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Syntactic Possibilities in Selected Children and Adults' Choices of Negative Constructions in English Language Usage

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Abstract

The Principles and Parameters theory of syntax as propounded by Chomsky (1981, 1995) postulates that, because children possess human genome, they are biologically en suite with a Universal Grammar that contains the core principles of language. Thus, this study employed Prince and Smolensky's (1993) Optimality Theory of syntax to investigate the syntactic possibilities in selected children and adults' choices of negative constructions in English language usage. To achieve this aim, the study investigated if all optimality mechanisms (grammatical, morphological, lexical and analytical processes) for generating negative constructions were attestable in the constructions of the respondents; and isolated the optimality devices exploited mainly by the adults in order to discover the linguistic resources that are commonly used by both the children and the adults. The data used for the study was sourced from the set of tests designed to elicit negative responses from 20 respondents, who evenly consisted of 10 children and 10 adults. The results showed that the respondents exploited the grammatical, morphological, lexical and analytical processes as optimal outputs to produce negative constructions. The analysis also demonstrated that, while the adult respondents uniquely employed the analytical process, the children respondents exploited the grammatical process more than the adults. On the basis of these findings, the study concludes that, children's syntactic devices of generating negative utterances differ significantly from those used by adults.

Key Words: Optimality Theory, Negative construction, Negative Propositions, and Analytical Processes

Introduction

Language provides varying possibilities at all linguistic levels from where its users select particular resources which aptly convey their communicative purposes. Therefore, the phenomenon of "choice" in the linguistic systems explains how people select from language resources to express meaning as constrained by situation of utterance. At the syntactic level, for example, the choice can be made between bipolar voices of active or passive to express a similar meaning. Ayo (2005, p.75) corroborates this view when he asserts that:

the richness of language avails a speaker or writer a set of system from which he could make a choice to express his ideas or view. This is why it is possible in a language to convey approximately the same information in two or more different linguistic construct.

Thus, language provides its users bipolar means of affirmative and negative constructions by which they express their stances to propositions depending on whether the proposition they want to express is true or false. Expression of negative proposition in particular is a means by which language users give a negative response to a proposition. Miestamo (2007, p.553) submits that "every natural language possesses at least a means to express clausal negation, that is, a construction or constructions the function of which is to negate a clause." Horn's (1989, p.157) also points out that "all human systems of communication contain a representation of negation. No animal communication system includes negative utterances, and consequently, none possesses a means for assigning truth value, for lying, for irony, or for coping with false or contradictory statements." Horn (2010, p.1) adds that "in many ways, negation is what makes us human, imbuing us with the capacity to deny, to contradict, to misrepresent, to lie, and to convey irony." It is obvious from the various submissions above that the syntactic concept of negative construction is a crosslinguistic phenomenon through which human beings perform so many communicative functions.

Since the various functions of negative constructions cannot be trivialised in human activities, in recent times there has been a growing interest among linguists to study the structure of sentential negation. Miestamo (2007, p.555) corroborates this by saying that "more recent cross-linguistic studies of clausal negation have paid more attention to these modifications, looking at the structure of negative clauses more holistically." Some influential studies, among others, include that of Kahrel (1996) who explored some aspects by which language users can express negation. The work of Haegeman (1996) is a practical exploration into some syntactic possibilities of negation. From a sociolinguistic perspective, Nevalainen (2006) worked on social history and linguistic typology of negation. Lindstad (2007) conducted analyses of structures of negation in English. Horn (2010) did a comparison of multiple negation in English and other languages. Mohsen (2011) conducted a research work comparing negation patterns in English to that of Norwegian. Thornton and Tesan (2013) also investigated sentential negation in early child English and discovered three three distinctive stages in the acquisition of sentential negation.

However, none of the aforementioned studies attempted to investigate the structures of negative clauses peculiar to children among the syntactic possibilities of expressing negative propositions by the adults. In other words, none of the existing research works on negative constructions has attempted to validate or challenge the view that, between/among various sociolinguistic variables such as age, education, sex, etc. languages share and yet differ in the realisation of certain

grammatical phenomena. The aim of this study therefore is to employ the postulations of the Optimality Theory of syntax to describe the syntax-semantics interface of negation in English language in order to account for the discrepancies between 10 children and 10 adults in their choices of different negative constructions among the various syntactic possibilities of expressing negative propositions. In so doing, the study: categorised negative constructions into typologies with a view to isolating the particular forms peculiar to children; and investigated the syntactic devices exploited mainly by the adult informants in order to elicit the linguistic resources that are commonly used by both the children and the adults. The study therefore has the potentiality of unveiling the syntactic possibilities that are uniquely exploited by each group in the construction of negative sentences.

