

Performance of Negative Sentences with regard to Learners Proficiency Levels

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Abstract

One of the characteristics of each educational system which can have a great influence on learners' developmental process is teaching methodology. Teaching methodology embraces ecology and educational environment. The developmental and interactional nature of syntactic features with miscellaneous factors takes account for the complexity of the concept of syntax. The quality of learning is related to both teaching methodology and the objectives of the curriculum. The purpose of the study revolved around three aspects: pathology, recognizing criteria of negation sentences of EFL learners. In pathology part, factors such as quality of teaching, educational sources, teachers' expertise, measurement, and managing learners were attended and discussed. According to learners and teachers' viewpoint, managing learners, quality of teaching, educational output, expertise, personality, and educational policies were the main recognizing criteria. Finally, the underlying elements of L2 negation sentences are discussed in which an emphasis is put on research-based education, problem-solving ability, advocating competent learners and many similar factors. The findings of this study can be useful for teachers as well as the educational programmers to improve the quality of language teaching.

Keywords: teaching methodology, development, L2 structure, negative utterances, L1

1. Introduction

Although it has been endorsed that grammar is developed in stages and each stage conforms to specific rules and regularities (Fromkin & Rodman, 1993), little is known about syntactic systematicity. That is to claim that language acquisition takes place in a creative way. Learners create a general rule from the input they receive and they regularize it through different stages. According to Selinker's *interlanguage* (1972), the process of language learning is of transitional nature which has its own features. This dynamic system of learner language accounts for the variability in L2 learners' linguistic production which is in contrast with the linguistic system of native speakers. This interim grammar put emphasis on the phenomenon of *backsliding* through which it can be deduced that the linguistic features observed in learners' language, is not random or towards the speakers' language system (Selinker, 1974). The behaviorist paradigm advocates that learners' error were regarded as a sign of imperfection and any attempt was done to prevent learners from making errors. This view originated from the fact that language learning is a process of habit formation and if learners are allowed to make errors this will result in internalization of errors (Lightbown & Spada, 2003).

In fact, in the optimistic side of the issue, which is viewed from the perspective of interlanguage, errors are the window through which it is possible to investigate linguistic patterns characteristic of learners' developing interlanguage (Ellis, 1988). Interlanguages are then systematic languages which are constrained by the same principles which are characteristic of human languages. The nature of interlanguage is defined by three facts (Ortega, 2009). The first one is that the input learners receive from the environment is not able to account for the variability in learner language. The second fact advocates that errors committed by the learners are not for the sake of differences which exist between the two languages, namely L1 and interlanguage. The third "striking fact is that many interlanguage solutions are also attested in the production of children acquiring their first language" (Ortega, 2009, p. 83).

Generally, with emphasizing the developmental patterns of learners' language, the role of universal mechanism is highlighted which in turn provides support for the nativist paradigm. Therefore, many researchers conducted research to find out the developmental sequence of certain grammatical morphemes. For instance, Brown (1973) investigated native speakers and came to the realization that some grammatical morphemes are acquired in a predictable order. Studies

Table 1- Developmental stages for negation in L2 English (Stauble, 1978)

Stage	Patterns	Illustration
1	Pre-verbal negation with <i>no/not</i> <i>No/Not + verb</i>	No <u>saw</u> him. 'I didn't see him'
2	Pre-verbal negation with <i>don't</i> <i>Don't + verb</i>	I don't <u>saw</u> him. 'I didn't see him.'
3	Post verbal negation in restricted contexts ' <i>AUX + not/don't</i>	I <u>will</u> don't see you tomorrow. 'I will not see you tomorrow.'
4	Post verbal negation in all contexts	They <u>didn't</u> see nobody. 'They didn't see anybody.'

have also taken into consideration the developmental patterns of syntactic elements. The scope of these studies has been extended to second language acquisition as well (Butterworth, 1972; Milon, 1972; Ravem, 1968; Wode, 1978).

Crucially, with the advent of Sociolinguistic approaches to SLA and the introduction of the role of artifacts in enhancing learners' performance, educational tools came to forefront. With the widespread use of computers in almost every phase of life, individuals, and particularly younger adults, have come to this realization that life is impossible without computers. Some parents may complain that their children never open a book but when it comes to computer games it is difficult to get them off. The optimistic side of the problem is that it is possible to take advantage of this scenario. Playing a game can be playing with a language too. In this study we analyzed the discourse structures (both written and oral) of some computer games in order to find out what would be the quality of language presented in them. After analyzing the games, the findings revealed that the discourse of computer games enjoys some peculiarities and it is rich linguistically and pragmatically in that the games include (a) creative and appropriate use of language; (b) figurative sentences; (c) phonetic patterns of language; (d) different accents and registers; and (e) use of colloquial and prefabricated sentences which can be of great help for improving communicative competence. These advantages show that computer games are a rich source of input for EFL learners. Teachers can also benefit from games as a kind of homework which is easy to do and at the same time joyful. Finally, the implications of the study in foreign language classroom context are argued.

