

The transfer of negative doubling in a bilingual community, Chipilo, Mexico

In standard Spanish, negation is preverbal, as in (1) *Yo no hablo italiano* ('I do not speak Italian'); the presence of a postverbal marker *no* is considered ungrammatical. However, in Veneto (a Northern Italian dialect), both markers are used: one preverbally and the second one at the end of the utterance, as in (2) *Mi no parle talian no* ('I do not speak Italian NEG'). According to sporadic observations reported in previous literature (Barnes, 2009; Mackay, 2002), many lexical, prosodic and morphological features have been transferred from Veneto into Spanish in the bilingual community of Chipilo, Mexico, which has preserved its minority language for over a century, and today represents a case of a stable bilingual diaspora, where Veneto is still acquired as the first language among bilingual speakers. Given the fact that this construction is not present in the speech of monolingual Spanish speakers from the same area, I hypothesize that the construction in (2) has been transferred into the Spanish of bilingual speakers, resulting in instances of negative doubling (ND) as in (3) *Yo no hablo italiano no* ('I do not speak Italian NEG'), used to reinforce the sentential negation. I investigated the frequency of use of ND as in (3) in comparison with the standard option in (1), according to the following social factors: sex, age (18-34, 55+), and parents' ethnicity. Stimuli were coded for the following linguistic factors: previous adjacent constituent, use of other negative words, and negative mention in the preceding context. Based on the assumption that given the right sociolinguistic conditions (Thomason & Kauffman, 2001,1988) in a language contact situation, transfer will occur, I predicted a higher frequency of ND among older Chipileño females who have more exposure to Veneto, in comparison to the younger speakers, who work or study outside of Chipilo, where Veneto is not used. For this project, 54 bilingual participants (26 Chipileños whose parents are both Chipileños, 16 participants whose mother is Chipileña, but the father is a monolingual Mexican, 12 participants whose father is Chipileño but the mother is a monolingual Mexican) and 21 monolingual Mexicans, (control group) were recruited to do three tasks in Spanish: a semi-spontaneous interview (Task 1), a preference forced-choice task (Task 2) and a sentence repetition task (Task 3). Given the infrequent occurrences of this morphosyntactic structure in spontaneous speech (Milroy, 1987), I implemented both spontaneous and semi-controlled tasks to elicit speech production with focus on ND. A total of 565 tokens (out of a total of 1585 cases, excluding 1427 distractors) were extracted and analyzed using Goldvarb to construct logistic regression models of the effects of each conditioning factor. Overall, speakers produced ND in 43% (n=248) of the available contexts. Bilingual Chipileños and those whose father is Chipileño favoured the use of ND in two of three tasks (over 40%). Significantly more males than females favoured the use of ND in the two controlled tasks, rejecting the initial hypothesis. The younger group used ND more than the older group in all three tasks: 8% (n=3) in Task 1, 40.5% (n=15) in Task 2, and 53% (n=18) in Task 3. There was a tendency to use ND in the context of a second negative mention, verb and adverb as previous adjacent constituents and negative words in the object position. Based on these results, younger participants, specifically Chipileño males, preferred the use of ND, contrary to the prediction, yet supporting the overall hypothesis about the transfer effects of a minority language phenomenon into the majority language use.

Reference list

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