

The Acquisition of English Negative Constructions by a Malay Bilingual Child

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ABSTRACT

The English negative construction is one of the most difficult constructions to be mastered in the process of acquiring the English Language due to the fact that such a construction involves both morphological and syntactic aspects of the language. The morphology and syntax of children's English negative constructions have been extensively studied both on native speakers and non-native speakers of the English language. However, to this date, no such studies have been conducted on Malay children who are acquiring English simultaneously with the acquisition of their mother tongue. This manuscript presents an investigation on the acquisition of English negative constructions of a Malay girl who was acquiring English at the same time as she was acquiring Malay. Results indicate that, to a certain extent, there is a resemblance in the production of negative constructions between children who were native speakers of English and the subject. Yet, the difference in the acquisition pattern is intriguing. Hence, this manuscript concludes with possible explanations to the cross-linguistic discrepancy in the acquisition pattern of the English negative constructions.

Keywords: bilingual first language acquisition; child development; phrase structure rules; sentence negation, transformational generative grammar

INTRODUCTION

Negative constructions are among the most common type of syntactic constructions heard by toddlers in conversations. This is due to the fact that parents are fond of saying negated expressions like “No!” or “No chocolate!” or “Don’t touch that!” to their toddlers throughout their care-taking experience (Kohn 2005). Such expressions pervade parent-child conversations that many parents tend to come to a conclusion that the form of construction that toddlers will execute at their early production stage is most likely the negative constructions. One parent even suggested another parent to “never let your child hear the word ‘no,’ so that he can’t say it back to you” (Druckerman 2012, p.71). To what extent is this true?

Children generally begin to express negation through non-linguistic means. Among all the non-linguistic channels used to express denial, disapproval, or non-existence are the shaking of the heads (Hoff 2001, p.219) and the waving of the hand. The linguistic forms of negated constructions may emerge as early as the one-word stage. Toddlers begin with “No!” at the one-word stage and proceed to “No mummy!” at the two-word stage, with *no* or *not* placed before or after a content word (Peccei 2000). The negated forms of sentence constructions among most children remain ungrammatical throughout the telegraphic stage.

Quite a number of studies on the manifestations of negative constructions uttered by toddlers were conducted on toddlers who are native speakers of English. Up till the 1980s, only seven studies on the acquisition of English negations were conducted on non-native speakers of English who were native speakers of Norwegian, German, Japanese and Spanish (Irvine 2005). The more recent cross-linguistic publication on negation is by Horn (2010), with a compilation of studies examining “the negative utterances in natural language across

time and space” (p. 2) by children and adult. To this date, no studies on the acquisition process of English negation by Malay children who are acquiring English as their other first language has been conducted. The only study on the acquisition of English negations that has been conducted on Malay native speakers so far was a cross-sectional study on Malay ESL (English as a Second Language) learners who were learning English in classroom settings (Suliana Wan Chik 2009). Hence, it is not known if the acquisition pattern in the English negative construction of a Malay bilingual child who is acquiring both Malay and English as her first languages is similar to the acquisition pattern of English native speakers. This paper presents an investigation on the acquisition of the English negative constructions of a Malay bilingual child in her first three years of life and compares it with the English negative constructions produced by toddlers who were acquiring the English language as their mother tongue (Peccei 2000). Since this is a case study, findings from this study are not meant to be generalised to the population of Malay children whose first languages are Malay and English. Instead, it aims at presenting data from a longitudinal study from an objective perspective.

LEXICAL AND PHRASAL NEGATION

From the syntactic perspective, negative constructions may occur at three different levels: at the lexical level, the phrasal level and the sentential level (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman 1999). Negation at the lexical level occurs simply by adding the morphemes that carry the notion of NOT (i.e., the derivational prefixes such as “*dis-*”, “*im-*”, and “*un-*”), to the roots “*advantage*”, “*mature*”, and “*cover*” respectively, resulting in polymorphemic words such as “*disadvantage*”, “*immature*”, and “*uncover*”. The derivational prefixes such as “*a-*”, “*anti-*”, and “*il-*” may also be affixed to the stems of words such as “*symmetrical*”, “*clock-wise*”, and “*logical*”, to mean the opposite of those words (i.e., “*asymmetrical*”, “*anti-clock-wise*” and “*illogical*”). Figure 1 illustrates how morphemically, lexical negations are formed.

