

Second Language Acquisition of Negation and Verb Movement

1. Development of Negation

A study by Canconi et al. (1978) established four stages in the acquisition of L2 English:

1st stage: „no“ and verb: „You no tell your mother.“

2nd stage: „no“ and verb; unanalysed „don't“ and verb: „He don't like it.“

3rd stage: copula/auxiliary and „no“/“not“: „It's not danger.“/ „Somebody is not coming in.“

4th stage: analysed „don't“ and verb: „He doesn't laugh like us.“

To sum up, **negation is mostly expressed by „no“ at an early stage**. This is true for Spanish as well as Japanese speakers, so L1 structure of negation does not seem to be crucial. More important are **principles of UG**: In early L2, „no“ belongs to the category Neg, which can project to Neg' and then to NegP - so it is possible to create negative sentences without having acquired the category of Inflection yet.

Later on, the **acquisition of the copula „be“ triggers the establishment of I**, since „be“ moves to the level of I in negation. „Not“ and unanalysed „don't“ are acquired at the same time, because the movement of „be“ to I provides a free position for them.

2. Negation of Thematic Verbs

A major difference between Spanish/ French and English negation concerns the raising of thematic verbs from VP to I:

English does not raise thematic verbs in negation: „John does not speak Greek.“, whereas **French and Spanish do**: „Jeanne ne parle pas grec.“/ „Juana no habla griego.“

This can be explained by the strength of inflections - Spanish and French have strong inflections, which raise both all kinds of verbs, while English inflections are weak and only raise copula and auxiliary verbs. However, this is only a **difference in parameters of variation** influencing the superficial location of negation. The **location of the Neg-phrase** in the whole clause, though, is **fixed universally as a complement of I**. As soon as I is established in the grammar of L2 learners, French and Spanish learners of English do not move thematic verbs anymore, while English learners of French start moving them.

3. Complement Selectional Properties of Heads

Interestingly, English learners of L2 French learn to negate thematic verbs more rapidly than vice versa. French negation seems to enable them to establish I almost immediately. Probably, this is due to learners' **sensitivity to the complement selectional properties of heads**: They know from UG that I selects NegP as its complement. If they realise that Neg in French does not select a VP complement with a filled head and that the thematic verb is located to the left of NegP, they are forced to project I above Neg as a position to which the verb can move.

Bibliography

Hawkins, Roger (2001), *Second Language Syntax: A Generative Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell, p. 82-123.