Acquisition of Negation in The Anaañ Child Language

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ABSTRACT: *The study on the acquisition of negation in the Anaañ child language aimed at examining how an Anaañ child acquires negation. It also identifies the negative forms used by the Anaañ child. Ten children from Afaha Esang, Abak Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State were studied between the ages of one and a half and four years. The children's conversations with peers at play- the ground, with siblings and parents as well as interactive questionings by the researchers which were recorded formed the instrument for the collection of data for the study. The framework of principles and parameters (P&P) was adopted for the analysis of the data. The basic assumption for its adoption is the claim that children simply need to learn the values of relevant parameters to acquire the grammar of their native language. The study concluded that the Anaañ child makes use of the pre-verbal negation 'kú' – "don't" and the one-word negation, 'ìyó' – "no" to communicate rejection, denial, and disagreement. I, therefore,e recommends that more studies on different aspects of linguistic analysis be carried out on the Anaañ child language acquisition.*
KEYWORDS: acquisition, Anaañ, child language, negation, pre-verbal, post-verbal

INTRODUCTION

The ability to learn and produce natural language and move beyond the communication of sign and body language is unique to human beings. Fromkin, Rodman, and Hyams (2017) observe that children before the age of five already know most of the intricate system, that is the grammar of their language. Before they can add small numbers or tie their shoes, children are inflecting verbs and nouns, forming questions, negating sentences, using pronouns appropriately, and embedding clauses. Like adults, children coin new words at an early age irrespective of whatever language they are exposed to. (Etim, 2021). The process of acquisition begins at a very tender age. Fromkin,

Rodman, and Hyams (2017) add that infants show a very early response to different properties of language. The grammar develops in stages ; at each stage, the child's utterances conform to the rules and regularities acquired.

As a child's language develops, the child acquires a particular grammatical structure in a variety of native languages to which the child is exposed. However, Sopata (2010) says that no two children are precisely alike in their language development, but exhibit the same general pattern of development within the same general time frame. McLaughlin's (2006) views add that upon entering the world, infants are bathed in sounds – most significantly, the voices and words of their language. During those early weeks and months, the sounds and words of the surrounding language are integral parts of the baby's most intimate moments, as the baby is fed, cuddled, entertained, and rocked to sleep. During their first few years, children are immersed in the sounds and words of their language and they grow up to embrace it which makes acquisition come naturally.

Negation is one fundamental element of human language. Kari (2015) observes that there are a variety of ways of expressing negation in the languages of the world. It could be expressed through the use of free-standing words, intonation (voice modulation or variations in the pitch of the voice spread over the entire sentence), or affixation. Children acquire negation as one of the linguistic concepts in their language development. This is because negation is essential to a logical system and allows one to evaluate whether a statement is true or false as well as giving way for the expression of non-existence concepts. Anderson and Reilly (1997) maintain that negation is a universal feature of language. In addition, Essien (1990) notes that negation consists of syntactic and phonological devices by which a positive proposition is denied or said to be untrue, or by which a positive imperative order is prohibited. Crystal (2008) defines negation as a process or construction in grammatical and semantic analysis which typically expresses the contradiction of some or all of a sentence's meaning. In his study, Zanuttini (2010) observes that negative markers tend to occur in the same part of the structure as other types of grammatical information, standardly considered to be the nucleus of the clause, (for example, tense and aspect). Understanding the properties of the negative markers is likely to also shed light on the properties of these elements, through the study of their interaction. In English, both negative elements and interrogative elements license polarity items such as *anyone or anything* (Haegeman, 1995). Kari (2015) also adds that English expresses negation in a variety of ways including the use of the morpheme *not/n't*, inherently negative adverbs, and affixation. On that note, Virno (2018) adds that phonological or lexical phenomenon consists solely of a multiplicity of 'nots' (x is not y, y not w, etcetera). It is easy to believe that language forms a whole with negation. The most frequent element of negation is 'no' in a child's speech (Batet & Grau, 1995). It is used in places where adults use 'not' together with 'do' or an auxiliary or a modal. Therefore, from the foregone discussion, negation in Anaañ takes a preverbal as well as post-verbal position. In other words, bound morphemes are attached to the form of the verbal or adjectival constituent to express grammatical relationships The process is through affixation – prefixation, and suffixation.