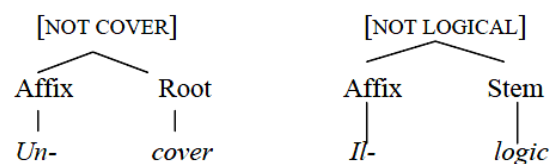


FIGURE 1. Morphemic Illustration of English Lexical Negation

Negation at the phrasal level, as the name suggests, is somewhat different from the lexical negation. Instead of affixing the derivational prefix [NOT] to the root or stem of words, phrasal negations occur in the Noun Phrase, playing the role of a premodifier of a Noun Phrase in the form of a determiner. Thus, phrases like “No chocolate!” or “No more milk!” can be illustrated as Figure 2.

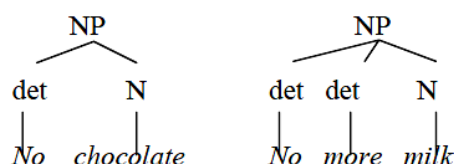


FIGURE 2. Syntactic Illustration of English Phrasal Negation

The first two types of negation mentioned above are rather straight forward in their manifestations as they both involve no major syntactic operation apart from the affixation of bound, derivational morphemes to free morphemes, and the modification of the Noun Phrases.

These two processes do not seem to be problematic to toddlers as, to many of them, lexical and phrasal negations might just be regarded as larger chunks of words that are mostly learned without the need to analyse their constructions further (Foster-Cohen 1999).

SENTENTIAL NEGATION

What seems to be a greater challenge to toddlers is producing negation at sentence level. Clark and Clark (1977, cited in Foster 1996, p. 94) illustrate that toddlers at their first stage – the stage when their *mean length of utterance* (MLU) is below 2.8 – have a great difficulty in uttering simple negated sentences such as “This doesn’t fit”, and “Don’t sit there”. At this stage, such notions are merely uttered as “No... fit” and “No sit there” respectively.

Likewise, a corpus on negations produced by three children known as Adam, Eve, and Sarah shows that initially, all three children were only able to utter “No the sun shining” (*The Language File* 1982). Such a construction (also known as the Stage 1 of negative construction) later developed into “the sun no shining” (Stage 2) before developing into adult-like negated sentences (“The sun isn’t shining”). This stage is known as the Stage 3 of negative construction.

As put forward by Clark and Clark (1977, cited in Gass & Selinker 2008), similar patterns of acquisition of negation can be observed among English native acquirers.

... single words such as *no* appearing first, followed by a negative word at the beginning of an utterance, such as *no eat*, followed by negative modals or negative words in sentence internal position, such as *He not big, I can’t do that* (Gass & Selinker 2008, p. 37).

At the first stage, the forms of “no” appear to be nonsystematic. They may manifest as “no”, “not” or “don’t” and were used interchangeably as they appear, to the language acquirers, to have no difference in meaning. However, according to Gass and Selinker (2008), “with increased proficiency, the nonsystematic use of these forms became the source of learners’ hypotheses about their use” (p. 259). Interestingly, studies suggest that children develop sentential negation in such a pattern due to the systematic grammar that is innate in every human being (see Hoff 2001).

TRANSFORMATIONAL-GENERATIVE GRAMMAR

The transformational-generative grammar (TGG) has always been described as a systematic grammar due to its capability to cater the issues of language creativity and language productivity among native speakers. Consisting of rules that can generate infinite number of sentences (via the Phrase Structure Rules) and rules that show the path from the deep structure to the surface structure (via the Derivational / Transformational Rules), this two-part grammar, to a certain extent, can be used to explain why syntactic differences in Stages 1 through 3 take place. The grammar models the process through which human constructs sentences (naturally from the most basic to the most complex structure) and suggests the complexity of sentences that each language user is able to utter. The analysis on the adult negative sentence “The sun isn’t shining” below illustrates how TGG can be used to explain the stages children go through in producing negative sentences.