2. Systematicity in Interlanguage

Up to now, the first studies done on systematicity in interlanguage come back to 1970s. Larsen-Freeman (1976) investigated inflectional morphemes and ordered them according to frequency and saliency. Other studies which conducted after the initial classification advocated the accuracy of the classification and provided empirical

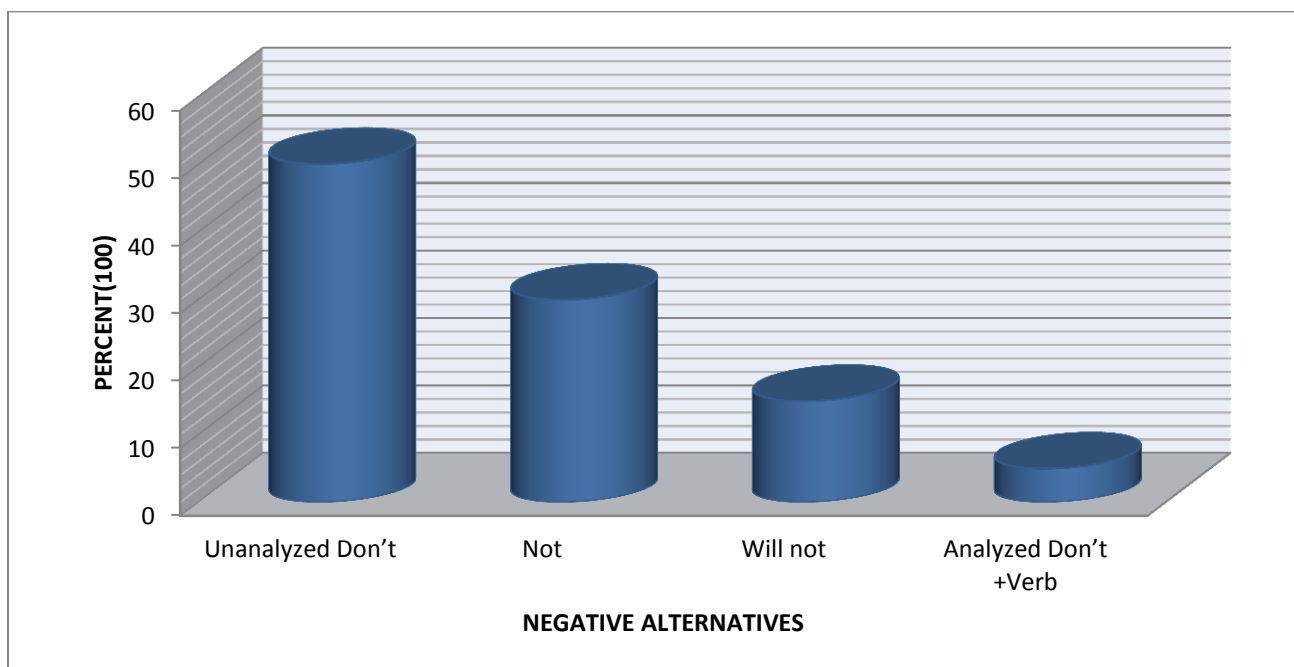
evidence about the order (Goldschneider and DeKeyser, 2001). As it is mentioned by Ellis (2006), the systematicity of interlanguage development reveals those properties of language input which are related to *frequency* and *saliency*.

There have been researches conducted on systematicity of a given function in L2 which is obtained through specific forms (Schumann, 1987). The concept of systematicity has been developed to consider syntax too. One of the areas which have been a topic of investigation in L2 is *negation*. Many studies are done to find out the stages of L2 English negation (Cancino, Rosansky, & Schumann, 1978; Stauble, 1978) and some researchers have also considered the negation in other languages. The four stages of L2 English negation are given in Table 1:

Regarding Table 1, it can be posited that "these negation stages reflect internal grammar representations that learners build and gradually revise as they are better able to approximate the target system" (Ortega, 2009, p. 88). As Table 1 manifests, stages are in a way that more accuracy is achieved as the learner develops. The new stages that the learners approximate are a sign of more convergence with the rules of the target language system. As Ortega (2009, p. 88) puts it, "pre-verbal negation is the first stage not only for L1 Spanish learners whose L1 is consistent with that solution (*no + verb*) but also for other L2 learners whose L1, just like English, only allows post-verbal negation." Therefore, it can be concluded that L1 linguistic system is going to have some effect on the development of stages. Languages such as Italian, Greek, Russian, and Spanish have pre-verbal negation as a grammatical norm. Thus, these speakers remain longer in the first pre-verbal stage than a Japanese speaker who has a post-verbal grammatical norm for negation (Schumann, 1979).

