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# THE USAGE-BASED STUDY OF LANGUAGE LEARNING AND MULTILINGUALISM

Lourdes Ortega, Andrea E. Tyler, Hae In Park, and Mariko Uno, Editors

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# 5

## ◆ Negative Constructions in Nonliterate Learners' Spoken L2 Finnish

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THIS CHAPTER DISCUSSES THE DEVELOPMENT of Finnish expressions of negation in four initially nonliterate women with very low oral skills during their first ten-month language course. While many studies have been published describing the learning of L2 Finnish by educated adult learners, hardly any research is available on how nonliterate adults learn Finnish. Yet research-based knowledge is needed for both pedagogical and resource-related decision making. The theoretical approach to additional language learning in this study is usage-based (e.g., Bybee 2008), with construction as the unit of analysis (Eskildsen 2012) and classroom as the interactional setting. In standard Finnish, the negative construction includes the negative auxiliary verb, inflected for person and number, and an uninflected lexical verb. In the data, verbs are present in only 23 percent of all the participants' utterances. Unexpectedly, over half of these are , mostly formulated with just the negative auxiliary verb stem, with no personal endings and no lexical verb. A potential reason for this pattern is the low use of verbs in general and the inherent complexity of the Finnish negative construction. The simple negative verb stem *ei* is also sufficient for getting the message across. Individual differences exist in both the number and way of using the negative construction, indicating potential developmental paths. The development of the negative construction is compared with that of literate learners both in writing and in oral tests.

### Introduction

Learning to say no is an important skill. One of the first words babies learn to produce is usually *no*, or in Finnish *ei*. While this single word expresses the message, a lot more remains to be learned before one can be considered a competent speaker of a

language. In this chapter we chart the early steps towards this goal by four initially nonliterate women learning Finnish.

Nonliterate adults are a small but growing group in Finland where almost all healthy adults have been able to read for about 250 years. Recent immigration from countries with low literacy rates has presented the educational system with a new challenge: adults who may know several languages orally but cannot read or write any of them. Nor do they know Finnish, which means that the methods normally used to teach children to read are not feasible either, as literacy cannot be based on oral skills in Finnish. An abundant body of research also shows that adults and children are different as language learners (e.g., Lightbown and Spada 2013, 93; Saville-Troike 2012, 88; Singleton 2001). The language learning of this group is now starting to attract research efforts in many countries, as evidenced by the networking within LESLLA (Low-educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition), an international forum of researchers, practitioners, and policy makers who share an interest in the development of L2 skills by adult immigrants with little or no schooling in their country of origin. Yet very little is known so far, and even less about learning Finnish, as research on Finnish as a second language has so far focused almost exclusively on school children and educated adults.

Literacy influences the learning of an additional language in many ways. It is usually acquired in school, a process that provides learners with study skills and strategies for learning, which those lacking any educational background do not automatically share. Being able to read provides many opportunities and affordances for language learning, and writing allows one to take notes and review and repeat linguistic material. Oral input all too often disappears before it has been understood and committed to memory. Sound recordings alleviate this problem but are seldom as readily available as pen and paper, even if smartphones help in this.

Knowledge of any alphabetic writing system also enhances the phonological skills necessary for learning a new language (see e.g., Tarone, Bigelow, and Hansen 2009). Most adults have great difficulty with phonological discrimination and memory when they do not have the support of a writing system. Even the shapes of letters can be hard to learn without the ingrained habit of paying attention to (as such) meaningless squiggles on paper or screen (Marrapodi 2013). In her study, Tammelin-Laine (2014a) suggests that in the early stages of learning a new language, nonliterate L2 learners do not benefit from oral linguistic input in the same manner and to the same extent as learners with functional literacy skills. Learning to read, particularly in an orthographically transparent language, such as Finnish, seems to improve phonological skills, which in turn helps with learning vocabulary.

In Finland, municipalities are required to draft a three-year integration plan for all adult immigrants who are not employed and who apply for unemployment benefits or other financial support. The local immigration officials and the immigrants themselves are involved in writing the plan. It lists the activities that are expected to lead to integration. For nonliterate immigrants, the first step is normally a ten-month adult literacy course consisting of approximately 1,400 lesson hours. Some participants in these courses have already lived in Finland for several years,

usually as housewives, with scant opportunities for language learning. This study was carried out during such courses in two different locations.