Prefixation

A negative marker is a grammatical categorthatch is used by children and even adults and is marked by prefixation. Gleason (1961) in Agbedo (2000) states that prefixes are affixes that precede the root with which they are closely associated. According to Ndimele (2003), prefixes can be realized as negative, reversative, locative, age/size/degree, temporal, and scope. Examples of negative prefixes in English are: 'a' – **a**sexual, 'un' – **un**wise, and 'de' – **de**merit. Ndimele also adds that, a negative prefix in English words is an example of a phonologically conditioned morpheme, /un/. The morpheme has four variants: /in-/, /im-/, /il-/ and /ir-/. These variants occur in complementary distribution, that is, when one occurs, others do not. Examples of the different variants according to Ndimele are:

i.   /il-/ occurs before a root that begins with a lateral sound /l/ (e.g. illiterate, illogical, illiquid)
ii.   /im-/ occurs before a root beginning with bilabials, (e.g. imbalance, imperfect, impatient, impiety, immovable)
iii.   /ir-/ occurs before a root beginning with an /r/ (e.g. irrefutable, irrecoverable, irreligious, irrevocable)
iv.   /in-/ occurs elsewhere (e.g. inconsequential, inorganic etcetera).

Essien, (1990) also says that prefix is used to negate imperative sentences in Ibibio. Examples are as follows:
1.   Kúsín   -   'Do not put'
2.   Kúfèghe´   -   'Do not run'
3.   Kúban   -   'Do not sharpen or do not be initiate'
4.   Kúdíá   -   'Do not eat
5.   Kútìé   -   'Do not sit'
6.   Kú dọ́   -   'Do not marry'

According to Kari (2015), in Ejagham (a Niger-Congo language spoken in Cross River State), the negative marking on the verb occurs as a prefix as seen in the following examples as cited by Watters (2000)

7.   Ǹńǹ, ń- kà-   jǐ)
Yes, 1SG-NEG   go
'Yes, (I didn't go)'

In the Ejagham example above, the negative prefix **kà**- is attached to the lexical verb **jǐ** 'go'.

Mensah, (2001) adds that Efik has also 'kû' and 'dí/dú' as the preverbal negative indicators. Examples according to him are as follows:

kû-/

8.   kû   kòp

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neg. hear
'Do not listen'
9.   kû   bíghí
neg. overstay
Do not overstay"

/dí-/

10.   Nò   mí (mbaak) n   dí   frĕ
Give me   Rel.CL 1SG NEG forget
'Give me   so that   I do not forget
11.   Tíñ   ákpáníkò̩ (mbaak) ú   dú   tuă
Tell   truth   Rel-CL 2sg NEG   cry
Tell the truth so that you do not forget"

Suffixation
Suffixation is a process that involves the attachment of an affix which is referred to as a suffix at the end of a root either to inflect or derive another word, (Agbedo 2000). Ndimele (2003) adds that suffix is an affix that occurs after the base or root of a word. According to Etim & Udondata (2019), suffixes can be affixed to verbs to extend their grammatical meanings by ways of negation, repetition, affirmation, and sometimes plurality.

Objectives of the study
The study set out to meet the following objectives:
➢   to identify negative morphemes in Anaañ child language.
➢   To examine how an Anaañ child acquires negation.
➢   To identify the negative forms used by Anaañ children.

METHODS

The study on the acquisition of Negation in the Anaañ child language is descriptive in nature. However, ten children from the rural setting of Afaha Esañ, Abak Local Government in Akwa Ibom State, were studied. Their ages ranged from one year and six months to four years. The children were met in a local and informal setting where Anaañ is spoken as their first language and Anaañ is also used in their interactions with parents, siblings, and peers. The children were frequently interacted with and played with by the researchers for over some time. Questions requesting answers were often asked them randomly to be able to collect the data for this study. The conversations among themselves and the children's responses to questions were recorded.

Theoretical framework

The study anchors on the theory of principles and parameters (P&P) which is an approach within generative linguistics in which the syntax of a language is described in line with the general principles and specific parameters. The theory, according to Lasnik and Lohndal (2010) is an approach to the study of the human knowledge of language that developed out of Noam Chomsky's work in the 1970s. According to them, it is centered on two fundamental questions like other Chomsky's earlier works. The questions are:

1.   What is the correct characterization of the linguistic capacity of someone who speaks a language?
2.   How does this capacity arise in the individual? What aspects of it are acquired by exposure to relevant information (learned), and what aspects are present in advance of any experience (wired in)?