3. Research on negation sequences

Advocates of generative linguistics advocated that language is a universal phenomenon with fixed procedural function which is widely similar. As it is the case, negation structures have been the concern of most researchers to the date and many interesting findings



have been proposed by the research projects. Gass “firmly believe[s] that it is only through a multiplicity of approaches to IL studies that we will begin to fit the pieces of the IL puzzle together” (Davies, Criper, & Howatt, 1984). Evidence of beginning studies show that the interlanguage is similar from one person to the next and that variables are influenced by learner factors and learning environment.

Generally, most of these studies included only children as subjects; thus, lower stages in negation were observed more often than the higher stages that are closer to accurate L2 negated structures. The reason for using children as subjects was so as to compare L1 acquisition to L2 to see if the developmental sequences are the same.

Importantly, a number of studies ensued investigating the stages of development in negation and question formation for English as Second Language (ESL) learners. The informants for these studies had various L1s, and the majority of them were learning English naturalistically, i.e. “in naturally occurring social situations” (Ellis, 1988). With two exceptions, Felix’s (1981) study whose informants were English as Foreign Language (EFL) students in a classroom in Germany and the Ellis 1982 study (reported in Ellis, 1988) of three adolescent ESL students in London, the subjects of these studies were not receiving formal English training. The fact that most of the studies were done of naturalistic learners makes sense, given that many used the first language acquisition research for comparison purposes and that research is based on naturalistic learning. However, the nature of the linguistic input for naturalistic learners and instructed learners is quite different and might influence the acquisition process. This, together with the fact that the ‘applied focus’ of this research is language teaching (Ellis, 1994), seems to provide a reason for more research of

instructed learners to see if these sequences occur in their interlanguage.

4. Research Questions

Do we have a universal pattern for learning negation?
 What is the difference in the use of negation in learners’ comprehension and production?
 How is the difference between elementary and intermediate learners in the use of negation?

5. Methodology

Here we explain the process used to show the development of negation in the EFL learner of Persian in elementary and intermediate levels. First we begin with a description of the subjects of the study which consist of 15 high school students in elementary level and 16 university students in intermediate levels. Then we tried to perform a cross-sectional study in investigating the

developmental stages for negation in both writing and multiple-choice tests. Finally, we will spell out how we collected and analyzed the tests and its results which are the basis of the research.

6. Results and Discussions

6.1. Overview

In studying the developmental stages for negation we have seen in some books that negation has some stages and it raised a question for me that what are developmental stages for EFL learners of Persian. Based on Cancino, Rosansky, & Schumann, 1978; Stauble, 1978, developmental stages for EFL learners have four stages.

The four stages found for L2 English negation are summarized in Table1.

But it just was a starting point for me. Based on Table 1, Hyltenstam (1987) suggests the first stage may be related to the fact that, across languages of the world, pre-verbal negation is a more common grammar configuration than post verbal negation, but here we should know that mother language has significant effects on L2 learning negation. In Persian we see that we don't have pre-verbal negation because of the word order in Persian (SOV) we use negation mark just before the verb at the end of the sentence. in a test we prepared for students in elementary level we see that their answers differs significantly in production and comprehension tests.

Elementary Students using negatives

A multiple-choice consisting of 18 questions is the comprehension test for testing negatives. A first group is elementary students of high school. there is a surprising result for me and we concluded that about 50% of answers is DON'T ,but most of them are not corrected.30% of the students' answers is NO, and 20% answers WILL NOT .here the number of analyzed DON'T were used by student is about 5%. Fig. 1 shows the frequency of answers

Figure 1-The frequency percent of answers in multiple-choice test for elementary EFL learners of Persian.

In tests of writing we tried to have a good title for students and made them to use more from negative sentences. It is difficult to write some sentences for some of them, but 11 of the elementary students participated in the writing test. It is obvious that use of NOT is more than DON'T in this level, but using DON'T although common here. About 35% of the sentences consist of DON'T. In Table 2 we provide some examples in three kinds of these negation stages, and after that In Table 3 you see that the number of usage of each of these negatives as follows:

Table 2-Some examples of negative sentences have written by elementary students.