LESLLA learners face a formidable and time-consuming task of having to learn a new language and literacy skills at the same time. Below we will discuss a small part of this process: the learning and use of the Finnish negative constructions by four women who attended a ten-month Finnish language and literacy course. This chapter focuses on the following research questions:

1. To what extent are negative constructions used in the spoken language of the participants in the L2 Finnish classroom context?
2. What are the negative constructions like?
3. How did negative constructions develop during the ten-month course?

The process of learning to say *no* is first discussed on the basis of research done in other languages. The Finnish negative constructions are then introduced, together with a brief description of our construction-based approach. The main part of the study consists of a presentation of the four learners, the data and methods of the study, and the findings on the development of negation in their spoken language. These are then compared with those of educated learners in the Discussion section.

## Negation in Learning a New Language

The development of negation is one of the more widely researched areas of second language acquisition. Since Klima and Bellugi (1966) described the developmental sequence of negation in L1 English, L2 development has been compared with their results. Milon (1974), for example, found that a seven-year-old L2 English learner followed the L1 sequence. Comparisons of adults and children have, however, produced very different findings (Dimroth 2010, 63), with adults showing more variance. Results, or their interpretation, also vary according to the theoretical framework and language studied. Particularly within Universal Grammar-based (UG-based) studies, the order of acquisition has been assumed to be non-language-specific, making the search for the natural order of acquisition the main motivation of these studies. The focus has been in particular on the syntactic position of the negation word in relation to the lexical verb of the sentence. In general, it has been found that in the first stage of L2 acquisition, the negation word precedes the utterance (*no* + X) regardless of the L1 word order (see e.g., Klein 1984 or Wode 1981).

An example of an extensive study involving a language other than English is that of Hyltenstam (1977) on Swedish. His findings support the natural sequence hypothesis of language acquisition (i.e., that it is independent of the manner of learning or the L1 background). The study on German of Clahsen, Meisel, and Pienemann (1982) was part of a vast ESF project in which the acquisition of many European languages by adult immigrants was explored. German and French were subsequently compared by Meisel (1997). The findings in most of these studies support a fairly uniform developmental sequence of negation. For a brief overview, see Becker 2005, 263–67.

Interpretation of the results has also changed over time. Meisel (1997, 227) concludes that adults, “rather than using structure-dependent operations constrained by Universal Grammar (UG), rely primarily on linear sequencing strategies which apply to surface strings.” A very different theoretical approach is offered by Eskildsen (2012), who studied the development of negative constructions in spoken language produced by two adult L2 English learners. While most previous research assumes L2 acquisition to be rule-based, Eskildsen, like us, sees language learning as construction-based (see chapter 3). His findings suggest that the participants’ learning of negation proceeds from recurring exemplar-based expressions toward an increasingly target-like pattern. The development process includes non-target-like patterns which decrease over time. However, there are also differences between the participants and the way learning proceeds. Eskildsen’s construction-based approach offers a new way of interpreting the data but has so far been little applied to any specific language.

All the languages alluded to above are Indo-European and share some similarities in their negative structures (e.g., the importance of word order). Much less research is available for other types of languages. In Finnish, the key issue in learning negation is inflectional, while word order is seldom problematic. The following chapter describes the Finnish negative construction.

## Negation in Finnish: A Construction Approach

Finnish verbs are inflected for person, number, time, mode, and voice, represented by suffixes (and accompanying stem changes). Table 5–1 shows the full inflectional system in the indicative mode for the present tense. The Finnish present tense negative construction consists of the auxiliary verb *ei*, inflected for person, and the bare stem of the lexical verb. Other tenses, modes, and the passive voice involve other forms of the lexical verb but are not discussed here as they do not occur in our data.

In Finnish, there is also the undeclinable particle *ei* (“no”), which is used as the opposite of *kyllä* (“yes”). This sentence-external *ei* looks and sounds exactly the same as the negative auxiliary in the third person singular. (For further details, see Karlsson 2008, 28, and for the nature of Finnish negation from a typological perspective, see Miestamo 2005.) *Ei* particles of this type do not occur in the present data, but this feature of Finnish grammar may lead emergent learners to assume that the Finnish negation word is always *ei*.

The negative response to both affirmative and negative yes/no questions includes conjugated *ei* either with or without the bare stem of the lexical verb (e.g., *Asutko Jyväskylässä? En (asu)*. “Do you live in Jyväskylä? No [I don’t]”). In negative yes/no questions, the question suffix is added to the conjugated *ei* and the word order is reversed (e.g., *Etkö asu enää Jyväskylässä?* “Don’t you live in Jyväskylä anymore?”).