Methodology

The research methodology was essentially descriptive and analytical. The study is based on the employment of Prince and Smolensky's (1993) Optimality Theory of syntax developed within the framework of Chomsky's Transformational Generative Grammar. The data used for the study was sourced from the set of tests designed and administered to 10 children and 10 adults purposefully selected for the study. The test consisted of ten (10) affirmative propositions/questions intended to elicit negative responses. The responses, otherwise called 'optimal outputs', in terms of the Optimality Theory of syntax, were qualitatively categorised and analysed on frequency tables via the four typologies of optimal outputs (grammatical, morphological, lexical and analytical processes).

Theoretical Framework

The concept of negation according to Mohsen (2011, p.2) "is a topic that is widely discussed within semantics, pragmatics, morphology, semantics and syntax." This is because linguists have explored the properties of negation to many other categories within these linguistic levels of analysis. Thus, the treatment of negation or negative construction is highly volatile and intractable. This explains why Miestamo (2007, p.552) laments that "in natural language negation is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, not all aspects of which have been studied by typologists." Mohsen (2011, p.2) also corroborates this view that "the function of negation is fairly straight-forward: it negates parts of or the entire sentence or clause. The formal realisation, however, is more complex and varies across languages, across speakers, and even in the same speaker across contexts." The Optimality Theory of syntax was developed by Alan Prince and Paul Smolensky in 1993 within the theoretical frameworks of Chomsky's Generative Grammar. The theory is highly influential in handling syntactic phenomenon. This is why Prince and Smolensky (1997, p.1604) assert that:

the proposition that grammaticality equals optimality sheds light on a wide range of phenomena, from the gulf between production and comprehension in child language, to language learnability, to the fundamental questions of linguistic theory: What is it that the grammars of all languages share, and how may they differ?

The main six hypotheses of the Optimality theory are enumerated by Legendre (2001, p.3) as follows:

- (i) UG is an optimizing system of universal well-formedness constraints on linguistic forms.
- (ii) Well-formedness constraints are simple and general. They routinely come into conflict and are (often) violated by the surfacing form.
- (iii) Conflicts are resolved through hierarchical rankings of constraints. The effect of a given constraint is relative to its ranking, which is determined on a language-particular basis.
- (iv) Evaluation of candidates by the set of constraints is based on strict domination. For any two constraints C1 and C2, either C1 outranks C2 or C2 outranks C1.
- (v) Alternative structural realizations of an input compete for the status of being the optimal output of a particular input. The most harmonic output -- the one which best satisfies, or minimally violates, the full set of ranked constraints in a given language -- is the optimal one. Only the optimal structure is grammatical.
- (vi) Every competition yields an optimal output.

The hypothesis numbered 5 above in particular is germane to this study. As contained in the hypothesis the Optimality Theory of syntax being a meaning-oriented approach maintains that the input of linguistic resources consists of a meaning or interpretation, and the output units are forms or expressions. Kager (2007, p.8) sums it up when he asserts:

the basic assumption of OT [Optimality Theory] is that each linguistic output form is *optimal*, in the sense that it incurs the least serious violations of a set of conflicting constraints. For a given input, the grammar generates and then evaluates an infinite set of output candidates, from which it selects the optimal candidate, which is the actual output.

This provides useful insights to handle the phenomenon of negative constructions in particular because it explains how alternative structural realisations can be generated for a negative proposition. This can be illustrated with the possible negative responses to a proposition/question as follows:

Proposition/Question 1: You are happy. (Are you happy?)
Alternative Optimal Outputs (Possible Responses):

- (a) I am not happy. (Negation by means of grammatical operator: *not*)
- (b) I am unhappy. (Negation by means of morphological component: *un*)
- (c) I am sad. (Negation by means of lexeme with negative semantic prosody)
- (d) I am stricken with sorrow. (Negation by means of causative construction with separate words)