No/Not+ Verb	Don't + verb	Auxiliary + Not
I no like lie	I don't want driving motor-cycle	I will not to home because I not any money
I not love life in this world	We don't must permit country loot	I haven't like drinking milk
I'm not sorry of study in the university	I don't will travel to Tehran next week	I will not speaking with talkative

In the below we have seen some significant differences between learners' comprehension and production. We see that in comprehension questions they supposed that the best answer is pre-verbal negation with DON'T.

Table 3-The use of negatives in 51 sentences have written by 10 elementary students

DON'T	19
NOT	28
WILL NOT	4

In speaking with some of these Students we conclude that use of NOT is prevalent, but the use of DON'T is although common for them. Actually most of their use of DON'T were grammatically not correct.

Intermediate Students using negatives

In the previous section we examined the kind of negatives used by elementary EFL learners of Persian .here we presented the data that consist of intermediate learners. Here again there are 16 intermediate participants for continuing the research. in this part we see that learners using more complex negative sentences, using more auxiliaries beside the correct sentences. Again in this part the major kind of negative utterances used by the learners is DON'T. here we see some minor differences in using negation .The percent of using DON'T were decreased ,but it doesn't mean that using NOT is increasing .instead you will see that DON'T (DIDN'T) is the main for using or choosing negative utterances and the use of other auxiliaries plus not increased here. In learners' writings we saw that noticing to time have increased and using DON'T , DIDN'T ,DOESN'T , again is more than using NOT or NO .in this section the analyzed form of negation is used more than previous group . For example in the first question in the test that is:

Alieat the dinner.
a)no b)don't c)will don't
d)none of them

about90% of the elementary students' answers is DON'T, it is an example of unanalyzed kind of using DON'T. intermediate students' answers consist of about 55% of the learners have chosen the option D, which is the analyzed use of DON'T (doesn't).

In the figure 2 below you see that again learners have chosen DON'T more than other alternatives. in this multiple – choice test that is the same as the test had used already for elementary EFL learners of Persian we tested the comprehension of negation in the university students (whom they have gone to English class before) as the intermediate learners for the study .Here the percent for unanalyzed DON'T decreased in relation to elementary learners, but still it is the answer that have chosen by the most students.40% of the answers is unanalyzed DON'T, but here you see that 25% of the answers is analyzed don't .it increased five times greater than analyzed answers in elementary learners .20% of the answers is NOT(no) and 15% is WILL NOT .

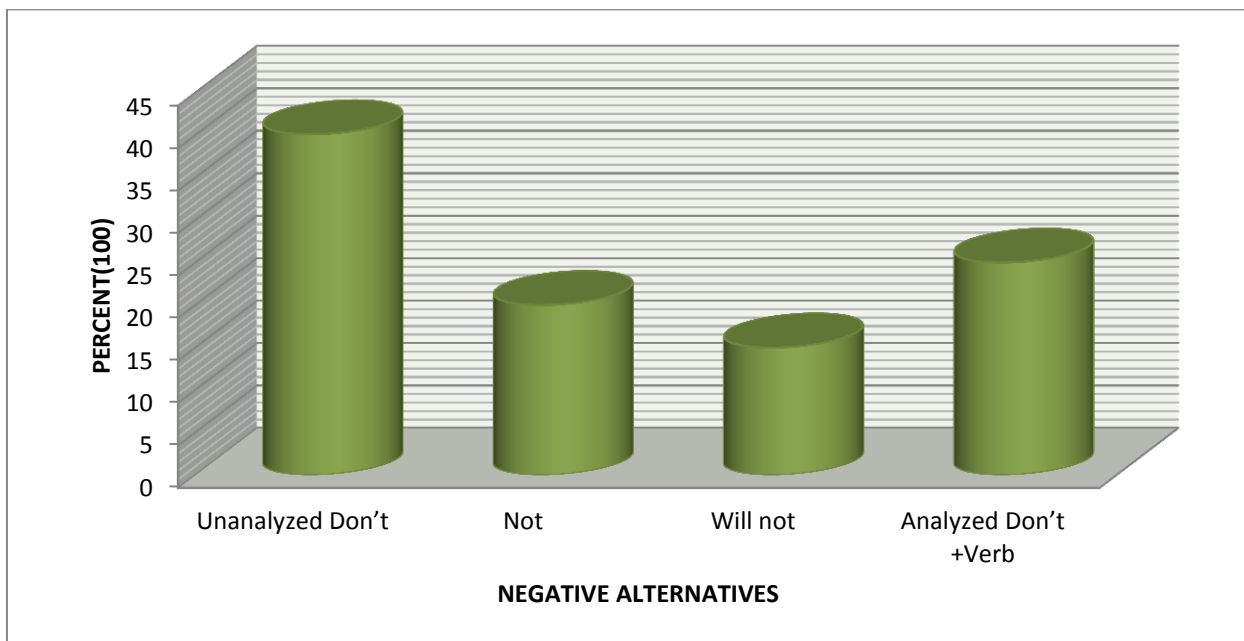


Figure 2-The frequency percent of answers in multiple-choice test for intermediate EFL learners of Persian