Many verbs display stem changes in inflection (e.g., *nuku/n*, “I sleep”; *hän nukku/u*, “he sleeps”). The dictionary entry is *nukku/a* (including the infinitive marker *a*). For negation, the stem is the same for all persons: *en nuku* (“I don’t sleep”); *hän ei nuku* (“he doesn’t sleep”).

◆ Table 5–1. Inflection of the verb *asua* (to live) in the present tense indicative mode (personal ending underlined, question suffix italicized)

Person	Affirmative	Negative	Interrogative	Negative interrogative
1. sg	asu <u>n</u>	e <u>n</u> asu	asu <u>n</u> <i>ko</i>	e <u>n</u> <i>kö</i> asu
2. sg	asu <u>t</u>	e <u>t</u> asu	asu <u>t</u> <i>ko</i>	e <u>t</u> <i>kö</i> asu
3. sg	hän asu <u>u</u>	hän e <u>i</u> asu	asu <u>u</u> <i>ko</i> hän	e <u>i</u> <i>kö</i> hän asu
1. pl	asu <u>mme</u>	e <u>mme</u> asu	asu <u>mme</u> <i>ko</i>	e <u>mme</u> <i>kö</i> asu
2. pl	asu <u>tte</u>	e <u>tte</u> asu	asu <u>tte</u> <i>ko</i>	e <u>tte</u> <i>kö</i> asu
3. pl	he asu <u>vat</u>	he e <u>ivät</u> asu	asu <u>vat</u> <i>ko</i> he	e <u>ivät</u> <i>kö</i> he asu

The Finnish negative construction can be described by rules that can be derived from descriptions like those above. This is not, however, the way we assume it is learned, at least not by nonliterate learners like the ones in this study. Educated learners may refer to rules or tables to find the right form for writing, but even they are more likely to learn negative construction from examples, starting from very frequent ones such as *en tiedä* (“I don’t know”).

The overall underlying notion of language learning in this study is usage-based and cognitively oriented: acquisition takes place in encounters with an increasing number of examples of the L2. Regularities are extracted from examples by general cognitive mechanisms. The objects of study are not rules or items but constructions, loosely defined here as units of language which contain a form and a meaning, both of which can vary within some limits (e.g., Goldberg 2003). Construction Grammar (see e.g., Fillmore and Kay 1996; Goldberg 1995, 2003) has been employed to describe several structures of Finnish (see e.g., Leino, J. 2003, 2008; Leino, P., et al. 2001; Visapä 2008). As a linguistic basis for the study of second language development, the construction approach has been used previously for Finnish in Seilonen (2013) and Kajander (2013). For English it has been applied by Eskildsen (2008). In this chapter, no Construction Grammar notation is applied, but the acquisition of negative constructions is described as a process of gradually increasing control.

## Participants and Their Learning Context

The participants are four women attending their first Finnish L2 language and literacy course. At the beginning of the data collection period in August 2010, their oral skills in Finnish were rather low. Amina and Asra could talk a little about their everyday life, while Husna and Rana could only say a few phrases, such as *nähdään huomenna* (“see you tomorrow”). As can be seen in table 5–2, none of them reported having any earlier formal schooling or acquiring reading and writing skills in any language. However, all of them knew some of the Roman alphabet. Additionally, three of them had previous experience in oral L2 acquisition.

The data were collected in towns A and B, where the language and literacy training classes were provided by adult education centers (AECs). In both AECs, the total number of lessons per week was thirty-five. It was divided into contact



◆ Table 5–2. Summary of participant information

Adult education center	Name	Age*	Country of origin	Native language	Other languages	Length of residence*	Earlier education
Town A	Asra	24	Afghanistan	Dari	Farsi	18 months	none
Town B	Amina	45	Afghanistan	Dari	Russian	15 months	none
Town B	Husna	45	Afghanistan	Dari	—	16 months	none
Town B	Rana	28	Iran	Sorani Kurdish	Farsi	12 months	none

Note. \*In August 2010, at start of the data collection. Mean age 35.5 years, mean length of residence 15.25 months.

teaching of approximately five lessons (forty-five minutes each) and independent work lasting two hours per day. The class size was fifteen students.