THE SUN ISN’T SHINING.

Based on TGG (following the model proposed by Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman 1999), the sentence “The sun isn’t shining” originally derives from the affirmative sentence “The sun is shining” before the latter goes through the negating process. The generative

grammar, through the Phrase Structure Rules, indicates that a sentence can be expanded to a *subject* and a *predicate* ($S \rightarrow \text{SUBJ PRED}$). The subject, on the one hand, can only be expanded to a Noun Phrase ($\text{SUBJ} \rightarrow \text{NP}$). This Noun Phrase, where “The sun isn’t shining” is concerned, is comprised of a *determiner* (“the”) and a *noun* (“sun”) ($\text{NP} \rightarrow \text{det N}$; $\text{det} \rightarrow \text{the}$; $\text{N} \rightarrow \text{sun}$). The Predicate, on the other hand, is expanded to two obligatory elements, namely, an *auxiliary* and a *verb phrase* ($\text{PRED} \rightarrow \text{AUX VP}$). Since the sentence “The sun is shining” is a sentence with a *tense* and an *aspect*, (i.e., present progressive), the auxiliary is expanded to a *tense* and a *progressive* ($\text{AUX} \rightarrow \text{T prog}$). “Tense”, where the sentence is concerned, refers to the notion of “*present*” whereas “*progressive*” is usually manifested in the form of, “*BE...ING*”, respectively ($\text{T} \rightarrow \text{-pres}$; $\text{prog} \rightarrow \text{BE...ING}$). “Shine” is an intransitive verb; hence, the Verb Phrase under the predicate branches out only to a verb, namely, the lexicon “*shine*” ($\text{VP} \rightarrow \text{V}$; $\text{V} \rightarrow \text{shine}$). Through the affix-hopping rule, the particle “*-ING*”, being a part of the concrete element pair in the auxiliary, is pushed to the right of the next lexical entry, so that the particle could be affixed to the lexicon, which, in this case, is “*shine*”. Figure 3 illustrates the mental representation of the deep structure of the affirmative sentence “The sun is shining”, as a result of the application of the Phrase Structure Rules.

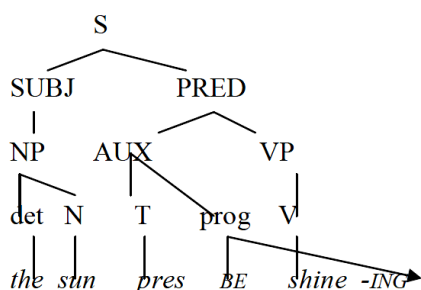


FIGURE 3. The deep structure for the sentence “The sun is shining”

However, what is shown in Figure 3 is only the deep structure for “The sun is shining”, which is “the sun pres BE shine –ING”. To negate an affirmative sentence at the deep structure level, a more complex process takes place. Due to the fact that “The sun isn’t shining” involves negating “The sun is shining” at sentence level, it is necessary to treat the sentence “The sun is shining” as a core sentence (S’) under a larger sentence with a sentence modifier (NOT) (See Figure 4).