In terms of the Optimality Theory, the different linguistic resources (grammatical operator, morphological component, lexeme with implicit negative operator and separate words in analytical construction) are alternative structural realizations of an input, which compete for the status of being the optimal output of the particular input. As contained in the output units 1a, 1b, 1c and 1d above, similar negative meaning is conveyed. This is because the generation of each output expression produces negations to the same proposition. By interpretation therefore the sentences contained in 1a, 1b, 1c and 1d above are purely syntactic alternatives which may be semantically and pragmatically equivalent in the same context. It is also noticeable that the linguistic resources organised to realise the four expressions of negation above are syntactically positioned after the auxiliary verb "am" in the order in which grammatical operator is done. In the deep structure the formal realisation of the semantic components of the lexeme "unhappy" is "not" + "happy". Thus, the negative operator is implicit or covert. The lexeme "sad" and "sorrow" in sentences "1c" and "1d" above are antonymous to the word "happy"; therefore the negative operator is latent to these words in their deep structure captured in terms of formal notation as: [not + happy] → [sad/sorrow].

However, some linguists maintain that it is only propositions that are overtly expressed by means of grammatical operators or negative markers (such as in sentence "1a" above) that can be regarded as negatives. Giannakidou (2000, 2006), for example, argues that the fact that n-words are interpreted negatively in the absence of overt negation does not prove that they are negatives. Linguists in this school of thought admit that all the responses above can be truthful descriptions of the same situation but argue that there is slight variation of meaning. Therefore, they are of the view that other responses apart from the proposition contained in sentence "1a" are affirmative because of the differences in their linguistic resources. However, Horn (1989, p.31) warns that it is difficult to draw the line between affirmative and negative sentences.

Miestamo (2007, p.552) asserts:

negation shows complex interaction with many aspects of meaning and structure. When we look at negation from a crosslinguistic

perspective, we immediately see that there is much more to it than just adding a negative marker to an affirmative sentence.

In alignment with this submission, we attempt to look at negation from the perspective of semantic prosodic features. Since all the responses contained in sentences 1b, 1c, and 1d above are semantically potent to convey a negative meaning as the proposition expressed in sentence "1a", it is our position in this study that they are all negatives though the implicit negative operator in them is syntactically covert. Olaleye (2017, p.70) stresses that the semantic prosody of lexemes could be covertly or overtly realised in terms of either pleasant or unpleasant (or positive or negative semantic prosody); depending on the aspects of attitudinal meaning the user wants to activate.

An influential categorisation which accommodates some aspects of negatives is that of Payne (1985) who attempts to classify negatives into four types: negative particles, morphological (affixal) negatives, negative verbs (negative auxiliaries and higher negative verbs) and negative nouns. This categorisation is oblivious of negative adjectives such as "sad" and "stricken" found in sentences "1c" and "1d" above. Employing the view of Optimality Theory therefore, one possible way of categorising negation would be to distinguish some negations that can be expressed overtly through negation markers (such as *no*, *not*, and *never*) from those that can be realised covertly. In alignment with the hypothesis of the Optimality theory, the present researchers have therefore evolved four (4) technical terms derivable from the interpretation of expressions of negation to explain expressions of propositional negation. These typologies are as follows:

1. **Negation by Grammatical Process:** This describes the type of negation that is derivable from a declarative sentence by positioning an overt negative marker (not) before the lexical verb in a sentence. For, example, (i) I remember your name. → I do not remember your name. (This involves the use of "do-support" where there is no auxiliary verb) (ii) She will travel tomorrow. → She will not travel tomorrow. (iii) He has read the book. → He has not read the book. (iv) I am happy. → I am not happy.
2. **Negation by Morphological Process:** This describes the type of negation created by morphological components such as prefix, infix and suffixation. For example, "un", "il", "ir", "im", "less", etc. as demonstrated in the following words: [illegal → not + legal] (prefix); [irregular → not + regular] (prefix), [meaningless → not + meaningful] (suffixation by replacement of "ful" for "less"), etc. The negative marker bearing the negative meaning in these words are overtly realised through morphological components.
3. **Negation by Lexical Feature:** This describes the type of negation through words with inherent negative meaning. This involves certain verbs,

adjectives, and nouns with intrinsic negative operator. For example, reject, forget, sad, sorrow, etc. Thus, sentences with overt negative operator may be realised through lexical process as demonstrated as follows: "I do not remember your name." → "I forget your name." The semantic features of words in this category can be decomposed as follows: [forget → not + remember], [sad → not + happy], [reject → not + accept], etc. Based on the format notation of decomposing the semantic features of these words, it is obvious that they implicitly embody negative operator as part of their semantic components. Thus, in lexical negative operation a single word which implicitly embodies negative meaning is involved.

