

Negative Concord in Child Standard English
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Zeijlstra's uni-directional typological generalisation:

If a language has a negative marker that is a syntactic head, the language exhibits NC (Zeijlstra, 2004: 266).

Research hypothesis & proposal:

The study proposes that when children have acquired the productive use of *n't* as a syntactic negative head, their grammar must potentially produce and license NC.

Negative head:

(*n't*): hasn't, don't, doesn't, won't, haven't, isn't, aren't, hadn't, cannot, can't, needn't

Negative Quantifiers:

(NQs): no, nobody, nothing, never, no-one, no one, noone, none, neither.

Results

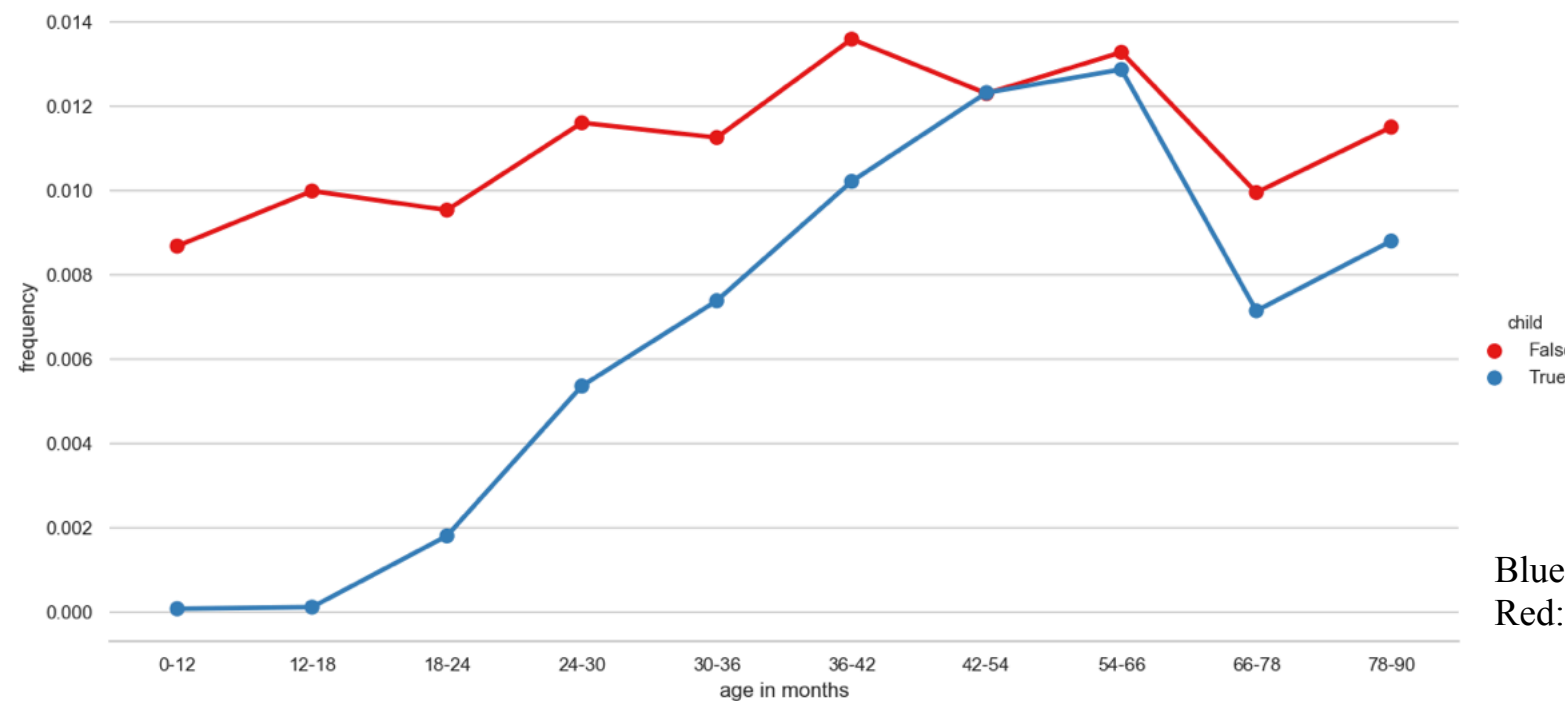


Figure1: Acquisition of *n't*

Blue: Child
Red: CDS

X-axis: Age in months
Y-axis: Avg. word freq.