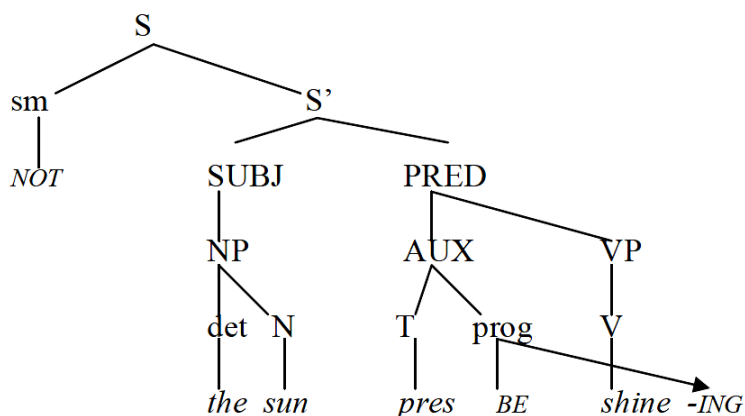


FIGURE 4. The deep structure for the negative sentence “The sun isn’t shining”

The tree diagram above results from the generation of the following Phrase Structure Rules:

$S \rightarrow \left\{ \begin{array}{l} (sm)^n S' \\ \text{SUBJ PRED} \end{array} \right\}$	$\text{PRED} \rightarrow \text{AUX VP}$
$\text{SUBJ} \rightarrow \text{NP}$	$\text{AUX} \rightarrow \text{T prog}$
$\text{NP} \rightarrow \text{det N}$	$\text{T} \rightarrow \text{-pres}$
$\text{Det} \rightarrow \text{the}$	$\text{prog} \rightarrow \text{BE...ING}$
$\text{N} \rightarrow \text{sun}$	$\text{VP} \rightarrow \text{V}$
	$\text{V} \rightarrow \text{shine}$

FIGURE 5. Phrase Structure Rules for the sentence “The sun isn’t shining”

As mentioned earlier, what is presented in Figure 4 is only the mental representation of the abstract deep structure of the sentence in question in the form of a tree diagram. However, to get to the surface structure (i.e., “The sun isn’t shining”) from the deep structure (i.e., “NOT the sun pres BE shine –ING”), a more complex process is involved.

In TGG, the items at the bottom of the tree diagram make up what is known as the *output of the base* of the deep structure. This output of base actually marks the beginning of the transformational rules which will be applied in the formation of any given – what native speakers claim as – grammatical sentences. Where the sentence “The sun isn’t shining” is concerned, its output of base is:

- NOT the sun –pres BE shine –ING

As mentioned earlier, the sentence in question is a sentence formed with the presence of a tense. Due to that, the transformational rule that comes after the output of base is the *copy s/t formula* [+3+sg], a formula that should be attached to the lexeme –pres. This is because “the sun” is present in the form of a third person (+3) singular (+sg):

- NOT the sun –pres [+3 +sg] BE shine –ING
-

The *copy s/t formula* is then followed by a transformational rule called *NOT Placement*. This rule refers to the situation where the notion of NOT that is originally located outside the core sentence, is now placed right after a modal (e.g., “may”), a copula (e.g., “is”), or the first concrete element of the auxiliary (e.g., “has”). Since a concrete auxiliary element is present in the sentence “The sun is shining” (i.e., “BE...ING”), the notion of NOT is placed right after the first auxiliary particle “BE”. Thus, when the *NOT Placement* rule is applied, the abstract sentence will now be transformed to the following:

- The sun –pres [+3 +sg] BE NOT shine –ING

The notion of NOT is then contracted through a transformational rule called *NOT Contraction*, changing the structure above to:

- The sun –pres [+3+sg] BE N'T shine –ING

Finally, once all the rules mentioned above are applied, the morphological realisation rules take place. At this stage, all the elements of “–pres [+3+sg] BE N'T” are combined and together, they manifest in the form of the word “*isn’t*”. The combination of *shine –ING*, on the other hand, is realised as “*shining*”. All these lead to the surface structure

- The sun isn’t shining.

TGG can indeed explain the difference in the productions of the toddlers at the three different developmental stages. As mentioned earlier, at Stage 1, the same utterance is uttered as “No sun shining”. By looking at the transformational rules above, it is clear that the Stage 1 utterance is very much reflected at the output of base structure (i.e., “NOT the sun –pres BE shine -ING”), where the notion of NOT is positioned outside the affirmative sentence. What is different between the Stage 1 and the output of the base is the fact that the determiner “the”, the notion of “present”, and the “BE” particle in the present progressive aspect are missing. This is a realistic phenomenon as Foster (1996) indicates that “the first stage of syntactic development is characterised by the general (but not complete) absence of functional items such as articles (the, a)” and that the ‘be’ forms are also considered as “items which are argued not to be the major meaning-carrying words in the sentence” (p. 76).

