



Emphasis

This handout is about the way certain expressions are used in formal English to emphasise. For example, if you write an essay with the following in it

“Not only the pupils would be more motivated, they would also be more successful“

I would underline “Not only the pupils would be“ as the construction is not right.

So what are these expressions and how do they affect sentence structure.

Part 1 Bellastoria

“Once upon a time there lived in the country of Bellastoria a very famous king. Not only was he respected by his subjects but deeply loved, too. One day a stranger, a prince in disguise, arrived at the court. Hardly had the prince arrived than he fell in love with the princess. Never had he seen such beauty. Little did the princess guess the true identity of this handsome young man. In vain did the king try to stop his daughter from returning the sentiments of the young stranger. Seldom had he been faced with such a difficult problem. Not a word did the young man utter about his true position; on no occasion did he reveal by word or arrogant deed that he in fact possessed enormous wealth. So gentle and meek was his behaviour, however, that everyone grew to love him. On no account would they permit him to leave their court. Only when he asked for the princess’s hand in marriage did the problem of nobility come to the surface“

Normal English word order is Subject then Verb. In most of the sentences in the text above this is not the case. An example in the second sentence: “..... was he”.

Take your highlighting pens and mark all the examples of this unusual order.

Can you work out the rule for this?

Can you make a list of the expressions which trigger this when used at the beginning of the sentence?

- Not only
- etc

Part 2 Task

Try rewriting the following sentences in more formal style by putting the words in brackets at the beginning of the sentence and making the changes necessary.

1. She had never seen such a magnificent sight. (never)
2. She not only planned brilliant projects but also carried them out. (not only)
3. The Prime Minister would not do such a thing under any circumstances. (under no circumstances)
4. She didn't see a soul. (not a)
5. She had scarcely finished her speech when thunderous applause broke out. (scarcely)
6. Her manner was so absurd that nobody took her seriously. (so)

Part 3 Notes

Putting words like “never“ and “not a“ and “scarcely“ at the beginning of a sentence emphasises them, intensifies the meaning. This upsets the usual English word order in the sentence. The subject and verb appear in the question form. Note that it doesn't say “Little the princess guessed“, which would be simple inversion, but “Little did the princess guess.“

This way of expressing emphasis is used only in formal style. It is not the kind of English you would use when talking to someone or writing informally.

Example:

The last sentence in the text is

“Only when he asked for the princess's hand in marriage did the problem of nobility come to the surface

If you are writing more informally you could emphasise the “only“ like this:

“It was only when he asked for the princess's hand in marriage that the problem of nobility came to the surface

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