

The first steps in Russian negation

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Seen logically, negation is used in order to deny or disprove the existence of something, to cancel or to nullify the effect of something. In the academic classification, there exist negative words (e.g. adverbs, particles), sentences (e.g. questions), decisions or utterances. The negative transformation in Russian is not often described as grammatical phenomenon, the exception are studies of language logics, contrastive studies and handbooks of Russian as second language. It seems not to be a subject of general interest for researchers in child language any more. In the earlier studies, negation in child language has been described by Bloom 1970; Fraser et al. 1963; MacNeill 1970; Miller 1973. It has been demonstrated, that the early negation expressed non-existence, disappearance, rejection, prohibition, inability and denial; that children have much less difficulty with inversion, if inversion is a more general rule in adults' language. The particular selection of a negative is determined by the main verb. From the formalistic point of view, sentences describing events must use negatio only in cases, when some negative concepts or their traits are underlined. In a dialogue, positive and negative questions and answers are built in Russian differently from most of the European languages. The specificity of Russian negation in adults' speech consists in following facts:

1. In a dialogue, the whole partner's utterance is evaluated with introductive «da» / «net» (yes/no) tags, independently of the general (negative or positive) meaning of the following utterance.
2. There are negative affixes and negative particles («ne» and «ni»), which are interpreted with a lot of errors by adult speakers of Russian; this word class is studied usually in morphology.
3. In a negative utterance, almost all of the meaningful words can be accompagnied by a one or more negative particles. The conclusion about the meaning of the whole sentence is made with the help of logical operations. The negative sentences are mentioned in Russian syntax, but they aren't usually described meticulously.

Negative particles as an element of child's language have been collected in Gvozdev 1961 and analyzed as a part of speech. His study has shown, that negation was firstly omitted, then appeared in several contexts, then accrued in meaning connected with the use of other nuancing tools. In the literature about mother tongue education the focus is put onto the training of Genitive vs. Accusative forms of dependent noun, because this is one of the most frequent errors in child's speech (after a negative word, a Genitive is possible and after «net» it is even obligatory) (Fedorenko et al. 1984). As Cvetkova 1961 remarks, one of the most frequent mistakes committed by Russian school children (and, as I could add, adults as well) is the logics of

interpreting the particle «ne» with nouns, adjectives and adverbs and some verbs – whether it belongs to the main meaning of the word and influences the sense of the word and therefore it has to be written separately. There are some hints for a child who tries to interpret the negated word: if the verb is also negated or if there are some evaluative words, the particle must be written together. Many researchers have observed, that if a word does not exist without «ne-» as prefix, it can nevertheless be separated from the root by the child and interpreted as a particle, as in the words «nel'zja» /forbidden/ which becomes «l'zja» /you may/ or «nenavidet'» /to hate/ which becomes «navidet'» /to like something/. These words can be discovered in the language of the most of the Russian children.

1. In my case studies upon imitation of negation I have made an attempt to show, that there are no mistakes in the repetitions of negative sentences: the particle is never placed wrongly after the verb, even if other words may occupy every possible different position in the utterance. In another study I have investigated the ways of childish negation, when the instruction (a command or a question) demands to accomplish previously a logical operation of denial or confirmation. 54 situations were given to 40 children of 4 age groups. The results were as follows: mistakes were committed by 39,8% of 3-4 old children, 25,2% by 4-5 years old children, 13,0% by 5-6 years old, and 2,0% by 6-7 years old subjects. The logics of answer develops from concrete towards abstract, from constation towards generalization, from unimportant towards important, from details towards the integrity, from the own towards someone else's. E.g. answering a question like «You have got at home two dolls and three cars, haven't you?», a 3-years old child says «Many dolls have I got», children aged 4 say: «But I am a boy», or «Only one doll with blue hair», 5-years old prefer to say «I have no doll», 6-years old say «Two dolls and only one car». To the question «Does a cat drink milk?» more than a half of all children answered that they had no cat, from the other answers «It drinks, in the grandmother's village near the barn» and «And I like kefir» were of interest. When asked: «Do I say it correctly: people do not eat candies?», small children answered: «One must eat candies»; «My grandfather buys lots of candies»; middle-aged pre-schoolers mentioned: «Because you eat too much and your stomach bumps»; «You'll have a toothache»; «Because the toothache comes from candies»; «Because people do not like, and children like», «Sometimes do not eat, because then you'll have a toothache», and only the oldest pre-schoolers think, that people eat sweets. So, the form of the question is more difficult than the real situation, it provokes wrong interpretations. To support this hypothesis, I have made experiments with the interrogative form and I have observed, that the form «Is the snow white?» was easier than «Is it correct, that the snow is white?», which was easier than «Is it correct, that the snow is black?», and the most difficult sentence to be understood happened to be «Is it correct, that the snow is not white?» (judged after the number of correct answers and the quickness of the answer). If a question contents a negation, it is more difficult to understand, than a positive question. Furthermore, the logics of linguistic tools to express negation is learned throughout the pre-school years; the correct use of negation doesn't necessarily lead to correct interpretation. The concept of negation in children is larger than its concrete applications in discourse.

