

Acquisition of Sentential Negation in English and Japanese

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This paper deals with the acquisition of sentential negation in English and Japanese. We discuss whether the sentence initial negation, as in (1), is an instance of internal negation or external negation. The examples in (1: SVO) & (2: SOV) are explained as:

(A) Internal negation (InNeg): Neg +VP internal subject (VPIS) (Déprez & Pierce 1993).

(B) External negation (ExNeg): Neg will be internalized later (immaturity). (Bellugi 1967, Bloom 1970 (1990), Wode 1977, Van Valin 1991, Sano 1998, etc.).

This paper argues that: VPIS in InNeg cannot be supported in the child data; and ExNeg may be well explained under the C-T inheritance (Chomsky 2008, etc.). Based on the data in CHILDES (MacWhinney 2000) we list the emergence of sentential negation and related constituents in Japanese (Miyata 1992, etc.) in (3); and those in English (Brown 1973), in (4).

First, we assume that the subject position in the child language is in Spec of TP: the nominative case *-ga* emerges early in Japanese, whereas subject precedes *do*-support in English. These can be counterexamples against VPIS in (A).

In terms of the “function” of the external negation, we assume that they are sentential negations. Van Valin (1991) & Sigisaki (2014a, b) assume that the sentence initial *no* has the illocutionary force, or is a (metalinguistic) exclamative negation (cf. Drozd 1995). English children distinguish three meanings of *no* (Bloom 1970 (1990)) whereas Japanese children use three different words (or also holophrases), as shown in (3). As we can see in (1), Adam negates the proposition of his mother’s utterance, but if Drozd (1995) is on the right track, it should be [metalinguistic *no*+ positive proposition]. Then Japanese children might combine [a negative word + a positive proposition], however, we haven’t found any. Hence we assume that as long as *no* in child language negates the following proposition, it IS the sentential negation.

The occurrence of external negation is rare, however, it has been reported in: English (Van Valin 1991, etc.); German (Wode 1977); Turkish (Aksu-Koç & Slobin 1985); Polish (Smoczyńska 1985); and Japanese (Sano 1998). Therefore, the examples in (1) & (2) are not unique.

Finally, we will discuss the order of acquisition. The sentential negation and tense are adjacent in Japanese & English. The order is: the past tense morpheme emerges prior to the sentential negation. The mastering order is the same: according to Atake & Ito (2013) mastering *-ta* is at 2;0-2;5 period, and *V-nai*, at 2;06-2;08 period. Put differently, the negation can be in the external position when T is not ready.

As a theoretical consequence, we argue that since the sentential negation is not derived from Merge (cf. Berwick & Chomsky 2011), it should be explained as part of the C-T inheritance: negation may be generated in C first, later in T. The acquisition of the negation may exhibit the maturation process of C and T.

Data

(1) Mother: did you see the truck?

Adam: no I see truck. (Adam at 2;3.04. Brown 1973)

(2) nor-u nai. (adult form: nor-a nai)
ride(-past) not (ride-irrealis not)

‘(it) does not ride.’ (Manabu, 2;6. Sano 1998)

(3) **Japanese data** (MacWhinney 2000, Miyata 1992, 1993, 1995, 2001, Fujimoto 2008)

Independent negative words: *nai* (nonsexist); *iya* (rejection); *dame* (prohibition).

Children’s name	Aki (1;5.07~)	Ryo (1;4.03~)	Tai (1;5.20~)
Independent negations	nai (2;2.12)	nai (1;4.03) dame (1;8.17) iya (1;9.15)	nai (1;5.20) iya (1;5.20)
-ta (perfect/past)	at-ta (2;1.12)	at-ta (1;10.26)	at-ta/owat-ta (1;5.20)
V-nai (neg)	ko-nai naa (2;6.22)	aka-nai-ne (2;0.04)	deki-nai (1;5.27)
Neg errors (non-past+neg)	kik-u nai (2;5.20) korerer-u nai (2;7.26)	mom-u nai (2;01. 18)	
Particles	-ga (2;0.19) -wa (2;3.18)	-ga (1;11.18) -wa (2;0.04)	-wa (1;05.20) -ga (1;05.27)

(4) **English data** (MacWhinney 2000, Brown 1973)

	Adam (2;3.04~)	Eve (1;6~)	Sarah (2;3.05~)
Past form	got (2;3.04)	broke/did (1;6)	broke (2;3.05)
Sentential negations	no I see truck (2;3.04) no the sun shining (2;4.03) I don’t want to sit seat (2;6.03)	man no taste it (1;6) briefcase dan (doesn’t work (1;9)	I don’t know (2;3.05)
Agreement	anything goes (2;6.03)	as she plays with fingernail tryin(g) fix my fingernail (1;10)	he laughs xxx (2;6.04)
Agreement /Sentential negation errors	What did you did (2;6.03)		she don’t wets/ it doesn’t broke. (3;7.09) did you saw him before? (4;11.04) someone didn’t did it. (4;11.13) did you went to (.) nursery+school ? (5;0.16)