In town A, the instruction at the AEC focused on functional oral language skills, with a large variety of learning activities (e.g., learning-by-doing), while literacy skills were taught along with the vocabulary for everyday life. In AEC B, the instruction was mainly reading-oriented, and vocabulary was not an explicit focus. The negative construction was briefly mentioned in the reader *Aasta se alkaa* (“It begins with A”), which was used in the L2 training (Laine, Uimonen, and Lahti 2006).

The lessons in both classrooms mainly consisted of either teacher talk or initiation-response-feedback (IRF) cycles led by the teacher (see e.g., Tainio 2007). The participants also used Finnish occasionally with their teachers, the researcher, and the other students. Native languages were spoken frequently during the lessons.

The teacher in the reading-oriented AEC B, in particular, used ungrammatical utterances such as *\*Tämä ei hyvä* (“This no good”). Normally a copula is used in Finnish, unlike in Dari and Sorani Kurdish. Most of the meaningful interactional situations of nonliterate L2 learners in Finnish are located in the classroom, and for this reason the language used during the lessons has an essential role in their learning process (see also Elmeroth 2003; Norton Peirce 1993). In general, the explicit teaching of verbs and their use was rare in both classes.

## Data and Method

The data for this study were collected in the AEC classrooms over a period of ten months, from August 2010 to May 2011. Participant observation was supported by note taking and audio recording of the lessons. At AEC A, data were collected on six days during the autumn semester and four days during the spring. At AEC B, the respective numbers of days were eight and thirteen. The observation sessions were arranged as regularly as possible. During these sessions, all the Finnish utterances produced orally by the participants were documented. The course curriculum was drawn up by the teachers. All the students, including the study participants, regarded the researcher as an assistant teacher, and natural interaction in Finnish, both with

the participants and other students, occurred frequently. (For more details of the data collection, see Tammelin-Laine 2014a, 53–55).

In the data analysis, the number of words and utterances produced by each participant were counted and utterances with one or more verbs (including *ei* followed by no lexical verb) were encoded according to their intended meaning and actual form. Words or sentences read aloud or words repeated after the teacher were excluded. Utterances were divided into two main categories: declarative (e.g., *Mies ei hyvä*, “Man not good”) and interrogative (e.g., *Ei kirjoita?* “No write?”), which were further divided into the subcategories of affirmative (e.g., *Yksi tunti kävelee*, “One hour walks”; *Tämä pois kirjoittaa?* “This away write?”) and negative (e.g., *Aamulla ei nukku*, “In the morning no sleep”; *Ei kirjoita?* “No write?”) utterances. The data also contain some disjunctive interrogatives (e.g., *Lukee...ei kirjoita*, “Read...no write”; *Kirjoita suu ja ei?* “Write mouth and no?”), consisting of both an affirmative and a negative verb. Because of their more complex nature, these utterances have been classified as a separate group. (For more on interrogative utterances expressed by the participants, see Tammelin-Laine 2014b.) When no lexical verb was present, the auxiliary verb *ei* was distinguished from the particle *ei* (see the section “Negation in Finnish: A Construction Approach”) by the presence of other material in the utterance (e.g., *Tämä ei hyvä*, “This not good”; *Koti ei*, “Home not”). Although this chapter does not focus on the contexts of the utterances (e.g., IRF cycle, interaction between students), some examples of these are presented in the qualitative analysis of the utterance samples produced by the participants. The data are described quantitatively in table 5–3.

Table 5–3 shows that the participants used at least one verb in only 22.7 percent of all their utterances. However, there is a clear distinction in verb use between Asra and Husna, the participants who used the most (29.9 percent) and least (11.7 percent) verbs. However, while the number of utterances including a verb produced by Husna is low, she uses proportionally a wider range of verbs than the other participants. Another noteworthy matter is that Asra and Amina were the first to crack the alphabetic code and subsequently became the most fluent readers during the observation period. Rana also succeeded in learning how to blend sounds into words, but at the end of the data collection her reading was less fluent than that of Asra or Amina (Tammelin-Laine and Martin 2015). This finding inclines us to suggest that a positive relationship exists between the development of reading skills and the use of verbs by these participants (see Tammelin-Laine 2014a, 74, 85).

Table 5–3. The data of the study

	Amina	Asra	Husna	Rana	Total
Number of words	669	512	387	635	2203
Number of utterances	264	241	179	270	954
Total of utterances with verb(s)	57	73	21	66	217
Percentage of utterances with verb(s)	21.6	29.9	11.7	24.4	22.7
Number of different verbs used	15	19	12	14	31

## Results

### *Quantitative findings on negation*

The data include 117 negative utterances. These utterances comprise 53.9 percent of all the utterances produced by the participants. The breakdown of the participants' negative utterances into declaratives, interrogatives, and disjunctive interrogatives with or without a lexical verb is shown in table 5-4. The negative constructions presented here are instances of learner language and mostly not formulated as they would be in standard or colloquial spoken Finnish.

