Iraqi EFL Learners' Use of Morphosyntactic Negation

استخدام متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية العراقيين للنفي الصرفي والنحوي

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Abstract

Language is used for communication which serves human needs. It is most normally used in the affirmative mode to express and serve these needs. Yet, the negative mode is also used to indicate denial, contradiction or the non-existence of certain aspects, states or qualities. Sentence negation that affects the meaning of an entire clause is known as syntactic negation. In contrast, negation that affects the meaning of just a single word or phrase by the use of affixes is called morphological negation.

This paper examines students' use of affixes in negation and their performance in the production and recognition of morphological and syntactic negation. Based on students' responses, the study aims at identifying differences and similarities which are measured through comparing students' recognition and production of the morphosyntactic negation.

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A test has been conducted for 40 third-year EFL learners who are required to answer 40 items using Google forms for the purpose of the test.

In view of the results of the study, it has been concluded that students' negation recognition ability is higher than their production one. As for students' recognition and production abilities in the syntactic negation and morphological negation, there has been a considerable difference between the two in favor of the syntactic one.

As far as the choice of negation affixes is concerned, students are unaware of the assimilation rules, because these rules are not sufficiently highlighted to guide students in producing negative forms by using prefixes.

Keywords: syntactic negation, morphological negation, recognition, affixes, production errors

الملخص

تُستعمل اللغة للتواصل الذي يخدم احتياجات الانسان. وعادةً ما تستعمل بصيغة الايجاب للتعبير عن تلك الاحتياجات و تلبيتها, الا ان صيغة النفي ايضا تستعمل للدلالة على الانكار, والتناقض, و لعدم وجود جوانب او حالات او صفات معينة. و يعرف نفي الجملة الذي يؤثر على معنى الجملة بأكملها بالنفي النحوي. بالمقابل , يطلق على النفي الذي يقتصر تاثيره على معنى كلمة واحدة فقط او عبارة واحدة من خلال استعمال اللواحق بالنفي الصرفي.

تتناول الدراسة استعمال الطلاب للبادئات واللواحق الصرفية في النفي واداء الطلاب في ادراك وانتاج النفي الصرفي والنحوي. وبناءا على قدراتهم تهدف الدراسة الي تحديد اوجه التشابه والاختلاف من خلال مقارنة ادائهم في ادراك وانتاج النفي على المستويين النحوي والصرفي.

تم اجراء اختبار لعينة مكونة من (٤٠) طالباً من الطلبة العراقيين متعلمي اللغة الانكليزية لغة اجنبية في المرحلة الجامعية الثالثة واشتمل الاختبار على (٤٠) فقرة باستعمال المنصة الالكترونية (نماذج كوكل) .

في ضوء النتائج توصلت الدراسة الى ان قدرة الطلاب على ادراك النفي اعلى من قدرتهم على انتاجه. اما بالنسبة الى قدرة الطلاب في ادراك وانتاج النفي النحوي والنفي الصرفي فقد ظهر فرق كبير بين الاثنين لصالح قدراتهم في النفي النحوي.

وفيما يتعلق باختيار البادئات الصرفية في النفي, تبين عدم ادراك الطلاب قواعد الادغام لان هذه القواعد لم يتم ابرازها بشكل كاف لارشاد الطلاب في انتاج صيغ النفي باستعمال البادئات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النفي النحوي , النفي الصرفي , الادراك , اللواحق الصرفية , الاخطاء الانتاجية

1-1 Structure of Negation

The structure of the negative sentence or phrase has a negative particle *not* or *–n't* (the contracted negative) as in

1. The cat has eaten the mouse.
2. The cat has<u>n't</u> eaten the mouse.

These two sentences have the same structure, except that there is a negative marker *–n't* in the second sentence affixed to the first auxiliary or after the operator (Leech, 2006, p. 66) (Quirk, 1985, p. 121) (Brown and Miller, 1980, p. 17). The negative marker can only be affixed to an auxiliary verb, and if there is no auxiliary verb, "Do" is supplied. Both tense and negation must be marked on the same verb (Brown and Miller, 1980, p. 17) as in

3. Doesn't John like strawberries?
4. Didn't Mary come to your party?

Mustafa (1984, p. 9) in his thesis "Negation in English", states that according to the traditional grammarians, such as Jespersen (1960) and Zandvoort (1975) there appears to be two ways in negating a sentence. The first is to place a negative element as early as possible in a sentence in order to "leave no doubt in the mind of the hearer"(Jespersen, 1960, p. 297). This is done by using negative adverbs such as *never*, *nowhere* etc., and by using prefixes just like *in-, un-, dis-* in *inactive, unhappy, disagree* and so on.