Toddlers at Stage 2, on the other hand, manifest the same deep structure as “The sun no shining”. This occurs due to the fact that toddlers at this stage have applied more transformational rules than those at Stage 1, namely the *copy s/t* and the *NOT Placement* rules. The presence of the *NOT Placement* rule in the minds of the toddlers enable them to place the notion of NOT somewhere between the subject and the verb and not outside the sentence. However, since the minor meaning-carrying words in the sentence (“BE”) is still absent at this stage, the manifestation of the *copy s/t* rule is not observable here.

The high level of proficiency among adults in uttering the sentence in question here is explainable in TGG by looking at the higher number of rules applied from the deep structure up to the surface structure. The application of two other rules, namely the *NOT Contraction* and the *Morphological Realisation Rules*, together with the development of the grammatical morphemes at the later stage, explains why adults’ utterances of the same deep structures are different from the Stage 2 toddlers’.

I DON’T WANT THE ENVELOPE

The same explanation can be applied to the sentence “I don’t want the envelope” (*The Language File*, 1982). The deep structure for the sentence “I don’t want the envelope” may be represented as the following:

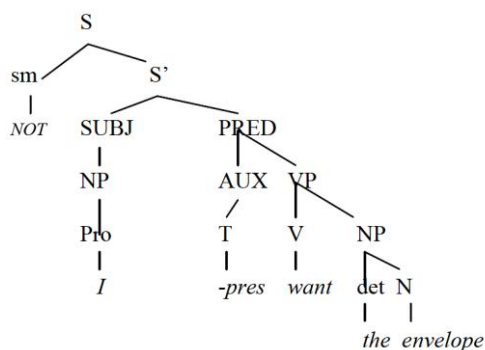


FIGURE 6. The deep structure for “I don’t want the envelope”

In order to get to the surface structure from this deep structure (i.e., “NOT I –pres want the envelope”), the following Transformational Rules are needed and are assumed to take place in the cognition of adult English speakers:

- Output of base: NOT I –pres want the envelope
- Copy s/t: NOT I –pres [+1+sg] want the envelope
- Operator addition: NOT I –pres [+1+sg] DO want the envelope
- NOT Placement: I –pres [+1+sg] DO NOT want the envelope
- NOT Contraction: I –pres [+1+sg] DO N'T want the envelope

Morphological Realisation Rules: I don't want the envelope.

One obvious difference between the *output of base* of this sentence and the sentence “No want envelope” is that there is a deletion of the pronoun “I” in the latter. This is so because, at Stage 1, toddlers’ utterances tend to revolve around the toddlers themselves (*c.f.* Piaget’s Pre-Operational Stage) and manifesting the first person pronoun may seem nothing but “stating the obvious”. Thus, the utterance “No want envelope” is produced.

The *NOT Placement* has been applied by the toddlers at Stage 2, but there is still an absence of the operator “DO”. The absence of this operator in the child’s construction makes the result of negating the sentence seems odd (“I no want envelope”). Such a phenomenon suggests that, although the transformational rules proposed by Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman (1999) indicate that the *Operator Addition* should precede the *NOT Placement*, where child language acquisition is concerned, the ability to insert the operator “DO” is acquired later in comparison to the placement of NOT. Only when the *Operator Addition*, the *NOT Contraction*, and the *Morphological Realisation Rules* are applied, shall the speaker manifest the deep structure as “I don’t want the envelope” (Stage 3) through the following transformational processes.

