

Chapter 7 Lending a Helping hand: The auxiliary verb

Additional information and practice

Supplemental Negation and the Use of Ain't (not included in the text)

Consider the two columns with negated sentences. What do you notice about the third column?

Positive sentence	Negated sentence version 1	Negated sentence version 2
I <i>am</i> reading. You <i>are</i> reading. She/he/it <i>is</i> reading. They <i>are</i> reading.	I'm <i>not</i> reading. You're <i>not</i> reading. She's/He's/It's <i>not</i> reading. They're <i>not</i> reading.	You <i>aren't</i> reading. She/he/it <i>isn't</i> reading. They <i>aren't</i> reading.
We <i>are</i> reading. You <i>are</i> reading. They <i>are</i> reading.	We're <i>not</i> reading. You're <i>not</i> reading. They're <i>not</i> reading.	We <i>aren't</i> reading. You <i>aren't</i> reading. They <i>aren't</i> reading.

Chart 1: Paradigm for negation

In Chart 1, you can see a straightforward pattern. In the middle column, the auxiliary contracts with the subject pronoun and the word *not* is spelled out. In the right column, the auxiliary contracts with *not* and *not* gets contracted to *n't*. Of course, there's a glaring gap! For *I* in the third column, we don't have a contraction.

We could apply the pattern that holds for the rest of the paradigm, which is “add *n't* to the auxiliary verb,” which would give us: *I amn't reading*. Yet, this form—*amn't*—doesn't exist in English. Well, not exactly. We could add *I ain't reading* in that first line in our chart. That form clearly does exist! And it seems to be pretty similar to *I amn't reading*. Here's a fun fact: *I amn't* did exist at some point. Through some sound changes, the *m* and *n* assimilated (that is, they merged into one sound: *n*). This means that *I amn't* turned into *I an't* (again, the *m* and *n* morphed, which is why the *m* is lost in *I an't*). Now, say *I an't* twenty times really, really fast. What do you end up with? Something closer to *I ain't*? If so, you've just illustrated a sound

change, one that took a long, long time in the English language, but that is how we ended up with *ain't*.¹

Ain't can replace combinations of *be+not* (this one comes from *amn't*). *Ain't* can also replace combinations of *have+not*, with this usage being derived from *hain't*, which dropped the initial *h* at some point in time. All of this is to say that if we accepted *I ain't* as a valid form, we could close that glaring gap in the right upper corner in chart 2 above!

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More practice from Exercise 1

Identify the auxiliary verb(s) and main verb in each verb phrase below.

- a) They *were saying* that they had a lot of problems at Garner because it was a lot of fights and stuff.³ (ChE)
- b) We *been married* almost twenty-six years.⁴ (AAE)

More practice from Exercise 3

For each sentence identify each component of the {VP} as a central modal auxiliary, a marginal modal auxiliary, a primary auxiliary, and a main verb. Provide evidence for your claims.

Example: We should have called the veterinarian. (sE)

- *should*: central modal; first slot in VP; next verb is in bare form;
- *have*: primary auxiliary; next verb is the past participle form
- *called*: main verb; last verb in VP; this is what the sentence is about (it is about “calling,” not “having” or “should-ing”)

- a) The group of friends had been meeting regularly at the park on Sundays. (sE)

¹ Reaser, J., C. T. Adger, W. Wolfram, and D. Christian (2017), *Dialects at School: Education Linguistically Diverse Students*. New York: Routledge.

² Reaser, J., C. T. Adger, W. Wolfram, and D. Christian (2017), *Dialects at School: Education Linguistically Diverse Students*. New York: Routledge.

³ Bayley, R. (2012). “Chicano English,” In B. Kortmann, and K. Lunkenheimer, (eds), *The Mouton World Atlas of Variation in English*, 156-165, Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, p. 162.

⁴ Kendall, T., M. Quartey, C. Farrington, J. McLarty, S. Arnson, and B. Josler, B. (2018). *The Corpus of Regional African American Language: DCB (Washington DC 2016)*. Version 2018.10.06. Eugene, OR: The Online Resources for African American Language Project. <http://oraal.uoregon.edu/coraal>. Transcript ID DCB_se2_ag4_m_01_1.

- b) I've written up the document, but before it goes out, it needs checked by Kim, Alex, and Sandy.⁵ (ME)
- c) The apple that the witch had gave Snow White.⁶ (ChE)
- d) I Ø been doing dancing for a long time, for eight years already.⁷ (ChE)
- e) I was afraid you might couldn't find it.⁸ (SAE)

⁵ Whitman, 2010; cited in Maher, Z., and J. Wood (2011), 'Needs Washed', *Yale Grammatical Diversity Project: English in North America*, (Available online at <http://ygdp.yale.edu/phenomena/needs-washed>. Accessed on 2023-04-14). Updated by Tom McCoy (2015) and Katie Martin (2018).

⁶ Bayley, R. (2012). "Chicano English," In B. Kortmann, and K. Lunkenheimer, (eds), *The Mouton World Atlas of Variation in English*, 156-165, Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, p. 163.

⁷ Ibid., p. 160.

⁸ Di Paolo, 1989, cited in Huang, N. (2011). 'Multiple Modals', *Yale Grammatical Diversity Project: English in North America*. (Available online at <http://ygdp.yale.edu/phenomena/multiple-modals>. Accessed on 2024-02-23). Updated by Tom McCoy (2015) and Katie Martin (2018).