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**Department of English**



***Investigating the Difficulties Faced by Iraqi  
EFL learners in Using Negation***

A paper

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Degree of B.A in English Language and Linguistics

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَا تَأْتِينَا السَّاعَةُ قُلْ بَلَىٰ وَرَبِّي لَتَأْتِيَنَّكُمْ عَالِمِ  
الْغَيْبِ ۗ لَا يَعْزُبُ عَنْهُ مِثْقَالُ ذَرَّةٍ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَلَا فِي الْأَرْضِ  
وَلَا أَصْغَرُ مِنْ ذَلِكَ وَلَا أَكْبَرُ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ مُّبِينٍ

صدق الله العظيم

سورة سبأ (419)

*In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful*

*The Unbelievers say, "Never to us will come the Hour":  
Say, "Nay! but most surely, by my Lord, it will come upon  
you;- by Him Who knows the unseen,- from Whom is not  
hidden the least little atom in the heavens or on earth:  
Nor is there anything less than that, or greater, but is in  
the Record Perspicuous.*

Ali (2006: 419)

## **Dedication**

To my mother ,father and brother whose love runs in my blood stream.

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## Section One

### Introduction

#### 1.1-The Problem

Grammar is partly the study of what forms or structures are possible in language. Traditionally, grammar has been concerned almost exclusively with analysis at the level of the sentence. Thus grammar is a description of the rules that govern how language's sentences are formed. In English, the Negation structure is a more preferable pragmatic strategy so that a native speaker would say "I don't think he is a good teacher" instead of "I think he is not a good teacher." A **negative** is a word or phrase that shows you reject or disagree with something. We use negatives all the time. Negative words like ( **Can't, don't, won't isn't, doesn't, never** and **nobody** . (Harmer 1999:9).

This study tries to answer the following questions :

- 1.What is meant by negative ?
- 2.What are the difficulties faced by Iraqi EFL learners in recognizing negative sentences ?

#### 1.2 The Aims

This study aims to:

- 1.Explain the meaning of negative.
- 2.Investigate the difficulties faced by Iraqi EFL learners in recognizing and production negative sentences.

### **1.3The Hypotheses**

It is hypothesized that :

1. There are many definitions of negation .
2. There are some difficulties faced by Iraqi EFL learners in recognizing and production negative sentences .

### **1.4 The Procedures**

1. Presenting a theoretical background knowledge about negative in English .
2. Testing fourth year students from the Department of English College of Education for Human Sciences /University of Babylon (2022-2023) to assess their performance in negative construction .

### **1.5The Limits**

The study is limited to the performance of fourth year students from the Department of English College of Education for Human Sciences University of Babylon(2022-2023) in recognizing and production negative sentences because they are the most advanced learners of English as a foreign language at the B. A. level.



## **1.6The Value**

It is hoped that this paper would be of help to those who have interest in negation in English whether they are students or teachers.

## Section Two

### Theoretical Background

#### 2.1 Introductory Remarks

Quirk et al.(1985: 1033) state that **negative** is a word or phrase that shows you reject or disagree with something. We use negatives all the time in regular conversation, so a lot of these words should be familiar to you. **Can't, don't, and won't** are all common negatives (as well as **isn't, doesn't, and not**). Words like **never** and **nobody** are negatives too , they just express disagreement in a different way.

Morante and Sporleder (2012:76) state that negation is a complex phenomenon that has been studied from many perspectives, including cognition, philosophy, and linguistics. In English, the usual negative formation is as follows: “When we use verbs like think, suppose and believe to introduce a negative idea, we prefer to make the introductory verb negative, not the verb in the subordinate clause.”

Foley (1997:43) mentions that some negatives do not sound like negatives because they do not include the words **no** or **not**. **unhappy, asymmetrical, nonsense, and dislike**. All of these words have a **negative prefix** that changes the meaning from one thing to another. Negative prefixes include **a-, dis-, il-, im-, in-, ir-, non-, and un-**.