4. **Negation by Analytical Process:** This describes the type of negation created by syntactic constructions with separate words which convey negation by mapping the conceptual meanings of different words. Most catenative verbs are examples of analytical means of creating negation. For example, sentences with overt negative operator may be realised through lexical process as demonstrated as follows. The negative proposition: "I do not remember your name." can as well be expressed as: "I fail to recall your name." Here, the lexical process "forget" or the grammatical process "not remember" is expressed by means of separate words: *fail to recall*. Typically analytical negative constructions are productive because numerous words are combined to contribute certain aspects of their semantic features to construct negative propositions. Thus, a certain word which implicitly embodies the negative operator diffuses this aspect of meaning for other words in the construction to imbibe.

The four processes can further be illustrated with the following sentences:

Proposition 2: Jonah obeys God's instruction. (Positive Proposition)

Negative Propositions:

- (a) Jonah did not obey God's instruction. (negation by grammatical process)
- (b) Jonah disobeyed God's instruction. (negation by morphological process)
- (c) "Jonah violated God's instruction. (negation by lexical process)
- (d) "Jonah refused to observe God's instruction. (negation by analytical process)

The linguistic resources such as *not obey, disobeyed, violated* and *refuse to observe* in the various propositions above have been employed to generate sentences which are semantically and pragmatically potent to convey negative propositions to the positive proposition: "Jonah obeys God's instruction". These have also demonstrated the various processes by which negation could be

interpreted. The next section is an exploration into discrepancies between how adults and children express negative propositions.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The textual data garnered from the expressions of negative propositions produced by the twenty respondents to the ten (10) affirmative propositions/questions that were designed are presented for analysis in the subsections that follow. The informants' choices from the four typologies of negation were presented in tables to discover the frequency of each typology.

Optimal Outputs Produced as Negative Responses by 10 Children Respondents

The children respondents' choices of available syntactic possibilities of expressing negative propositions are presented and analysed as follows:

Proposition 1: It is right to cheat in the exam. (Is it right...exam?)
Optimal Output: (i) Grammatical: It is not right to cheat in the exam. (8 children)
(ii) Lexical: It is wrong to cheat in the exam. (2 children)

Proposition 2: A dog can eat grass. (Can a goat eat grass?)
Optimal Output: Grammatical: A dog cannot eat grass. (10 children)

Proposition 3: It is certain that a car can fly like aeroplane. (Is it certain ...aeroplane?)
Optimal Output: Grammatical: It is not certain that a car can fly like aeroplane. (10 children)

Proposition 4: The moon produces heat like fire. (Does the moon produce...fire?)
Optimal Output: Grammatical: The moon cannot produce heat like fire. (10 children)

Proposition 5: Difficult questions are easy to solve. (Is it easy... questions?)
Optimal Output: Grammatical: Difficult questions are not easy to solve. /It is not easy...questions. (10 children)

Proposition 6: It is proper to eat in the toilet when someone is hungry.
Optimal Output: Grammatical: It is not proper to eat in the toilet when someone is hungry. (10 children)

Proposition 7: Adam and Eve obeyed God perfectly. (Did Adam...Eden?)
Optimal Output: (i) Grammatical: They (Adam and Eve) did not obey God perfectly. (3 children)

- (ii) **Morphological:** They (Adam and Eve) disobeyed God.
(7 children)

Proposition 8: It is appropriate to make a drunkard a religious leader.
(Is it ... leader?)

Optimal Output: **Grammatical:** It is not appropriate to make a drunkard a religious leader (10 children)

Proposition 9: The snake in the picture book can bite.
(Can the snake...bite?)

Optimal Output: **Grammatical:** The snake in the picture book cannot bite.
(10 children)

Proposition 10: It is possible for a goat to climb tree like monkey.
(Is it possible ... monkey?)

Optimal Output: (i) **Grammatical:** It is not possible for a goat to climb tree like monkey./A goat cannot climb tree like monkey. (Reinstated in another sentence),
(9 children)

(ii) **Morphological:** It is impossible for a goat to climb tree like monkey. (1 child)

The various optimal outputs produced as negative responses to the affirmative propositions/questions administered were presented in the frequency table that follows.