Fig:1

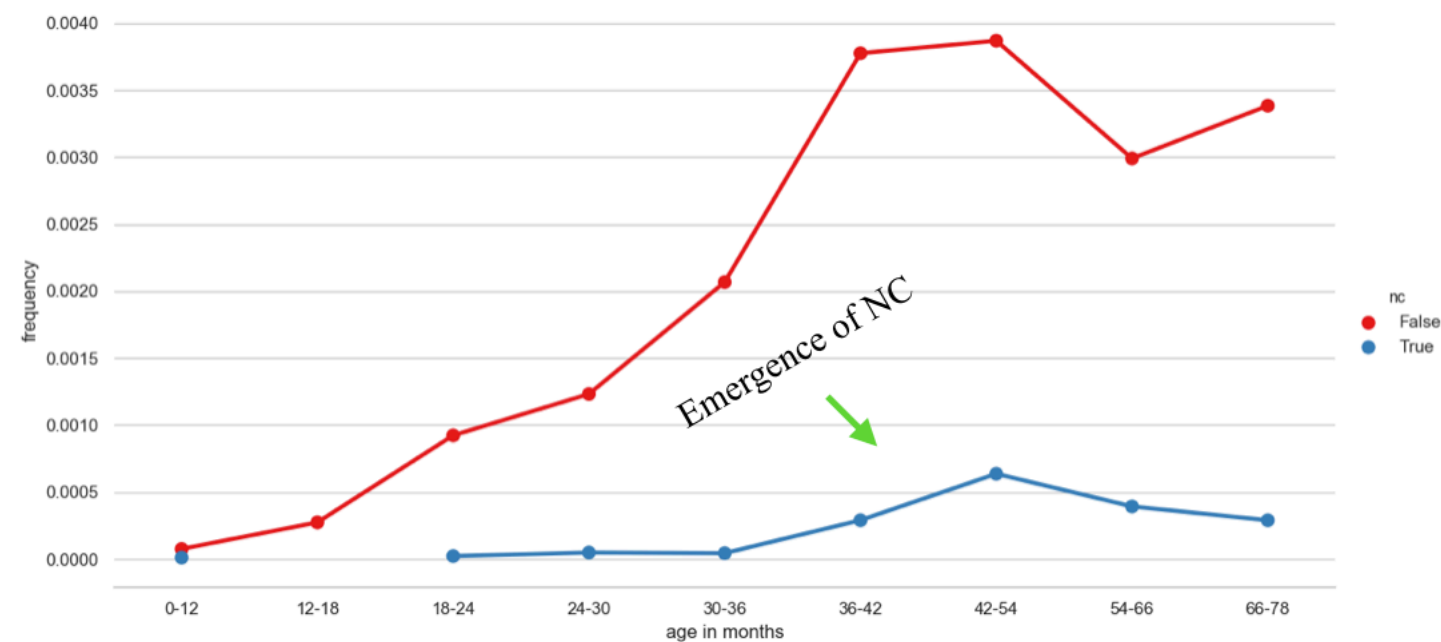


Figure 2: Acquisition of NQs and NC

Blue: NC
Red: NQs

X-axis: Age in months
Y-axis: Avg. word freq.

Fig:2

Conclusion:

- From 18 months on the negative head *n't* is being acquired and develops quite rapidly.
- NQs emerge from 24 months of age.
- NC shows up in child speech from 36 months onward,
- Initially NC is not a prominent production in child language but from 42 months on it becomes prominent.
- The fact that children acquiring Standard English produce negative concord constructions provides empirical support for the hypothesis that negative concord is at least initially part of the 'core' grammar of child Standard English.

Future Outlook: Investigating the acquisition of NC in NC varieties of English; African American, Bristol and Belfast.

References:

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