We use negatives like **can't** and **won't** because they are so familiar, but the truth is that there are many ways to write a negative sentence (Ibid)

For Bybee et al. (1994:87), words like **hardly**, **seldom**, **rarely**, and **never** can be used to negate things in a different way. Unlike **don't** and **won't**, they have different degrees of meaning.

## 2.2 The Concept of Negation

**Negation** means that one adds something into a sentence that negates, or reverses, the meaning of that sentence. In English, there are two main ways that one can do this. The first is to add “not” to the verb, and the second is to add “no” to the noun. The first kind of negation is adding “n’t” or “not” to a word in the sentence, (Quirk et al., 1985:655), like this example:

*1. The movie was not good*

The addition of the word *not* (or, alternatively, changing was not to wasn’t) means that one reverses the meaning of the rest of the sentence. The above means that, in fact, the movie was terrible. (Ibid)

The second kind of negation is used when we use a word that means something opposite. For example, if you have negative words like **never**, **neither**, **nobody**, **no**, **none**, **nor**, **nothing** and **nowhere**. In a sentence, you know that the meaning of the sentence is also reversed. For example:

2. There are no more drinks in the fridge.
3. This means that the fridge is empty of drinks.

For any given sentence, there are generally two ways that one can negate it, or say the opposite. If I say that everyone wants to try the new ice cream shop, someone else can contradict me by saying:

4. Everyone does not want to try the new ice cream shop.
5. No one wants to try the new ice cream shop.

The first example uses the not negation, and the second example uses the negative word negation. (Foley, 1997:43).

## **2.3 Types of Negative**

### **2.3.1 Negative Verb Conjugation**

The most common negative construction in English is the negative conjugation of a verb using the word "**not**". Main verbs can be made negative by placing "**not**" directly after the auxiliary verb in a conjugation. Brown and Levinson (1987. 80)

The sentence structure for a negative verb conjugation is:

*Subject + auxiliary verb + "not" + main verb + object[s].*

The combination of "not" and an *auxiliary* verb is often contracted in English. For example:

do not = don't, will not = won't, and *has* not = hasn't.

6. She won't come to the party tomorrow.

7. Tom has not finished the report.

8. We aren't studying Russian this semester.

### 2.3.2 Negative Imperative

Imperative sentences are used to instruct or command others. "**do not**" (or "**don't**") is used before the main verb of a sentence to create a negative imperative an instruction *not* to do something. No subject is required in the negative imperative form (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 81).

The negative imperative sentence structure is:

"Do" + "not" + verb + object[s].

9. Do not begin without me.

10. Don't waste any time.

11. Do not touch the glass. (Bybee et al., 1994:54)

### 2.3.3 "No" and "Not + Any" Negative Sentences

Svartvik and Quirk (1980:64) mention that "No" negative sentences and "not + any" negative sentences are very similar. There are a number of "no" words (such as nowhere, nobody, nothing, and no one) and "any" words (such as anyone, anybody, anything, and anywhere) that can serve the same purpose in making a sentence negative.

"Any" words take negative verb structures and "no" words take positive structures. "Any" word sentences require a "not" as well, which precedes it. "No" and "not + any" can be used interchangeably (Ibid).

The sentence structure of a "no" word negative sentence is: *Subject* + auxiliary verb + main verb + "no" word + object[s]. (Ibid)

12.They have no pets.

To make this a "not + any" negative sentence:

13.They do not have any pets.

14.I have nothing more to say.

15.The boys invited no one to their party.

16.Timothy has gone nowhere this summer.

17. She bought nobody a present. (ibid)

For Svartvik and Quirk (1980:64), the sentence structure of an "any" word negative sentence is:

Subject + auxiliary verb + "not" + main verb + "any" word + object[s].

18.Mary isn't going to eat any dinner.

19.Susan did not see anybody at work today.

20.Peter hasn't done anything for the past three days.

21.I'm not meeting anyone tomorrow.

To make this a "no" negative sentence: I'm meeting no one tomorrow.

22.Alex hasn't traveled anywhere outside of the United States. (Ibid)

### **2.3.4 Double Negatives**

Double negatives are a common but incorrect negative structure in English. They are characterized by the use of two "no" words (such as not and nowhere) in one sentence. Most people who use double negatives are trying to make a "no" word negative sentence but mistakenly add "not" to it as well. Double negatives are incorrect because two negative words or phrases cancel each other out to contribute positive meaning to a phrase (Foley, 1997:43).