5. Never did I see that film.

The second way is to attach the negative marker to the verb of the sentence. The negative marker *not* (-n't) is put after the auxiliary verbs and before the full verbs.

6. He is not writing the story.
7. He has not (hasn't) left yet. (Ibid, p. 297).

The negation of a sentence depends on the type of the verb being used, i.e., with the auxiliaries *be*, *have*, and modals, negation is done with *not/ n't*, whereas with other verbs, the negation is formed with DO plus *not/n't* before the base form of the verb as in:

8. They aren't listening.
9. I did not refuse to pay. (Yule, 2006, p. 45).

1-2 Types of Negation

Negation can be classified into two types based on the linguistic unit being negated, i.e., word, phrase or sentence:

1-2-1 Syntactic Negation

This type of negation can be achieved via three ways:

1-2-1-1 Negation with NOT: the normal form of negation in English is the use of NOT (or its contracted form *–n't*) after the operator i.e. after the first auxiliary verb or finite verb as in

10. I am feeling tired. → I am not feeling tired.
11. The letter is here. → The letter isn't here. (Leech, 2006, p. 66). Yet when there is no overt auxiliary as in
12. John leaves (every morning at six o'clock).
13. John doesn't leave (every morning at six o'clock).

The verb DO appears, because the negative marker (*-n't*) cannot be affixed to the main verb (Brown and Miller, 1980, p. 117). Full verbs are distinguished from the auxiliary verbs by their inability to form negation as in

14. She can do it. →She cannot do it.
15. She saw the play. → * She saw not the play. (Quirk et al, 1985, p. 121; Crystal, 2003, p. 44; Palmer, 1987, p16).

Akmajian et al (1995, p. 331) state that prior to the sixteenth century the distinction between main verbs and auxiliary verbs did not exist, i.e., at that time it was possible for main verbs to take NOT, and examples for that can be found in Shakespeare's writings as in:

16. I deny it not. (I don't deny it)
17. Forbid him not (do not forbid him) (cf. Quirk et al, 1985, p. 122).

In some cases, however, there are acceptable negative sentences using NOT with lexical verbs as in:

18. He decided not to see the play.

Where the negation is associated with the second non-finite verb phrase, *to see*, rather than with the initial finite verb phrase *decided*. It can be demonstrated clearly by the following paraphrase:

He decided that he would not see the play.

Which is not synonymous with:

He did not decide that he would see the play. (Quirk et al, 1985, p. 122).

1-2-1-2 Negation with Negative Words: negative concepts are normally expressed through the use of negative verbs (wasn't, wouldn't), yet positive verbs with negative words such as *no, none, nobody, no one* and *nothing* can also be used to express negation(Yule, 2006, p. 48). Leech (2006, p. 67) defines the

negative word as "a word which has the function of negating the meaning of the clause or sentence." Negative words are used with positive verbs or alone as in:

19. No one complained.

20. Nobody told us.

21. There was nothing to eat.

22. What did you say? Nothing. (Yule, 2006, p. 48; Murphy, 1994, p. 170).

1-2-1-3- Negation with Adverbs: sentences can also be negated by the use of negative adverbs such as *never*, *nowhere* without using other negative expressions such as *no, not, any* as in:

23. Nowhere could they find the missing cat.

24. I have never learned to swim= I haven't ever learned to swim.

25. Never did I dream of such a car. (Leech, 2006, p. 68; Stageberg, 1981, p. 178).

Other negative adverbs can also be used like *hardly, scarcely, barely* etc. that already have negative force, thus it is redundant to use another negative in the same clause as in:

26. I had hardly had (not I hadn't hardly) time to study. (Collins Concise Dictionary, 1989, p. 568).

When these negative adverbs such as *never, nowhere* are used in front position for emphasis, they are followed by an inverted word order i.e. the subject is put after the auxiliary verb (be, do, have) or a modal as in:

27. I have never heard such a story. → Never have I heard of such a story. (Yule, 1996, p. 48; Quirk et al, 1985, p. 133).

1-2-2 Morphological Negation

This type of negation is signaled by the presence of negative affixes such as *a-, mis-, non-, de-, dis-, un-, in-, il-, im-,ir-, ig-, ab-* in addition to the suffixes *–less* and *–out* (Crystal, 2003, p. 310). These prefixes and suffixes are attached to any part of speech to produce the opposite meaning as in:

Asymptomatic = not symptomatic

Non-existent= not existent

Disagree= do not agree

Unacceptable= not acceptable

Insecure = not secure

Imperfect =not perfect

Illegal= not legal

Irrational = not rational

Ignoble= not noble

Useless= not useful

Abnormal= not normal (Stageberg, 1981, p. 90).

