



Graduate Symposium on Languages and Translation: Ambition and Challenges

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEGATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD:

A STUDY IN SAUDI DIALECT

Introduction:

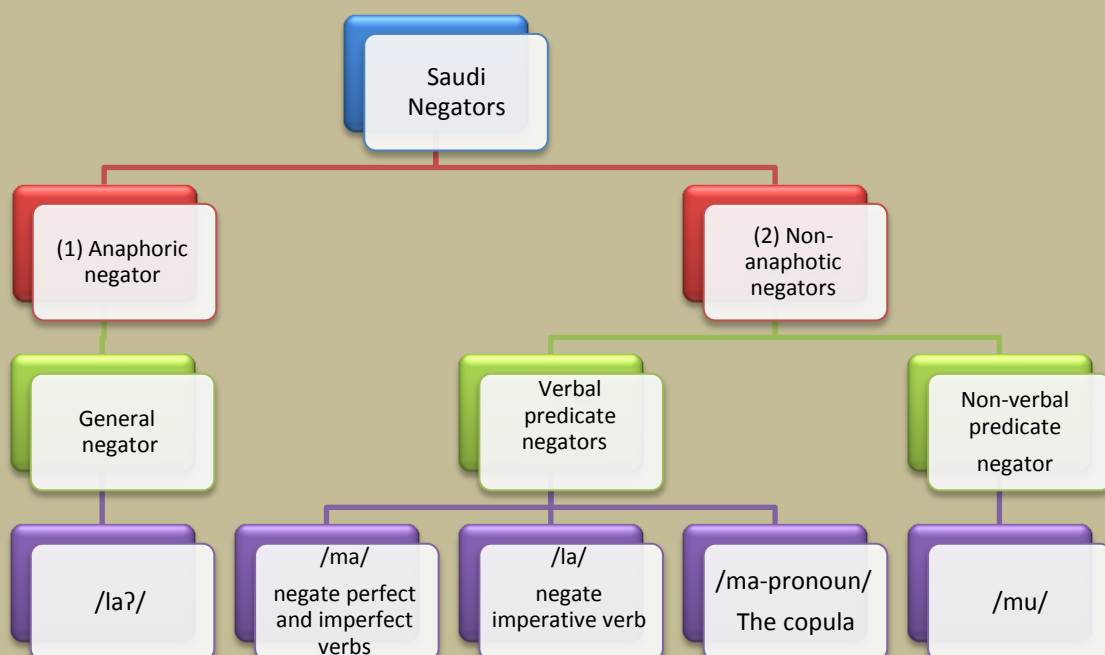
In this study an attempt is made to obtain information about the stages that Saudi children go through when they acquire negation from the age of one to three. To obtain this goal, data from three normal monolingual Saudi children were collected. Two aspects of negation were studied in detail:

(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.

Negation in Saudi dialect:

A) The Syntax of Saudi Negation:



(B) *The Semantic of Saudi Negation:*

A child learning negation in any language must learn both the semantic functions associated with negation and the syntactic structures used to convey those functions. Therefore, to have a better understanding of negation in Saudi child, semantic functions of Saudi negation should be considered. This study has only considered six semantic functions of negation which are relevant to early stages of language acquisition and have been investigated in previous studies in child language.

(1) **Non-existence:**

ma fi kurah

NEG in ball

There is no ball.

(2) **Rejection:**

ma ʔbya ḥali:b

NEG want milk

I don't want milk.

(3) **Prohibition:**

la tiḡrab ḥali:b

NEG Imperative-drink milk

Don't drink milk.

(4) **Denial:**

ma ʔkalat

NEG Perfect-eat

She didn't eat.

(5) **Inability:**

ma ʔgdər ʔḡlah

NEG Imperfect-can carry

I cannot carry it.

(6) **Epistemic negation:**

ma ʕarif wi:n il-ḥali:b

NEG Imperfect-know where the-milk

I don't know where is the milk.

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) Method of Collecting Data:

(1) Spontaneous Production Method:

The mothers were instructed in each session to interact with their child as they would normally do in the absence of the researcher.

(2) Elicited Procedure Method (EPM):

The children's mothers were also asked to participate in an elicitation procedure. 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 the new form 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:

Based on the criteria used in this study, seven stages of acquisition of negation seem to emerge. These seven stages are based on three children representing different ages; therefore, none of the three subjects have been seen going through all the seven stages. This study is only assuming that these age differences represent stages that one might go through when s/he acquiring Saudi negation. Therefore, the seven stages in this study are in terms of progression of acquisition, and not in terms of ages. These stages are shown in table (1).

Conclusion:

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) The analysis also 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.

Table (1) seven stages of acquisition of negation:

	Rejection	Prohibition	Disappearance /Nonexistence	Denial	Inability	Epistemic
Stage 1 Sara [1;1-1;2]	Combination of actions: Vocalization, Eye contact and gesture.	Combination of actions: vocalization, eye contact, and gesture				
Stage 2 Sara [1;3-1;4]	-/laʔ/ <i>No</i>	-/laʔ/ <i>No</i>	- /baħ/ <i>gone</i>			
Stage 3 Sara [1;5]	-/laʔ/ <i>No</i>	-/laʔ/ <i>No</i>	- /baħ/ <i>gone</i>	-/laʔ/ <i>No</i>		
Stage 4 Sara [1;7-1;8]	-/laʔ/ <i>No</i> -/ma abɣa/ <i>don't want</i>	-/laʔ/ <i>No</i>	- /baħ/ <i>gone</i>	-/laʔ/ <i>No</i>		
Stage 5 Sara [1;8] Waleed [1;9-1;10]	-/laʔ/ <i>No</i> -/ma abɣa/ <i>don't want</i>	-/laʔ/ <i>No</i>	- /raħ/ <i>gone</i> -/ma fi/ <i>Not in/exist</i>	-/laʔ/ <i>No</i>		
Stage 6 Waleed [1;11-2;1]	-/laʔ/ <i>No</i> -/ma abɣa/ <i>don't want</i>	-/laʔ/ <i>No</i> -[/la/+IMPV] <i>Don't+ V</i>	- /raħ/ <i>gone</i> -/ma fi/ <i>Not in/exist</i>	-/laʔ/ <i>No</i>	-[/ma/+V] modal verb is missing	
Stage 7 Leen [2;8-2;9]	-/laʔ/ <i>No</i> -/ma abɣa/ <i>don't want</i>	-/laʔ/ <i>No</i> -(/la/+IMPV) <i>Don't+ V</i>	-/ma fi/ <i>Not in/exist</i> - Copula	-/laʔ/ <i>No</i> - Copula -[/ma/+V] -[/mu/+non-V]	-/ma ʔgdər/ <i>can't</i>	-/ma ʔʁif/ -/ma ʔdri:/ <i>don't</i> <i>know</i>

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