My longitudinal study of the two Russian girls up to the age of three deals with the very first steps in the acquisition of different forms of negation in Russian. Different meanings and uses of negating thought and its verbalization are demonstrated below.

2. In the case of an «early talker» V. the first «net» /no/ appeared by 0;15 and was a constation of the non-existence as a rejection of an own utterance. Looking at a plant in an

unknown picture, V. described it «cvetochki, listiki, jabloko» /flowers, leaves, apple – the series was a repetition of a previous situation/; after the mother asked: «Where is the apple here?», V. answered: «net'». Constatations like «daddy isn't here» were produced from then on as an initiative of the child. By 1;05 «ne xochu» /I don't want/, «ne nraivitsja» /I don't like it/, «ne budu» /I'm not going to/ were used as whole words and whitnessed of an internal negation, of a wish not to do something; «spasibo vsjo» /thank you, that's all/ at the end of a meal expressed the same thing. The next variant of negative word acquired was «netu» /there is no/, which demanded a Genetive, but was used without till the age 2;06. Negative words appeared first in the postposition, e.g. «butylka netu» /bottle there is no/ or later (1;07): «mama zhuzhzhit net» /mummy hums no/. By 1;06 negative particle separated from the word in the non-conventional form of «i» and later became «ni». Only afterwards «net» developed as an answer in opposition to «da». The meanings of prohibition, constatation of a negative fact or action are expressed then: «not needed», «you cannot open» (while trying to open herself a box with medecine), «doesn't suit», «don't put», sometimes in a wrong combination with a finite verbal form instead of an infinitive: «ne nado plachem» /don't we cry/. The proposition to be negated may also be expressed by a duplicated imperative, e.g. (1;07): answering to mother's proposal: «Davaj nadenem busiki na V.» /Let's put the necklace on V./, V. says: «davaj-davaj ne xochet» /doesn't want to let/. Negative adverbs used after 2;0 are: «nemnozhko» /a bit/, «nepravil'no» /wrong/. The fact that negation may be pleonastic provokes superfluous and therefore wrong negation (2;0): «i vot tak nichego ne vidno ne byvaet» /and so nothing isn't seen cannot be/ – the sentence obviously combines some ready-made negative expressions. In a dialogue, the correct selection of negation is sometimes difficult (2;0): «Aren't you afraid? – No. – Never? – Yes, I am not afraid.» The intensification of negation is conventionally marked by negative particle «ni»; combined with logical operation of quantification, it causes some difficulties in the use of negation (2;01): «net, ni M., ni N., ni S., vse ne priglasili, tol'ko igrushki menja priglasili» /no, neither M., nor N., nor S., everybody hasn't invited me, only the toys have invited me/. The use of intensifiers is attractive for children, so the child V. tries this construction over and over again, producing wrong utterances (2;02): «net, ne nado na menja ni kolgotki, ni koftochku, ni botinki ne nadevat'» /no, you don't mustn't put on me neither tights, nor shirt, nor shoes/. Otherwise, almost all of the uses are correct, even a complex case of «poka /until/ + ne» (2;05): «pust' oni stojat zdes', poka ja ne pokushala» /let them stay here, until I haven't eaten/ – Past Tense is here colloquial, a Future would be better. Still during the period observed the conjugation of negative pronouns (like «nikto» /nobody/ and «nichto» /nothing/) was difficult. So, as we can see, there is a certain discrepance between what a child thinks and what she is able to express. Logical structures underlying child's speech are nowhere as evident as in these first universal judgements. The development of negation is a complex function of language and thought. 3. In the case of a «late talker» M. negation other than simple babbling-like repetitions «ne-ne-ne-ne-ne» in function of rejection, refusal and prohibition (which was here the same thing) was used starting with 2 years. «Ni» was used instead of «ne», both being negative particles, and «net» was pronounced as «nja». When something wasn't done, M. often used a variant with a free particle, which became typical and lasted for a long period of time. [I have told you to stay here] – «a ja ne» /and I haven't/. «Da ne(t)» /but no/ was a common way to express dissatisfaction, to constate that M. had another opinion or wanted to formulate a distinctive wish. There was also another stable expression from the adults' language, which was adequate: «ne tu, druguju» /not this one, another one/. The logics of negation started with a simple introduction of one negative word into the whole sentence: «bol'shoj net» /there was no big/. When the word «nel'zja» /it is forbidden/ was already acquired, its introduction into the