There are two types of morphological negation:

a- Direct negation: this type of negation is characterized by the presence of the NOT element e.g. happy ---unhappy (NOT happy) (direct opposition) (Joshi, 2012, p. 53).

b- Indirect negation: this kind of negation does not mean the antithesis, e.g. in the words *guided→ misguided* (it does not mean "not guided", rather it means guided in the wrong or bad way). An infamous person is not someone who is "NOT famous", but it is someone who is "famous for undesired reasons".

Some negation prefixes can be used in either type, i.e. it can be said that "direct negation" and "indirect negation" are not mutually exclusive with regard to the prefixes used in each one of them. A prefix that forms one type of negation may also form the other. For instance, the English prefix *mis-* in "misfire" forms the direct negation of "to *fire"*, whereas mis- in "misunderstand" is the indirect negation of "to *understand"*. The prefix *in-* in the word "insecure" means "not secure" (direct negation), whereas *in-* in the word "infamous" means famous for bad quality or deed i.e., ill-famed (indirect negation).

The indirect negation can express different meanings such as the following:

1- Reversal of direction e.g. clockwise →anticlockwise
2- Reversal of action e.g. tie → untie
3- Insufficiency e.g. cooked → undercooked
4- Inferiority e.g. tension →hypotension
5- Overabundance e.g. active→ hyperactive
6- Removal e.g. bug→ debug
7- Badness e.g. function→ malfunction
8- Opposition e.g. terrorism→ antiterrorism (Joshi, 2012, p. 54-55).

3-Data Description and Analysis

The next subsections discuss the frequencies and percentages of students' errors in syntactic negation and morphological negation. 40 third-year students from the Department of English, College of Arts/ University of Baghdad in the academic year 2022-2023, have been randomly selected for the test, using Google forms. Students are required to answer twenty items for the recognition

part of the syntactic negation and the morphological negation. They are also required to answer twenty items for the production part of the syntactic negation and the morphological negation. The total number of items is 40.

Table (1) Number and Percentage of Syntactic Negation Recognition and Production Errors

Error type	No.	%
Recognition and production	127	15.875

Table (1) offers a clear picture of the number and percentage of the error types which the test results exhibit. Both types of errors (in Syntactic negation recognition and production categories) committed by the students stand for only (15.875 %) of all the responses in these two categories. Compared to the morphological negation recognition and production errors in table (3), they would constitute less than a half. This indicates that students' ability in syntactic negation is generally higher than their ability in morphological negation.

Table (2) Numbers and Percentages of Syntactic Negation Recognition Errors and production Errors

Error type	No.	%
Recognition	42	10.5
Production	85	21.25

Given the test results, it has become clear that syntactic negation recognition errors represent half of the production errors. There are only (42) incorrect responses standing for (10.5%) of the total number of the responses in the syntactic negation recognition category. This is due to the fact that presenting a list of negative forms could serve as a clue for the correct negative form.

The production part is more problematic for students, as far as negation is concerned, as shown in the number of instances of errors observed in their responses that out of (127) incorrect responses in both categories, (85) are recorded in the production part only standing for (21.25%), i.e. two times higher than recognition errors. This could be attributed to the context of learning wherein the focus is on the use of the negation particles *'not', 'no'* rather than on the way and place of using them, let alone the other necessary changes required for the negation of some forms of verbs as in simple present and simple past tenses.

Table (3) Number and Percentage of Morphological Negation Recognition and Production Errors

Error type	No.	%
Recognition and production	277	34.625

Viewing the incorrect responses in the other half, i.e. morphological negation, their percentage (34.625%) indicates that students' ability in morphological negation is significantly less than their ability in syntactic negation. They stand for more than double the instances recorded for the syntactic negation errors. Having no clear rules for adding negation prefixes to different parts of speech would explain this percentage.

Table (4) Numbers and Percentages of Morphological Negation Recognition Errors and Production Errors

Error type	No.	%
Recognition	121	30.25
Production	156	39

Table (4) shows the morphological negation recognition errors wherein there are (121) errors in (400) responses which stands for (30.25%) of all the responses in this category. They are almost one-fourth less than the morphological negation production errors. Amounting to three times of the same category errors in the syntactic negation, these errors demonstrate that students' ability in morphological negation recognition is significantly low compared to their ability in syntactic negation recognition. Lack of textbook instructions in this respect stands behind the random selection from the listed negative forms.

The production errors are higher than the recognition errors in the morphological negation constituting (39 %) of students' responses in this category. It is worth noting that they are almost two times higher than production errors in the syntactic negation. Thus, morphological negation recognition errors are three times higher than the syntactic counterparts and the morphological negation production errors are almost two times higher than their syntactic counterparts. This gap in their ability is attributed to the imbalanced focus on syntactic negation and the marginalization of the importance of morphological negation in the curricula that there is no enough material dedicated for the morphological negation.