23.He doesn't like nothing.

24.Angela has not visited no one this month.

25.They aren't traveling nowhere for the holidays.

Do **not**, under any circumstances, use double negatives. Instead, use either one "**no**" word on its own or one "any" word (with an accompanying "**not**") to form a negative sentence.(Ibid)

### 2.3.5 "Never" Sentences

"Never" describes something that does not happen at all and therefore must be used with a positive verb to convey negative meaning. Auxiliary verbs are not needed for negative sentences in the *present simple* or *past simple* tense the "**never**" already indicates that something is not ever *done* (an auxiliary conjugation). (Morante and Sporleder ,2012:44)

The sentence structure of a "never" negative sentence is:

Subject + auxiliary verb + "never" + verb + object.

26.She never takes time off work.

27.Mary has never returned my calls.

28.Peter never walked to school when he was young.

### 2.3.6 "Neither...Nor" Sentences

The phrase "**neither ... nor**" is used when expressing two negatives together. Unlike double negatives, "**neither...nor**" sentences use no negatives to express negative meaning. Rather, they contain two positive alternatives made untrue by "**neither**" and "**nor**". The verb in one of these sentences applies to all objects because the speaker is making two related untrue statements that do not stand alone. (Quirk et al., 1985:65)

29.I have neither the time nor have I had the desire to do my work.

30.She has neither the time nor the money to help her friends.



## **2.4 Words Negative in Meaning but not in Form**

There are several adverbs and determiners which are negative in meaning but not in form. They include: (scarcely, hardly, barely little, few (in contrast to the positive a little and a few). These can affect clause negation. (Dixon , 2005 : 439)

31.Hardly anyone wants the job.

32.They scarcely seem to care, do they?

33.They hardly have any friends, do they?

As with other initial negative adverbials, the adverbs normally cause subject-operator inversion when they are positioned initially as adverbials or as modifiers within an adverbial in literary and oratorical style (Ibid).

34.Little did I expect such enthusiasm from so many.

35.Scarcely ever has the Iraqi national team suffered so much humiliation.

36.Few changes have ever taken so many people by surprise.

Verbs, adjectives, and prepositions with negative meaning may be followed by nonassertive items, particularly any and its compounds: (Ibid)

37.She avoided ever speaking to us.

38.We are unaware of any hostility.

## 2.5 The Function of Negation

In grammar, negation is when certain words or entire sentences are nullified or shown to be untrue by adding a special type of word called a negative. The most common example is the negative adverb **not**, used with auxiliary verbs like **do** or **be** to negate the original meaning of a sentence. Quirk and Greenbaum (1972 : 194 )

39.I like the new car.

40.I do not like the new car.

These two sentences have completely opposite meanings, even though most of the words are the same. The main difference is the word **not** (and its necessary partner do), which reverses the entire meaning.

In English grammar, negation is a grammatical construction that contradicts (or negates) all or part of the meaning of a sentence, also known as a negative construction or standard negation.

In standard English, negative clauses and sentences commonly include the negative particle not or the contracted negative **not**. Other negative words include **no, none, nothing, nobody, nowhere, and never**.

In many cases, a negative word can be formed by adding the prefix -un to the positive form of a word (as in **unhappy** and **undecided**). (Ibid : 195 )

## **Section Three**

### **Testing and Data Collection**

#### **3.1 Definition of Test**

Skehan (1999: 203) states that a language test is a systematic method and a means of checking the students' performance through the elicitation of a certain behavior to make inferences about certain characteristics of an individual. For Al- Juboury (1999:1), a test is any means of checking what students can do with the language. Also, it is as a systematic procedure for observing and describing one or more characteristics of a person with the aid of either a numerical or category system.

#### **3.2 Features of a Good Test**

Al- Juboury( 1999: 24) states that a good test should contain the following features :

##### **3.2.1 Validity**

According to Al-Juboury (1999:84), validity is the degree to which a test measures what is supposed to measure or can be used successfully for the intended purpose. In fact, there are two kinds of validity here the researcher is going to shed light of them; content validity and face validity .

