation to the subject of the sentence remain the same as described.

S	+	T		T	+	S
Henry		comes		doesn't		he
Carol		has	been cooking	hasn't		she
Juliet		was	being told	wasn't		she
The car		could	have been fixed	couldn't		it

The free form, *not*, in the negative tag (yes-no) question frequently occurs after the subject rather than before it.

S	+	T		T	+	S
Henry		comes		does		he not
Carol		has	been cooking	has		she not
Juliet		was	being told	was		she not
The car		could	have been fixed	could		it not

The occurrence of *not* before the subject, nevertheless, is not wrong.

S	+	T		T	+	S
Henry		comes		does not		he
Carol		has	been cooking	has not		she
Juliet		was	being told	was not		she
The car		could	have been fixed	could not		it

The tense carrier in relation to the subject in the statement and the tense carrier in relation to the subject in the tag-question may be represented by S + T; T + S is affirmative; if S + T is affirmative, T + S is negative.

Statement	Tag-question
S + T (negative)	T + S (affirmative)
S + T (affirmative)	T + S (negative)

The bases remain in the distinction between S + T for statements and T + S for yes-no

questions.

Statement

S + T

Question

T + S

It seems that a knowledge of the tense carrier in simple predicates is essential to teachers and students of English as a second language. The significance of the tense carrier in the formation of simple affirmative statements and simple affirmative yes-no questions has been pointed out in a previous article. This one further demonstrates its importance in the formation of simple negative statements, simple negative yes-no questions, and two kinds of tag-questions.

Note:

"The Tense Carrier in Two Kinds of Wh-Sentences" will appear in a following issue of this journal.

References:

Yao Shen, "Supplementation of Opposites in Simple Predicate Expansion," *TESL Reporter*. Vol. 4, Nos. 1-4 (Fall, 1970-Summer, 1971).

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