Table (5) Total Frequencies and Percentages of Negation Recognition and Production Errors

Error type	No.	%
Recognition	163	20.375
Production	241	30.125

Negation production error percentage in table (5) reflects a considerable difference in students' performance compared to their performance in negation recognition. Students' production errors stand for (30.125%) of all the responses in the production category. That is about (10%) higher than recognition errors which stand for (20.375%) of the responses in the recognition category. This confirms that students' recognition is higher than their production in both morphological and syntactic negation.

4- Conclusion

Given the results of the study, it has been concluded that students' negation recognition ability is higher than their production one. In the production part, students need to conduct some operations in some cases, such as in the negation of the past tense verbs, regular and irregular, and when having a number of auxiliaries, wherein the negative particle should be attached to the first auxiliary.

As for students' recognition and production abilities in the syntactic and morphological negation, there has been a considerable difference between the two in favor of the syntactic negation abilities. Syntactic errors constitute half of the morphological errors. This is due to students' lack of awareness of the morphological negation function. This lack of awareness explains the low level of performance in utilizing affixes in negation.

Not knowing the negative form of a certain word in the morphological negation, students resort to the avoidance strategy, using *'not'* instead of the required affix. Moreover, Assimilation rules, as far as the choice of the negation affix is concerned, are not sufficiently highlighted to serve as a guide for students in producing negative forms.

Appendix

Test items / Syntactic negation (recognition part)
Choose the appropriate negative form for the following sentences:
 1- **Tom is a teacher.**

a. Tom does not a teacher.
b. Tom isn't a teacher.
c. Tom not a teacher.

2- **John would play tennis**.
a. John doesn't play tennis.
b. John don't play tennis.
c. John wouldn't play tennis.

3- **John studied French.**
a. John cannot studied French.
b. John doesn't study French.
c. John didn't study French.

4- **Sally teaches math.**
a. She cannot teach math.
b. She isn't teach math.
c. She doesn't teach math.

5- **They were in Italy.**
a. They don't in Italy.
b. They not in Italy.
c. They were not in Italy.

6- **The teachers might have been in college.**
a. They don't have been in college.
b. They might not have been in college.
c. They are not have been in college.

7- **John and Tom wrote the essay.**
a. They have not wrote the essay.
b. They don't write the essay.
c. They didn't write the essay.

8- **I blame you.**
a. I am not blame you.

b. I don't blame you.

c. I not blame you.

9- The farmer could sell his produce.

a. He could not sold his produce.

b. He is mot sold his produce.

c. He could not sell his produce.

    10-The officer solved the issue.

a. He is not solved the issue.

b. He didn't solve the issue.

c. He not solved the issue.

Test items / morphological negation (recognition part)

    Choose the appropriate negative form for the following:

1- That is believable.

a. Disbelievable

b. Nonbelievable

c. Unbelievable

d. Imbelievable

2- William is noble.

a. Unnoble

b. Disnoble

c. Ignoble

d. Misnoble

3- He is powerful.

a. Unpowerful

b. Dispowerful

c. Powerless

d. Mispowerful

4- This idea should have satisfied him.

a. Missatisfied

b. Nonsatisfied

c. Dissatisfied

d. Desatisfied

5- The story was perfect.

a. Unperfect

b. Nonperfect

c. Imperfect

d. Disperfect

6- This chapter is relevant.

a. Unrelevant

b. Disrelevant

c. Inrelevant

d. Irrelevant

7- He is quite patient.

a. Unpatient

b. Impatient

c. Dispatient

d. Nonpatiet

8- The legal side should be considered.

a. Nonlegal

b. Illegal

c. Inlegal

d. Unlegal

9- The virus is active.

a. Unactive

b. Disactive

c. Inactive

d. Misactive

10-The pictures are symmetrical.

a. Insymmetrical

b. Ilsymmetrical

c. Asymmetrical

d. Desymmetrical

Test items / Syntactic negation (production part)

Negate the following sentences

1- The earth goes around the moon.
2- Birds flew away.
3- Bees are always busy.
4- Tom was a carpenter.
5- The screen could have been wet.
6- I usually wake up late.
7- Tom may become president.
8- We try hard.
9- Did you go out last night?
10- Corona virus changed people's minds.

Test items / morphological negation (production part)

Negate the following:

1. That is believable.
2. She is a religious woman.
3. The case was legally closed.
4. This situation is acceptable.
5. She wears decent clothes.
6. There was a kind of agreement.
7. You should frost the chicken before cooking it.
8. You should activate your mobile in the classroom.
9. High heels are practical nowadays.
10. That will be understood.

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