<u>Output of base:</u>	NOT I –pres want the envelope
<u>Copy s/t:</u>	NOT I –pres [+1+sg] want the envelope
<u>NOT Placement:</u>	I –pres [+1+sg] NOT want the envelope
<u>Operator addition:</u>	NOT I –pres [+1+sg] DO NOT want the envelope
<u>NOT Contraction:</u>	I –pres [+1+sg] DO N'T want the envelope
<u>Morphological Realisation Rules:</u>	I don't want the envelope.

Thus far, we have looked at the manifestation of negative constructions uttered by toddlers who are native speakers of English. Does the same phenomenon take place in the English negative construction of a Malay bilingual child who was in the process of acquiring both Malay and English simultaneously as her first languages?

METHODOLOGY

This study investigates the negative construction of a Malay bilingual child who was acquiring the English language at the same time as she was acquiring her mother tongue, Malay. The corpus was taken from a larger corpus from a case study, which consists of the subject’s utterances from the one-word stage till the telegraphic stage (Salehuddin 2004).

At the time the corpus was collected, the subject was between 2 years and 9 months (henceforth 2;9) and 3;7. Based on the stages of acquisition given by many researchers of language acquisition (Foster-Cohen 1999, Peccei 2000), the subject should ideally be at the second stage of acquisition (between 2;3 and 3;6). Hence, an analysis on the toddler’s negated sentences using the TGG and Phrase Structure Rules described in the earlier section was conducted to investigate if the English negated constructions of the Malay bilingual toddler were similar to the ones produced by toddlers at Stage 2, as described in previous studies (Peccei 2000).

RESULTS

Where the English negative constructions are concerned, among the items recorded during the subject’s telegraphic stage are as in Table 1. At the surface level, the data presented in Table 1 reflects the typical linguistic development of children acquiring the English language. This is because, there appears to be a variety of negative sentence constructions in the

subject’s production. For example, the manifestation of the notion NOT was observed both outside the core sentence (e.g., “No big sister”, “Abah is here not”) and within the core sentence (e.g., “Don’t go there”, “It’s not funny”).

However, a closer look at the data makes the corpus be more intriguing. This is due to the fact that the expressions “Don’t touch” (produced at 2;7) “Don’t go there” (produced at 3;4) and “It’s not funny” (produced at 3;7), which very much reflect the production of adult English native speakers’ construction, occurred in the subject’s production in no particular order. This appears to suggest that to a certain extent, the development pattern of negative constructions for the subject of this study is not similar to those found in previous studies on English as a first language acquirers (Foster-Cohen 1999, Peccei 2000).

TABLE 1. Subject’s Negated Constructions

Age	Utterance	Phonetic transcription	Meaning
2;7	“Don’t touch”	[dɒn tʌtʃ]	“Don’t touch”
2;9	“Abah is here not”	[ʌbɑ:h is hɪə nɒt]	“Abah is not here”
3;4	“Don’t go there”	[dɒn go de]	“Don’t go there”
3;4	“Abah is not here”	[ʌbʌh ɪs nɒt hɪə]	“Abah is not here”
3;7	“Is not angry”	[ɪs nɒt ɛŋɡwɪ]	“I am not angry”
3;7	“No big sister”	[no bɪɡ sɪstə]	“I am not a big sister”
3;7	“It’s not funny”	[ɪts nɒt fʌnɪ]	“It’s not funny”

“Abah is here not” and “No big sister” are more likely to reflect the Stage 1 production as the transformational rules applied in these two sentences are very much like the ones in “The sun no shining” and “I no want envelope” above. To illustrate, the deep structures for both sentences can be mapped out as in Figure 7:

