

Introduction:

An attempt is made in this study to obtain information about the stages that Saudi children go through when they acquire negation from the age of one to three. To obtain this goal, data from three normal monolingual Saudi children were collected. Two aspects of negation were studied in detail:

(1) **The syntactic development of negation.** The emergence of all negators in the three children's speech was investigated in order to present an overall picture of the syntactic development of negation

(2) **The relationships between forms and functions of children's negation.** In order to understand this relation, all utterances containing negatives from the three subjects' speech samples were coded for six semantic functions of negation: rejection, disappearance/non-existence, denial, inability, and epistemic negation.

Saudi negation:

A) *Anaphoric negator:*

* /laʔ/ is the general negator (e.g. /tʔya ʔali:b/ Do you want milk? /laʔ/ No).

B) *Non-Anaphoric negator:*

(1) **Verbal negation:**

* /ma/ negates perfective and imperfective verbs (e.g. /ma ʔbya ʔali:b/ I don't want milk).

* /la/ negates imperative verbs (e.g. /la tiʔrab ʔali:b/ don't drink milk).

* /ma-/ can also be prefixed to personal pronouns to form a negative copula /ma-pronoun/ (e.g. /ma-ʔib sara/ She is not Sara.

(2) **Non-Verbal negation:**

* /mu/ negates non-verbal predicates such as noun, adjective, adverb, preposition, and participle (e.g. /mu ʔilwa/ she is not pretty.

Methodology:

A) *Subjects and Study Periods:*

Children were videotaped in order to aid the analysis. The video-recording lasted approximately half an hour in each session. Sessions were held regularly once per month. The following table shows the total period and number of sessions of each subject:

Name	Age range	Total period	Number of sessions
1- Sara	1;1-1;8	8 months	8
2- Waleed	1;9-2;1	5 months	5
3- Leen	2;8-2;9	2 months	2

B) *Methods of Collecting Data:*

(1) **Spontaneous Production Method.**

(2) **Elicited Procedure Method (EPM).**

The EPM used in this study is an experimental technique designed by the researcher to elicit children's negation in the broader context of games (e.g. hiding toys, doing a jigsaw puzzle, playing with a puppet, etc.) and in joint picture-book-reading with the mother. EPM was required as a complementary source of data, why?

- It is a matter of chance in the spontaneous procedure method whether children come up with relevant utterances in the period of observation; EPM is used to enable the researcher to overcome this problem.

- EPM enables the researcher to collect samples of the targeted structure(s) within a single session, which helps to draw solid conclusions about child's negation at a particular time.
- EPM also enables the researcher to control the meaning that associated with the targeted utterance which eliminates many of the difficulties that arise in attempting to interpret a child's intended meaning.

C) Criteria for the Emergence of New Form and New Function:

- (1) **New Negative Form:** A new negative form was considered to have emerged when it was used in two or more different interactional events during one session or in two consecutive sessions.
- (2) **New Negative Function:** Similarly a new negative function was considered to have emerged when the new form was used in two or more different interactional events during one session or in two consecutive sessions.

Results:

The findings seem to show that the subjects go through a clear developmental sequence in the acquisition of forms and functions.

(1) **In terms of forms**, the emergence of negators follows the sequence of /laʔ/ first, the verbal particle /ma/ second, the imperative /la/ third, the copula and the non-verbal particle /mu/ last.

(2) **In terms of functions**, the functions of rejection, prohibition and disappearance/non-existence appeared in the earlier stages followed by denial, whereas the functions of inability and epistemic negation emerged during later stages.

(3) **In terms of the relationship between functions and forms**, the analysis indicates that the emergence of a form to express particular functions was affected by the stage of development in which the function emerged. The early emerging functions were first to be expressed by more complex syntax (i.e. multiword negation), whereas functions that emerged later in the development were expressed by the complex form later in the development.



**Graduate Symposium on
Languages and Translation:
Ambition and Challenges**

20-22/12/2010

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF
NEGATION IN EARLY
CHILDHOOD:**

A STUDY IN SAUDI DIALECT



Done by:

Bedoor AL-Abdul Mohsen

b.mohsen@hotmail.com