SECTION 2

Inversion after negative adverbs

(For inversion in conditionals after *should, had,* etc. see Unit 5, Sections 3.4 and 4.1. For inversion in result clauses after *such, so,* see Unit 6, Section 2.1.)

1 WHAT IS INVERSION?

When we begin a sentence with a negative adverb or adverbial phrase, we sometimes have to change the usual word order of subject and verb (often using an auxiliary verb such as *do*):

***I had never** seen so many people in one room.*
(= normal word order)
***Never had I** seen so many people in one room.*
(= inversion)

✗ ~~*Not only **he was good looking**, he was also very intelligent.*~~

✓ *Not only **was he** good looking, he was also very intelligent.*

2 WHEN WE USE INVERSION

We use inversion when we move a negative adverb (*never, nowhere, not only,* etc.) to the beginning of a sentence. We do this because we want to emphasise the meaning of the adverb.

Time relationships

- We use inversion after 'negative' adverbs which emphasise a time relationship at the beginning of a sentence:
  *No sooner **had I** put the phone down **than** it rang again.*
  ***Hardly / Scarcely / Barely had I** got my breath back **when** it was time to go again.*
- We use inversion after phrases that use *not*:
  ***Not until** he apologises **will I** speak to him again.*
  ***Not since** I was little **have I** had so much fun.*
  ***Not for one minute do I** imagine they'll come back.*
- We use inversion after some time phrases that use *only*:
  ***Only after** several weeks **did she** begin to recover.*
  ***Only later did she** realise what had happened.*
  ***Only then did he** remember he hadn't got his keys.*
  ***Only when** I've finished this **will I** be able to think about anything else.*
  ***Only in the last few days has the truth** started to emerge.*

watch out!

After *not until, only when* and *only after*, the inversion is in the main part of the sentence:

✗ ~~*Not until **did I see him** I remembered we had met before.*~~

✓ *Not until **I saw him did I remember** we had met before.*

Frequency

We also use inversion after 'negative' adverbs which emphasise frequency at the beginning of a sentence:

***Never have** I been so taken aback.* ***Rarely do they** fail to get away for a holiday.* ***Seldom is that pop group** out of the news.* ***Hardly ever did he** wear a suit.*

- We can also use inversion after 'negative' adverbs at the beginning of a sentence to emphasise how infrequently things happen:
  ***Little did she** realise what was about to happen.*
  ***Nowhere was a replacement** to be found.*

General emphasis

We often use inversion for general emphasis with phrases that use *only*:

***Only by** patience and hard work **will we** find a solution.*
***Only in this way do we** stand any chance of success.*

- we can also use it with phrases that use *no*:
  ***In no way should this** be regarded as an end of the matter.*
  ***On no account are you** to repeat this to anyone.*
  ***Under no circumstances can we** accept the offer.*

3 NOT USING INVERSION

We use inversion when the adverb modifies the verb, and not when it modifies the noun:

***Rarely seen** during the day, the badger is a famously shy animal.* (= inversion)
***Hardly anyone** knows about it.* (= no inversion)

? check

Tick (✓) the sentences which do not contain inversion.

1 Nowhere have I seen anything like this.
2 Never give up until you have tried all the alternatives.
3 Only by paying the fees in full can we guarantee a place on the course.
4 Hardly anyone applied for the job.
5 Not since the 1940s has there been such poverty.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

Practice

1 Underline all the phrases (a–i) that can start sentence 1 below.

a Rarely if ever
b Not only
c Only if it's convenient
d Hardly anyone expects that
e Under no circumstances
f Under such circumstances
g Only by asking her directly
h There's no way
i Unless something unusual happens,

1 … she will come.

Underline all the phrases (a–i) that can start sentence 2 below.

a Little did anyone notice
b Only if he wasn't available
c Barely had I sat down when
d On no occasion I recall
e Only when it was convenient
f Not until we were all ready
g Never did she knock before
h Only then
i It was then that

2 … did she come in.

2 Match the first (1–10) and second (a–j) parts.

Examples: 1 + *j* 2 + *i*

Inconsistent advice about a new husband!

(1 On no account should)
(2 Not only should he be allowed to give his opinions,)
3 Under no circumstances is he to
4 Only by constantly nagging will he be
5 Only after weeks of rigorous training will he
6 Rarely will a man respond to a request the first time unless
7 No way should his laundry be done for him unless
8 Only very rarely should a garment be ironed for him
9 In exceptional circumstances
10 But, only if he seems really desperate

a learn how to switch on the vacuum cleaner.
b should you try to solve his problems for him.
c without the assurance that next time he will do it himself.
d you may take what he says seriously.
e it is in his own interests to do so.
f he is prepared to lend a hand with the washing up.
g be disturbed while watching a football match on television.
h persuaded to pick his clothes up off the floor.
(i he should also be deluded into thinking you agree with him.)
(j you let him realise he isn't the boss.)

3 Fill the two gaps in each sentence with an appropriate word or phrase. Do not use more than 6 words to fill each gap.

Example: In the 1990s, no sooner *had one* economic crisis been *overcome than* another came along.

1 Never ..... anything so beautiful ..... of my life.
2 Not ..... primary school ..... I seen such juvenile writing as this.
3 Little ..... he imagine that one day ..... in this position.
4 Not till I pointed ..... his job depended on them ..... agree to the changes.
5 Only by ..... lock could he have ..... into the house.
6 Only when ..... some months ..... really feel at home here.

4 Fill each blank with a suitable word. CPE/CAE

Memo to teaching staff

We have a problem. Rarely (1) ..... we had a student population like this one. (2) ..... since the 1980s can I remember so many troublesome students in our school at any one time. Not only (3) ..... some of them treat the staff with absolute scorn, (4) ..... they are also clearly (5) ..... on causing as much trouble as possible among their peers.
No (6) ..... has one broken window been repaired (7) ..... another is mindlessly smashed. (8) ..... has our handyman painted over one piece of graffiti (9) ..... another appears. On (10) ..... account can such behaviour be (11) ..... to continue. And not for one (12) ..... should the ringleaders think they will not be punished. Only (13) ..... such punishment is carried out will confidence return to the student body and (14) ..... then will school life return to some kind of normality. Under no (15) ..... will we allow the present state of affairs to continue.

LIVEWORKSHEETS