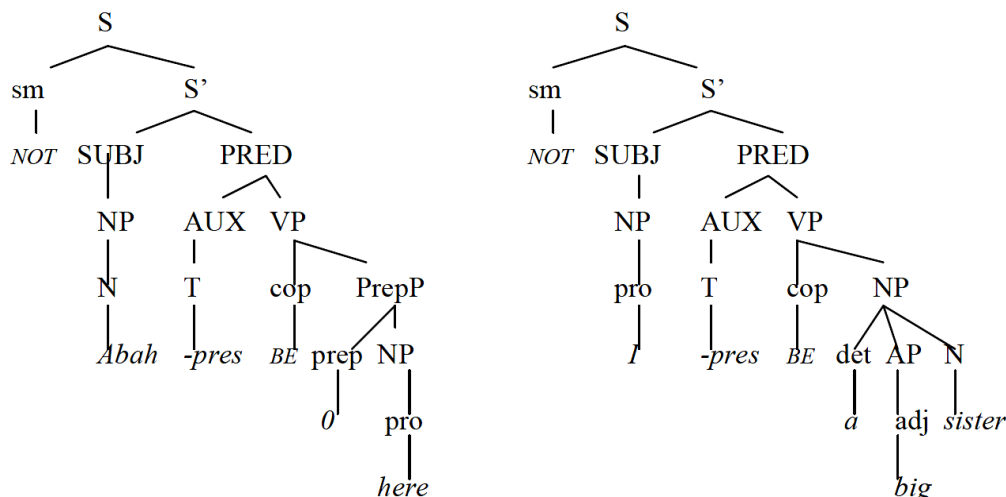


FIGURE 7. The deep structures for “Abah isn’t here” (left) and “I am not a big sister” (right)

The mapping rules of the two sentences (to the adult system) are as the following:

Output of Base:

NOT Abah -pres be here

NOT I -pres be a big sister

Copy s/t:

NOT Abah -pres [+3+sg] be here

NOT I -pres [+1+sg] be a big sister

NOT Placement:

Abah -pres [+3+sg] be NOT here

I -pres be [+1+sg] be NOT a big sister

NOT Contraction:

Abah -pres [+3+sg] be N'T here

Morphological Realisation Rules:

Abah isn't here

I am not a big sister.

It is clear from the mapping rules above that, in order to produce the adult-like negative construction of “Abah isn’t here”, three transformational rules are involved. In contrast, in order to produce the adult-like negative construction of “I am not a big sister”, one will only have to apply two transformational rules. Hence, where the subject is concerned, the *NOT Placement*, *NOT Contraction* (in the second sentence), and the *Morphological Realisation Rules* were not at all applied to manifest the notion of “Abah is not here” and “I am not a big sister”.

Subject’s “Is not angry”, however, reflects the utterances of English-speaking children at Stage 2 (Peccei 2000). The deep structure for that sentence can be mapped out as the following:

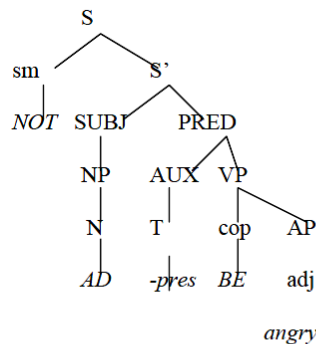


FIGURE 8. The deep structure for “AD is not angry”

The transformational rules from the deep structure to the surface structure of the adult system are as the following:

Output of Base:

NOT AD -pres be angry

Copy s/t:

NOT AD -pres [+3+sg] be angry

NOT Placement:

AD -pres [+3+sg] be NOT angry

Morphological Realisation Rules:

AD is not angry

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Where negated constructions are concerned, children at Stage 1 normally negate sentences by using the lexeme *no* or *not* (usually *no*) to modify the sentence (Bellugi 1967, in Peccei 2000, p. 39). They either attach it to the beginning or to the end of the sentence (Bellugi 1967 in Peccei (2000, p. 39) and Hoff (2001, p. 219)). This is the reason why the notion of NOT is regarded as a “sentence modifier” in TGG. Where the utterance of the subject of this study is concerned, such a characteristic is evident in both “Abah is here not” and “No big sister”. The

subject of this study attached the notion NOT at the end of “Abah is here not” and at the beginning of the phrase “big sister”. What strengthens the fact that the subject was still at the first stage of utterance is the fact that auxiliary verbs, main verbs or copula “BE” were all absent in her utterances. Functional words like determiners (“a”) and pronoun (“I”) were also absent in the subject’s utterances and this seems coherent with Foster’s description of Stage 1 toddlers (Foster 1996, p. 76).