sentence caused still appearance of ungrammatical forms. «M. (Nom.) nel'zja af-af» /The dog is not allowed to bark at M./, «dida nel'zja atata» /grandfather is not allowed to beat/. The binding of the words into an utterance was still unusual (2;01): «nel'zja po krovat' botinka, nel'zja botinka xodit'» /forbidden to go on the bed of the shoe, forbidden of the shoe to go = without having taken your shoes off/. A verb with negation can be also interpreted as one form; it is characteristic, that the negative particle is used as well as by the first child in the shortened form of «i». By 2;02, if asked, whether there is something or no, M. answers always correctly: «net, est'» /still, there is/. «Nichego» (Gen. from «nichts» /nothing/) means both «there is nothing here» and «there is nothing to be afraid of», as in the adults' input. The next step in the acquisition of logical negation consists in the development of antonymical contrasts. When told, that the bottle is dirty and must be washed up: «da net, chistaja» /but no, it is clean/. While learning to act properly, the child acquires also the alternative ways of handling: «sejchas ne(t), sejchas tuda, vot tak» /now not, now there, so/. «Net» and «ne» start to be used differently and adequately: «net, ne s syrom, s maslom» /no, not with cheese, with butter/. Negative adverbs start to appear by the same time, e.g. «nikogda» /never/. From 2;03 on, the correct contexts are growing in number. In many sentences, a positive and a negative forms are combined: «ne tak, a tak i tak» /not so, but so and so/; «èto nashe, a èto ne nashe» /this is ours, and this is not ours/. Such utterances reflect new developments in cognition. The child can represent the hypothetical situation and imagine alternative future pictures of her wishes. But those sentences represent also the fact that the child has already acquired the positive and the negative verbal ways of speaking about future. In a highly motivated situation negative verbal form becomes more elaborated, combined with correct government of noun cases and the use of dependent infinitives. The negated action is sometimes omitted, so that the whole situation is negated: «papa ni, tol'ko mama» /daddy no, only mummy/. The negative imperative is difficult, e.g. (2;04): «ne vid' M.» /don't see M./; it is also used with a non-correct choice of verbal aspect («ne ubegite, ne vykljuchi, ne polozhi, ne zakroj, ne pojdi, ne polozhi» and so on). In ready-made expressions, the pleonastic negation may be correct. Negation appears often paired with oppositive conjunction «no» and «a» (but), and this case demands a more structured thought or proof (2;06): «It is tasty, but I don't like this one, which was bought by mummy»; «I want to put on red tights, and I don't want to put on black ones, because they are too dark». The negation as a rhetoric tool is reflected and used consciously; the double negation underlines the positive sense of the phrase: «Let's go and see, where is our daddy, and not non-our». Negative adverb can evaluate the whole situation, even if it doesn't happen in the same way in adults' speech: «nikak» /no way/ means that the event she is waiting for doesn't come. Negative particle is freely combined with an adjective since 2;08. Construction with a negated verb + infinitive is generalized and applied to the cases, where only a subordinate clause is possible (2;11): «ja ne obsudila formochki vzjat'» /I haven't discussed to take the modeling shapes/, that is an important mark of distinction between the real situation and the speech act. By 2;11 the dispersion of negating particles is redundant and excessive: «ni krema, ni myl'ca – vsjo mne ne daj, ne daj mne nichego» /no creme, no soap – everything don't give me, don't give me nothing/; the first part is wrong, and the second reformulated part is correct. But in the following example: «ja prinjala nichego» /I have swallowed nothing/ the obligatory negative particle is absent before the verb. So, the analysis of the data demonstrates a congruence of my observations to the typology of negation in different languages. One of the absent forms in Russian – Subjunctive mode – is for example compensated by Russian children if they want to express a negative wish, literally: «Go away, but you won't be here», «Let me not to do» and «Sitted down do not be». Even if some cases in Russian do not characterize the adults' lan-

guage, they are important for the growing mind of a child and appear in a certain period of the verbal development.

The present study was concentrated on the very first discourse productions of Russian children. It has been demonstrated, that the unimportant or irrelevant distinctions that are characteristic for adults' speech are reproduced in child's language. The order of appearance of negative meanings (particles and prepositions) is rather similar in all of the children. In the course of acquiring full competence in her/his native language, the child must acquire a socially elaborated and traditionally transmitted competence in its logical system. This competence includes some interrelated grammatical and cognitive skills. Negation as a cognitive operation starts to be used in the very first utterances, but its forms have to undergo a long evolution until they can be used properly and adequately in all formal and linguistic situations. The wrong usage of negative forms is typologically justified, even if it isn't evident in Russian.

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