In tests of writing we had 11 participants and we repeated the previous title we had given to elementary students (talk about the thing you dislike). In these writings the use of NOT or NO decreased in comparison with the elementary learners. DON'T are more analyzed than the elementary learners and using NO is decreased in wrong positions. Table 4 shows some examples of these sentences have written by the elementary EFL learners of Persian.

Table 4 – Some examples of negative sentences have written by intermediate students.

No/Not+ Verb	Don't + verb	Auxiliary + Not
I'm not eating everyday	I don't eat much chicken	I will not go to house next week
I'm not going out dorm because my friend here	I don't forgive myself if I don't pass my exams	I cannot speak English
I'm not proud	When I was a child, I didn't like watch TV	I will not keep to keep on my studies in math

7. Discussion

In the previous part we outlined some information about the data had been gathered from elementary and

intermediate EFL learners of Persian, gathering data were based on measuring learners' comprehension and production. In this part we look back to the research

questions: 1.) Do we have a universal pattern for learning negation? 2.) What is the difference in the use of negation in learners' comprehension and production? 3.) How is the difference between elementary and

intermediate learners in the use of negation? Using the results of the research that we outlined in the previous chapter, we answer these questions. Moving beyond the research questions, we discuss how this study is relate to other studies in this area and we although suggest areas for future research.

Do we have a universal pattern for learning negation?

It may be the most important question in the study. Up to now we have seen that some scholars (Cancino, Rosansky, & Schumann, 1978; Stauble, 1978et al) have claimed that learning negation for L2 learners of English follow a kind of distinct route. These negation stages reflect internal grammar representations that learners build and gradually revise as they are better able to approximate the target system (*Lourdes Ortega, 2009*).

In the previous section we tried to analyze the way EFL learners of Persian use the negative marks, how they acquire negation and which kinds of negative sentences they use more. The results show that using negation is different in different levels and across both comprehension and production. Based on Table 2 it is proved that EFL learners of Persian have some unique patterns for distinguishing negation in close tests and comprehension questions. Table 2 shows us the use of DON'T is much more widespread than NO/NOT in elementary learners. Even in their speech they use more DON'T for making negatives. Based on Table 1, there is a universal pattern for learning negatives. It means that among EFL learners this is universal and most of the learners learn and use English negative in a same way. But the results of the experiments show that most of the learners have chosen the option DON'T. It is obvious that most of the time they prefer DON'T in alternatives, even though these are not the correct answers and we called them unanalyzed DON'T.

Table 5- Developmental stages for negation in EFL learners of Persian

Stage	Patterns	Illustration
1	Pre-verbal negation with don't Don't + verb(Unanalyzed DON'T)	Ali ... Ali don't eat the dinner David don't go to holiday next week
2	Pre-verbal negation with no/not No/Not + verb (Unanalyzed No/Not)	She not like math I no want go to my city
3	Post verbal negation in restricted contexts ' AUX + not/don't	I will not be a Doctor I cannot speak English
4	Post verbal negation in all contexts (Analyzed Don't)	I like nobody She didn't like to anybody

Here we should notice on the difference between comprehension and production when we analyze the data gathered from EFL learners. Based on Table 3 In these pieces of writings the focus is that these learners use NOT more than DON'T when they are asked to produce a piece of writing. But again we see that the number of DON'T is too high. If we look at Table 4 and 5 you see that in intermediate learners they use DON'T more than NO/NOT even in their production. The major difference here is increase of analyzed DON'T plus use of auxiliary in their negation.

In the previous part we tried to find that do we have the same universality, and if exist the universality like this. It is so complex to answer these questions, but after analyzing some findings we concluded that in Iran we don't confirm to this universality, it means that we have a local pattern for learning negatives, it may relate to Iranian first language that we don't have pre-verb negation like Spanish or Japanese learners. If we change the Table 1 based on the results we have gathered from some EFL learners of Persian it can be like this:

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