### **3.2.1.1 Content Validity**

According to Al-Juboury (1999:25), the term 'content validity' refers to how well a survey or test measures the construct that it sets out to measure. A valid test must be used upon a careful analysis of the subject or skill we are testing.

### **3.2.1.2 Face Validity**

The term 'face validity' refers to the extent to which a test appears to measure what it claims to measure based on face value. For example, a researcher may create a questionnaire that aims to measure depression levels in individuals. A colleague may then look over the questions and deem the questionnaire to be valid purely on face value. (Ibid: 26).

### **3.3.2 Reliability**

Reliability means the constancy of test scoring. If a test is applied twice to the same student, it will give the same result(ibid).

### **3.3.3 Practicality**

It is also known as 'usability'. A test that is valid and reliable but difficult to administer or score or which is expensive may fail to gain acceptance (ibid :27) .

### **3.4 Test Design**

The test consists of two questions the first measures the recognition level and the second measures the production level. Each question consists of ten items. The students are given sentences and they are required to respond according to their background knowledge concerning the Negation .

### **3.5 The Sample**

A random sample of students is selected from four year in Department of English , College of Education for Human Sciences , University of Babylon during the academic year (2022-2023). This sample consists fifty students (males and females). They are non - native speakers of English .

### **3.6 Test Martial**

Most items of I the questions of the test are taken from grammar books mentioned in chapter two .

## **Section Four**

### **The Analysis**

#### **4.1 Data Analysis**

In this chapter the researcher analyses the results of the test after testing fourth year university students at the Department of English College of Education for Human Sciences , University of Babylon for the academic year 2022-2023.

The test consists of two Questions: Question One consists of ten items which are designed to checked the students' performance at the recognition level , while Question Two consists of ten items which are designed to measure the students' performance at the production level .

The researcher collects the correct and incorrect responses and provides the percentages of each correct / incorrect response by using the following formula:

The number of the total correct / incorrect responses mutilated by 100 and divided on the total number of the students which is 50 students.

## 4.2 The Recognition Level

**Table (1) shows the students' performance at the recognition level of Question One**

**Title (1) The Performance of the Students at the Recognition Level**

<b>Items</b>	<b>No. of correct responses</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>	<b>No. of incorrect responses</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
1	27	54%	23	46%
2	44	88%	6	12%
3	28	56%	22	44%
4	43	86%	7	14%
5	45	90%	5	10%
6	41	82%	9	18%
7	42	84%	8	16%
8	42	84%	8	16%
9	23	46%	27	54%
10	30	60%	20	40%

Item(1): The total number of the correct responses and their percentages are ( 27, 54%)while the total number of the incorrect responses and their percentages are ( 23 , 46%) because they do not have enough information about “ words negative in meaning but not in form like (hardly)”

Item(2):The total number of the correct responses and their percentages are (44, 88%)while the total number of the incorrect responses and their percentages are (6, 12%)because they use a guess

Item (3): The total number of the correct responses and their percentages are (28 , 56%)while the total number of the incorrect responses and their percentages are (22, 44%)because they do not have enough information about “(Not +Any) refers to negative”

Item (4) : The total number of the incorrect responses and their percentages are ( 7, 14%)while the total number of the correct responses and their percentage are (43, 86%) because the point without negation

Item (5) :The total number of the incorrect responses and their percentages are ( 5, 10%)while the total number of the correct responses and their percentage are (45, 90%)because the point is very clear

Item (6) : The total number of the incorrect responses and their percentages are ( 9, 18%)while the total number of the correct responses and their percentage are (41, 82%) because they have enough information about “Negative Verb Conjugation”

Item (7) : The total number of the correct responses and their percentages are (42,84 %)while the total number of the incorrect responses and their percentages are ( 8, 16%) because they do not notice the point without negation

Item (8) : The total number of the correct responses and their percentages are (42,84 %)while the total number of the incorrect responses and their percentages are ( 8, 16%) because they do not have enough information about “ Negative Verb Conjugation”



Item (9) :The total number of the correct responses and their percentages are (23,46%)while the total number of the incorrect responses and their percentages are ( 27,54%).because they do not have enough information about “words negative in meaning but not in form like (little)”

Item (10) :The total number of the incorrect responses and their percentages are ( 30,60%)while the total number of the correct responses and their percentage are (20,40%) because they do not have enough information about “ Negative words like (none)”

## 4.2 The Production Level

The following table shows the results of the test at the production level of Question Two.

