Acquiring formal negation & NC

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Research question:
This study focuses on investigating what determines how NC provides essential support for children in interpreting negation/negative elements (NMs) in the course of language acquisition.

Background: Zeijlstra's proposed framework predicts that languages may or may not require NegP. Double Negation languages in which a negative marker that is an adverb, serves as the negative operator and is interpreted in the semantics directly, cannot have a NegP. Languages where NMs do not directly correspond to a negative operator are NC languages and may have NegP. For Zeijlstra, NC is a syntactic agreement and provides evidence for the presence of formal features, and multiple NMs stipulate that one of them carries [uNEG] that must be checked in the syntactic component, this is what motivates a NegP.

Proposal: I will use Zeijlstra's (2004, 2014) framework to explain the acquisition of negation (AoN) and NC in SE. Children acquiring any language must settle the syntactic status of NMs of their target language. SE is a DN language in which every negative form corresponds to a negative meaning. Consequently, it predicts that children acquiring SE should start acquiring it as a DN language where the negative marker is predominantly an adverb. SE also projects formal negation through NegP, by a Neg^o *n't*. We assume that children pass through a stage where they assume SE is a full NC language.

Data and results: This study provides empirical findings based on the analysis of Corpus data of SE retrieved from CHILDES database (McWhinney 2000). As predicted, based on the speech in (1) we argue that children start acquiring SE as a DN language using extensively the adverbial negation e.g. *no* and *not.* Going through stages, children place negation external or internal to sentence. Besides, negation in early child English does not mirror the adults' most frequent form of negation, *n't.* Findings also show the gradual and delayed acquisition of *n't,* in spite of the fact that children receive substantial input for it. As predicted, it is argued that children do produce NC but not before the age of 3 years, exactly the age when a Neg^o is projected in their grammar. Examples are for instance: **(1)** a) Adam pocket *no/not.* [Adam: 27] **(2)** a) Helen do*n't* like her. [Helen:31] **(3)** a) But you *don't* want *no* more. [MT: 50].

Conclusion: We conclude that children's initial stages of acquisition of negation are instances of semantic negation. Given the absence of essential linguistic input (NC), their acquisition of *n't* is rather delayed. Based on the conflicting input, children formalise negation and assume SE as an NC language and do produce NC. When the linguistic input violates children's hypothesis that SE is a NC language, only then the production of NC decreases in child speech and they realise SE as their target DN language. Hereby, we conclude that SE is an inherently NC language.