Table 1: Frequency of Negation Processes Used by the 10 Children Informants

Propositions/ Questions	Negative Propositions Produced							
	Grammatical Process		Morphological Process		Lexical Process		Analytical Process	
	Output (i)	Output (ii)	Output (i)	Output (ii)	Output (i)	Output (ii)	Output (i)	Output (ii)
1. It is right to cheat in the exam. (Is it right... exam?)	8	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
2. A dog can eat grass. (Can a dog eat grass?)	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
3. It is certain that a car can fly like aeroplane. (Is it	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

certain... aeroplane?)								
4. The moon produces heat like fire. (Does the moon produce heat like fire?)	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
5. Difficult questions are easy to solve. (It is easy to solve difficult questions?)	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
6. It is proper to eat in the toilet when someone is hungry. (Is it proper ... hungry?)	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
7. Adam and Eve obeyed God perfectly. (Did Adam...Eden?)	3	0	0	7	0	0	0	0
8. It is appropriate to make a drunkard a religious leader. (Is it ... leader?)	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
9. The snake in the picture book can bite. (Can the snake...bite?)	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
10. It is possible for a goat to climb tree like monkey. (Is it possible... monkey?)	9	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Total								
Grand Total	90	0	0	8	0	2	0	0
Percentage	90			8		2		
	90%			8%		2%		
							0	
							0%	

The results on table 1 above provide statistic information about the frequency of negation processes (grammatical, morphological, lexical and analytical) used by the children informants. As revealed on the table, the results indicate total average percentage of 90%, 8%, 2% and 0% respectively. It is evident from the results that among the four categories of negation, the grammatical process was used most frequently. The morphological process was the next frequently used in the descending order of magnitude. While the lexical process was infrequently used, the analytical process was not used by the respondents. The results evidently show that, among the potential optimal output mechanisms by which negative responses can be syntactically generated, children exploit the grammatical process more than the others. Thus, the grammatical process is a dominant feature of the children respondents.

Optimal Outputs Produced as Negative Responses by 10 Adult Respondents

The adult respondents' choices of available syntactic possibilities of expressing negative propositions are presented and analysed as follows:

Proposition 1: It is right cheat in the exam. (Is it right...exam?)

Optimal Output: (i) Morphological: It is unlawful to cheat in the exam.
(3 Adults)

(ii) Lexical: It is wrong to copy my friend's answers in the exam. (7 Adults)

Proposition 2: A dog can eat grass. (Can a goat eat grass?)

Optimal Output: (i) Grammatical: A dog cannot eat grass. (6 Adults)

(ii) Lexical: It is difficult for a dog to eat grass. (4 Adults)

Proposition 3: It is certain that a car can fly like aeroplane.
(Is it certain ...aeroplane?)

Optimal Output: (i) Morphological: It is uncertain that a car can fly like aeroplane. (7 Adults)

(ii) Lexical: It is contemptuous/despicable for a car to fly like aeroplane. (3 Adults)

Proposition 4: The moon produces heat like fire. (Does the moon produce...fire?)

Optimal Output: (i) Grammatical: The moon does not produce heat like fire.
(6 Adults)

(ii) Lexical: It sounds incredible for the moon to produce heat like fire. (4 Adults)

Proposition 5: Difficult questions are easy to solve. (Is it easy... questions?)

Optimal Output: (i) Grammatical: Difficult questions are not easy to solve.

- (4 Adults)
- (ii) Lexical: Difficult questions are hard to solve. (6 Adults)
- Proposition 6: It is proper to eat in the toilet when someone is hungry.
 Optimal Output: (i) Grammatical: It is not proper to eat in the toilet when someone is hungry (2 Adult)
 (ii) Morphological: It is improper to eat in the toilet when someone is hungry. (8 Adults)
- Proposition 7: Adam and Eve obeyed God perfectly. (Did Adam...Eden?)
 Optimal Output: (i) Morphological: They disobeyed God. (2 Adults)
 (ii) Analytical: They (Adam and Eve) refused to obey the law of God perfectly. (3 Adults)
 (iii) Analytical: They (Adam and Eve) failed to observe God's Instruction perfectly. (5 Adults).
- Proposition 8: It is appropriate to make a drunkard a religious leader.
 (Is it ... leader?)
 Optimal Output: (i) Morphological: It is inappropriate to make a drunkard a religious leader. ((7 Adults)
 (ii) Lexical: It is wrong to make a drunkard a religious leader (3 Adults)
- Proposition 9: The snake in the picture book can bite.
 (Can the snake...bite?)
 Optimal Output: (i) Grammatical: The snake in the picture book cannot bite. (6 Adults)
 (ii) Lexical: It is strange/difficult for a snake in the picture to bite (4 Adults)
- Proposition 10: It is possible for a goat to climb tree like monkey.
 (Is it possible ... monkey?)
 Optimal Output: (i) Morphological: It is impossible for a goat to climb tree like monkey. (8 Adults)
 (ii) Lexical: It is difficult for a goat to climb tree like monkey. (2 Adults)