**Table :(2) The Performance of the Students at the Production level**

<b>Items</b>	<b>No. of correct responses</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>	<b>No. of incorrect responses</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
1	42	84%	8	16%
2	45	90%	5	10%
3	49	98%	1	2%
4	47	94%	3	6%
5	43	86%	7	14%
6	38	76%	12	24%
7	48	96%	2	4%
8	40	80%	10	20%
9	41	82%	9	18%
10	30	60%	20	40%

Item (1): The total number of the correct responses and their percentages are (42, 84%) while the total number of the incorrect responses and their percentages are (8, 16%) because they do not have enough information about item .

Item(2): The total number of the correct responses and their percentages are (45, 90%) while the total number of the incorrect responses and their percentages are (5 , 10%) Because the sentence is in the present perfect tense so it is easy to be negated.

Item (3): The total number of the incorrect responses and their percentages are ( 1,2 %) while the total number of the correct responses and their percentages are (49, 98%) The sentence is to give advice by (should) so it is very clear.

Item (4): The total number of the incorrect responses and their percentages are (3 , 6%) while the total number of the correct responses and their percentages are (47,94 %) because The sentence obligation Verb (has to) it is very clear.

Item (5): The total number of the incorrect responses and their percentages are ( 7, 14%) while the total number of the correct responses and their percentages are (43, 86%) because the sentence is obligation Verb (must) so it is very clear.

Item (6): The total number of the correct responses and their percentages are ( 38, 76%) while the total number of the incorrect responses and their percentages are (12, 24%) because the item is very easy .

Item (7): The total number of the incorrect responses and their percentages are (2 , 4%)while the total number of the correct responses and their percentages are ( 48, 98%) because the sentence is in the present simple so it is very clear

Item (8): The total number of the correct responses and their percentages are ( 40,80 %)while the total number of the incorrect responses and their percentages are (10,20 %) because they don't the tense of sentence.

Item (9): The total number of the incorrect responses and their percentages are (9, 18%)while the total number of the correct responses and their percentages are (41, 82%)because the tense of the sentence is in the present simple, so it is easy to change it in to.

Item (10):The total number of the correct responses and their percentages are (30,60%)while the total number of the incorrect responses and their percentages are (20, 40%)because the sentence is a question, so they faced difficulty in introducing the negative.

## **Section Five**

### **Conclusion**

#### **5.1 Theoretical Conclusions**

Negation is one of the most important subjects in English : This paper is intended to discuss the syntactic and semantic features of negation . In English grammar, negation is a grammatical construction that contradicts (or negates) all or part of the meaning of a sentence .

In English, negative clauses and sentences commonly include the negative particle "not" or the contracted negative "n't". Other negative words include "no, none, nothing, nobody, nowhere, and never". In many cases, a negative word can be formed by adding the prefix "un"- to the positive form of a word (as in "unhappy and undecided"). Other negative affixes (called negators) include "a-, de-, dis-, in-, -less, and mis-".

## 5.2 Practical Conclusions

The results of Question One show that the percentage of the incorrect answers is lower than those of the correct ones which means that the students do not have enough information about negation at the recognition level. The percentage of the correct answers is (73 %) while that of the incorrect once is (27 %).

Question Two which measures the student's ability at the production level shows that students commit errors. The percentage of the correct answers is (84.6 %) while that of the incorrect once is(15.4 %) .

The results of the test reflect that most of the Iraqi EFL fourth year students face difficulty in recognizing and producing negation because they do not have enough information about the topic. Another reason is that there are different types of negation , most of which are not as common to them .

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