

When acquiring negation in English, propositions are first negated simply by adding words such as "no" or "not," usually at the beginning of sentences (Klima and Bellugi 1966:192):

No wipe finger.

No the sun shining.

Not a teddy bear.

Wear mitten no.

The form of these utterances is syntactically simple. Negative markers are added to otherwise affirmative statements: Neg + S (or less commonly, S + Neg). Children soon progress, usually from 2 to 4 months later, to greater complexity by incorporating negation within the internal structure of sentences. For instance (ibid.:194):

He not little, he big.

I no want envelope.

There no squirrels.

None of these sentences is well formed (from an adult standard), but they show an advance over the earlier stage because negative markers are placed within sentences rather than simply added to them.

The third stage of development, occurring two to six months later, involves more complex incorporation of negation into sentences (ibid.:196):

I not see you anymore.

You didn't caught me.

This not ice cream.

Don't touch the fish.

Ask me if I not make mistake.

At this stage, negative marking is productively applied to auxiliaries (can, do). Another feature of this period is that an earlier sentence structure, /Neg + S/, has been omitted from children's grammars. In addition, "no" as an internally positioned marker disappears, replaced either by "not" or by more complex negative forms.