Children’s *no* or *not*, most of the time is inserted within the sentence at Stage 2 (Bellugi 1967 in Peccei 2000, p. 39). This was also evident in this study as the subject has actually placed the notion of NOT after the copula BE in the sentence.

At the age of 3;7, the subject was still producing speech that reflects negative constructions of English native speakers who are still at the first stage of negative construction acquisition (i.e., “Abah is here not.” and “No big sister.”) (Peccei 1999). This is possibly because the subject was not yet able to process several transformational rules from the base structure to the surface structure. Processing several transformational rules is indeed a cognitively complex process, hence processing it up to a lower level (to maintain the notion of NOT outside the core sentence “Abah is here”) will make the process a cognitively less complex process to the three-year-old (See Salehuddin, 2012a, for discussion on cognitive complexity).

Nevertheless, the subject appears to produce the third stage of negative constructions (e.g., “Don’t touch.” and “It’s not funny.”) concurrently with the first stage (i.e., “no big sister”) and second stage (i.e., “Abah is here not”) of negative construction. If the subject had really reached the third stage of negative constructions, why were there still ungrammatical sentences in the subject’s utterances which reflect the production of toddlers at Stage 1 and Stage 2?

An analysis of the negative construction of Malay suggests that the subject’s inaccurate production is not a result of mother tongue interference. A structure like “Abah is here not”, for example, does not resemble adult-like Malay negative construction as the notion of NOT in Malay also takes place within the core sentence (e.g., *Abah tidak ada di sini*). The subject’s inaccurate production in “Abah is here not” strongly suggests that she was not in the third stage of negative construction.

Subject could have managed to produce adult-like negative constructions despite being at the first and second stage due to the subject’s linguistic environment. Observations on the interaction between the subject and her parents indicate that the parents used quite a number of negative constructions in the process of raising the subject (Salehuddin 2004). Expressions like “Don’t touch” and “Don’t go there” are common in interaction between the subject and her parents and this enriches the subject’s linguistic environment. Although to the nativists and cognitivists, input play a minor role in language acquisition, more recent studies have shown that to a certain extent, the frequency and usage of lexical terms in children’s linguistic environment do play a role in language development, especially when they involve interaction. Salehuddin (2009, 2011, 2012b), for example, showed that children acquire the Malay numeral classifiers *buah* much earlier than numeral classifiers *utas* despite the fact that the former is cognitively more complex than the latter. The subject has also used the expression “It’s not funny” in her production as a result of her spending a lot of her television-watching time on *the Disney Channel*. According to Tare, Shatz and Gilbertson (2008), varied conversational input through a variety of linguistic and intentional contexts provides useful data for children to create early word-word mappings for non-object terms. Some studies (e.g., Rice 1990, Ely & Gleason 1995) suggest that children’s television programs also influence preschool children’s language development. Hence, the subject’s adult-like negative construction may possibly be the result of imitation.

Although TGG has been claimed as a grammar that can tackle the issue of innateness among native speakers, this manuscript presents how TGG can also be used to explain the ungrammatical structure of the negated sentences of a bilingual child who is not a native speaker of the English language. As indicated earlier, it is not the intention of the manuscript to generalise the findings of this study to the population of Malay children whose first languages are Malay and English. Yet, the manuscript hopes to highlight that although one's mother tongue does influence the production of a bilingual child (i.e., the instance when the speaker's name is used instead of the first person personal pronoun), the acquisition of negated utterances, where the pattern of the transformational rule is concerned, is no different than the acquisition of a monolingual child. While much of the traditional TGG have been abandoned by its creator (i.e., Chomsky) and proponents themselves, this two-part grammar continues to have useful application in the study of children's language acquisition.

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