Ambridge & Lieven (2012) note that children's innate knowledge of language consists of knowledge of phrase structure, principles of language, and parameters for aspects of syntax that cannot be innate because they vary across languages. These three elements constitute Universal Grammar (UG). Chomsky (1981) asserts that principles and parameters are part of a genetically innate universal grammar (UG) that all humans possess barring any genetic disorder. This informs why Chomsky and Lasnik (1993) ask how children in different linguistic environments rapidly arrive at an accurate and complete grammar that seems to exhibit universal and non-obvious similarities.

According to Encyclopaedia Britannica, principles are linguistic universals, or structural features that are common to all natural languages, hence they are part of the child's native endowment. Parameters on the other hand are options that allow for variations in linguistic structure. The proposed principle which is readily set upon the Anaañ child's exposure to the linguistic data on negation is the pre-verbal, post-verbal as well as a one-word pattern. However, the parameter that is set through the child's linguistic performance is the preverbal and the one-word pattern as captured in the data presentation. It is important to note that this grammatical knowledge of negating an utterance is tacit rather than explicit. It is the competence at work that enables a child to give negative responses to questions.

Child language development

The language development of any human according to Berger (1994) relates not just to physical growth but also to mental development. Therefore, the growth or the development of the child must be side by side otherwise, the individual would have a developmental disorder or developmental delay. That is if their mental development is not in the same progression as their physical development. (Al-Harbi 2020). Children are born into an environment where communication is pivotal. They develop and grow up as social beings, immersed in a network of

relationships from the start. It is in this social setting that they are first exposed to language, to language in use (Clark, 2003). This is why McLaughlin (2006) observes that even before the production of the first word, communication between the child and the caregiver is occurring – at some level. However, it does not remove the fact that in acquiring language, children observe people around them using the language and the context of usage which eventually constitutes the child's linguistic experience of the language. (Radford, Martin, et 1999). Looking to the behaviorist psychologist, an individual is virtually conditioned by his or her environment. This means that human cultures are geographically determined and language development is merely a child's imitation of his or her surroundings. (Bochner & Jones, 2003). However, much beyond the idea of environment, Noam Chomsky (2006) claims that everyone is born with a 'language acquisition device' in the brain that allows an inborn capacity for language understanding and use. Idrayani & Jember (2016) add that in learning a language, people have an innate ability to detect grammatical categories for specific languages such as phonology, syntax, and semantic. The innate ability gives the children an opportunity to acquire the language that he or she is exposed to. Spada & Lightbown (2004) note also that children's first language acquisition begins at birth and continues to puberty (the 'critical period'). Children can acquire any natural language given the appropriate experience of the language. Fromkin, Rodman & Hyams (2007) observe that children acquire some aspects of syntax very quickly, even while they are still in the telegraphic stage. Children produce correctly, the word order of their language in their earliest multi-word utterances and they understand word order even when they are in the one-word stage of production.

Child negation
According to Abdulkarim and Roeper (1998), a child may not initially see how his language represents negation because negation exhibits a lot of language variations. Fromkin, Rodman, and Hyams (2007) observe that before they can add 2 to 2, children are conjoining sentences, asking questions, using appropriate pronouns, negating sentences, forming relative clauses, and inflecting verbs and nouns, and in general have acquired the syntactic, phonological, morphological and semantic rules of the grammar. In this study, negation in the Anaañ child language will be grouped into two sets. Negation in Anaañ is pre-verbal, and a one-word negation.

The first stage of the development of negation by children is characterized by the use of the pre-verbal negation, 'kú' "don't" and the one-word negation, 'ìyó', "no". In acquiring the syntax of simple sentences, children produce their first sentences by using these single words much more frequently to mean rejection, denial, and disagreement. The word 'ìyó' is used in isolation when the children first start using it and later on combine it with other forms like verbs, nouns, et cetera. Examples of 'kú' as used by the children during their conversations:

12.   Kú   bìdé   mbìdé k'   ítìé   ádè
Neg play(V) play   PREP   place   that
'Don't play in that place

13.   Kú   nám   mkpọ   ádè
Neg. do things   that
'Don't do that

14.   Kú   míá   ànyé
Neg.   beat   she
'Don't beat her'

15.   Kú   sàñá   ù   m kpèdé
Neg. walk   2sg   1sg   near
'Don't come close to me'

16.   Kú   bén
     Neg. carry
        'Don't carry'

Examples of 'ìyó' -   "No" as they responded to questions asked by the researchers
    17. Speaker (adult):   à   mé   díá   mkpọ́
                            2sg Aux   eat a thing
                            'Have you eaten?;
        Response (Child): ìyó
                            'No'
    18. Speaker (adult)   Nsídé à   dú   díá ghá   mkpọ́
                            Why 2sg Aux   eat NEG. thing
                            'why have you not eaten?
        Response (Child):   ìyó
                            'No'
    19 Speaker (adult): àmmá' fò   mmọ́dé
                            Mother your in
                            'Is your mum in?'
        Response (Child): ìyó
                            'No'
    20. Speaker (adult): àmmá' fò   á   kà   úké
                            Mother your 3sg go   where
                            'Where has your mum gone to'
        Response (Child): ìyó
                            'No'
    21. Speaker (adult): Dí   yàk   ì   nyòñ
                            Come let   3pl   go
                            'Come let us go'

b. Response (Child): ìyó

'No'

22. Speaker (adult): k'   údúọ́k mmọ́ñ ádè ké   ndé.
                      Neg.   pour   water the PREP there
                      'Do not pour the water there'

   b. Response (Child): ìyó

'No'

In the above examples, the single-word negative marker which is frequently used by children as they acquire language is played out. A child responds to almost every question (both yes-No questions), command, instruction or directives with a single negative marker to express rejection and disagreement, nonexistence and refusal. A child hardly uses the negative suffixes as "-ké, -ghé, -má, -ghá, -tá, etc" to express themselves as adults do.

CONCLUSION

In Anaañ, the negative prefix is 'ku' and iyo are aspects of the g. The negative marker 'ku' is added to an imperative verb to express disagreement or refusal. Some examples from an adult Anaañ native speaker are as follows:

23.   Kú – sín   -   'Do not put'
24.   Kú – fèghé   -   'Do not run'
25.   Kú – kòp   -   'Do not listen'
26.   Kú – díá   -   'Do not eat'
27.   Kú – tìé   -   'Do not sit'
28.   Kú - dọ́   -   'Do not marry'

As 'ku' is affixed to the verb in the above data, Essien 1990 notes that the prefix 'ku' in Ibibio which is also applied in Anaañ characteristically bears a falling tone, which is capable of influencing the inherent tone of the root of the verb. This, however, depends on the syllabic structure of the root of the verb. If the root is CVC or CV, its inherent tone is raised too high if the former were low, but its inherent tone remains high or becomes high-low if it were already high.

29.   (a) Kòp ítèm   nọ̀ ùsọ
    Hear advice give father
        'Listen to your father's advice'
     (b) kû   kóp   ítèm   ù   nọ̌   ùsọ́
         Neg. hear advice   2sg give father
         'Do not listen to your father's advice'
30.   (a) dọ́   ájén   ádè

marry child   that
        'Marry that child'
    (b) kû   dọ́   ájén   ádè
        Neg. marry   child   that
        'Do not marry that child'

In Anaañ, suffixes can be affixed to verbs to extend their grammatical meaning by way of negation. Some of the negative suffixes as given by an adult native speaker are:

31.   Ḿ   bát   tá
1sg. count Neg.
'I am not counting'
32.   Ḿ   féghé ké
    1sg.   run   Neg
        'I am not running'
33.   Ń   sáññá ké
 1sg. walk   Neg
 'I am not walking'
34.   Ń   tìè   ghé
1sg   sit   Neg
'I am not sitting'
35.   N   ńyàm   má
1sg   sell   Neg.
        'I am not selling'
36.   Ń   ka´   ghá
    1sg   go   Neg
    I am not going'

Negative suffixes in Anaañ have many forms which are phonologically conditioned by the root of the verb. Some of the variant forms of Anaañ negative suffixes are: (-ké, -ghé, -má, -ghá, -tá, etc). The forms depend on the category of syllable structure of the root word which may be CVC, CV or CVCV. From the above data, it is observed that –ké is suffixed to CVCV verbs, -tá, -ghé and -má are suffixed to CVC verbs, then –ghá to CV verbs.

Negation in Anaañ varies morphologically as the structures with which it presents itself is relatively predictable both in adult and children language. /kû/ occurs pre-verbally as prefixes and /ké, -ghé, -má, -ghá, -tá,/ occur post-verbally as suffixes, while /iyó/ appears as a one word negation. Children most times acquire negation through imitation as they repeat what they hear the adults around them speak.

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