Table 2: Frequency of Negation Processes Used by Adult Informants

Propositions/ Questions	Negative Propositions Produced							
	Grammatical Process		Morphological Process		Lexical Process		Analytical Process	
	Output (i)	Output (ii)	Output (i)	Output (ii)	Output (i)	Output (ii)	Output (i)	Output (ii)

1. It is right to cheat in the exam. (Is it right...exam?)	0	0	3	0	0	7		0
2. A dog can eat grass. (Can a dog eat grass?)	6	0	0	0	0	4	0	0
3. It is certain that a car can fly like aeroplane. (Is it certain...aeroplane?)	0	0	7	0	0	3	0	0
4. The moon produces heat like fire. (Does the moon produce heat like fire?)	6	0	0	0	0	4	0	0
5. Difficult questions are easy to solve. (It is easy to solve difficult questions?)	0	4	0	0	6	0	0	0
6. It is proper to eat in the toilet when someone is hungry. (Is it proper...hungry?)	2	0	8	0	0	0	0	0
7. Adam and Eve obeyed God perfectly. (Did Adam...Eden?)	0	0	0	2	0	0	3	5

8. It is appropriate to make a drunkard a religious leader. (Is it ... leader?)	0	0	7	0	0	3	0	0
9. The snake in the picture book can bite. (Can the snake...bite?)	6	0	0	0	0	4	0	0
10. It is possible for a goat to climb tree like monkey. (Is it possible....mon key?)	0	0	8	0	0	2	0	0
Total	20	4	33	2	6	27	3	5
Grand Total	24		35		33		8	
Percentage	24%		35%		33%		8%	

The results on table1 above provide statistic information about the frequency of negation processes (grammatical, morphological, lexical and analytical) used by the adult informants. As revealed on the table, the results indicate total average percentage of 24%, 35%, 33% and 15% respectively. It is evident from the results that among the four categories of negation, the morphological process was used most frequently by the adult respondents. The lexical process is the next dominant feature in the descending order of magnitude. This is followed by the grammatical process. The results also reveal that the analytical process was less dominantly exploited by the adult respondents.

Discussion and Findings

The statistic information provided in table 1 and 2 above is indicative of the fact that, while both the children and the adult respondents are mutually inclusive in the use of grammatical process for the generation of negation to propositions; the children however exploited the grammatical mechanism more than the adults. This explains why Thornton and Tesan (2013) point out that "one of the main findings is that English-speaking children initially use 'not' [grammatical operator] to express sentential negation." Thus, the difference in the statistic information provided in the tables inaugurates our hypothesis in this study that children first

conceptualise that negation is expressed through the use of negative markers/operators before acquiring other syntactic devices of generating clausal negation as they progress to adulthood.

It is also evident from the tables that the adult respondents, by contrast, typically conveyed the same negative propositions using other syntactic possibilities. In particular, the analytical process was uniquely exploited by the adults. In other words, both the children and the adults' respondents were mutually exclusive in the exploitation of analytical process for generating negative sentences. This also suggests that children do not have the competency to exploit complex syntactic processes (such as lexical and analytical) of expressing negative propositions as adults.

Conclusion

The present study was an attempt to use linguistic techniques to account for how language offers its users certain means to express clausal negation. It investigated the different syntactic possibilities exploited by children and adult respondents to construct negative Optimal Outputs to propositions. The study demonstrated that the grammatical process of generating negative expressions was more extensively used by the children respondent than the adult respondents. It was also revealed that, while the adult respondents uniquely exploited the analytical means of generating negative expressions, the children respondents did not employ the means. On the basis of these findings, it is safe to conclude that, children's syntactic device of generating negative utterances differ significantly from those used by adults.

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