Table 5-4 shows that in the data, *ei* occurs mostly in declarative utterances without a lexical verb: Approximately 77.8 percent of all the negative constructions are declaratives containing no lexical verb. In addition, the total percentage of interrogative and disjunctive interrogative utterances with no lexical verb is 7.7. However, Amina, Asra, and Rana occasionally use lexical verbs in declaratives. There are also some examples of the use of lexical verbs in interrogative utterances with a negative or disjunctive meaning in Amina's and Asra's data. There are also wide individual differences: In Amina's data, approximately 30 percent of the negative utterances include a lexical verb, while in Rana's data, the percentage is as low as 7.3, and in Husna's data, even lower: zero.

In general, the use of a lexical verb in negative constructions among the participants is low. Possible reasons for this pattern are the rather low use of verbs in general (see table 5-3) and seeing *ei* as a negation particle instead of a declinable verb. The negative verb stem *ei* is functionally adequate for conveying the idea of negation across. Most of the utterances including *ei* and a lexical verb are declaratives (10.3 percent). Individual differences in the number and type of negative constructions are quite substantial: Husna's data include just four negative utterances, considerably less than the data of the other participants, especially Asra's (forty-five negative

◆ Table 5-4. Negative constructions in the data

	Amina	Asra	Husna	Rana	Total
Total of utterances with verb(s)	57	73	21	66	217
Neg. declaratives with lexical verb	6	3	0	3	12
Neg. declaratives with no lexical verb	15	38	4	34	91
Neg. interrogatives with lexical verb	0	2	0	0	2
Neg. interrogatives with no lexical verb	4	0	0	2	6
Disjunct. interrogatives with lexical verb	2	1	0	0	3
Disjunct. interrogatives with no lexical verb	0	1	0	2	3
Total of neg. constructions	27	45	4	41	117
Percentage of neg. constructions with lexical verb	29.6	13.3	0	7.3	14.5
Percentage of neg. constructions	47.4	61.6	19.0	62.1	53.9

utterances). All the negative utterances produced by Husna date from the last three months of the data collection. They are all declaratives, without a lexical verb (e.g., *Tämä ei tyttö tämä poika*, “This no girl this boy”). This deviates from the other participants, whose data include negative constructions from October onward, occasionally with a lexical verb.

### *Qualitative findings: Development of the form and use of negative constructions*

In the data, the participants use the Finnish negation auxiliary without inflection (i.e., only in the stem form *ei*). Throughout the data, it is mostly used in utterances without a lexical verb, followed or preceded only by nouns, adjectives, or adverbs. However, in some examples it is followed by a lexical verb in its default form (third person singular) or by the grammatically correct stem of a lexical verb. Below, the development of negative constructions by each participant is presented by providing examples of their first occurrence. Amina, Asra, and Rana use negative constructions both with and without a lexical verb, while no lexical verbs occur in Husna's negative constructions.

In Amina's, Asra's, and Rana's data, the first negative constructions occur from October onward. The first type of negative construction in their data is *ei* + no lexical verb in a declarative utterance, as illustrated in examples (1) through (3):

- (1)  
Amina: Tämä ei (target: Sitä en tiedä)  
This no+SG3 “That one I don't know”
- (2)  
Asra: Koti ei (target: Hän ei ole kotona)  
Home no+SG3 “He is not at home”
- (3)  
Rana: Ei hyvä mies (target: Mies ei ole hyvä)  
No+SG3 good man “The man is not good”

The examples show that the first negative constructions are short and simple. Their meaning is difficult to understand without knowledge of the context. Example (1) expresses the idea that the participant does not know something while examples (2) and (3) refer to someone else (third person singular) not being somewhere or not being something. One potential reason for the missing lexical verb in Example (1) is that Amina has not yet memorized the construction *en tiedä* (I don't know) even though it has probably occurred frequently in the classroom. In Examples (2) and (3) Asra and Rana do not use the copula. This is in line with the participants' low use of the copula in affirmative utterances as well (see Tammelin-Laine, 2015). In Puro's (2002) oral data, the copula was the most frequently used verb following the auxiliary verb *ei*. The low use of the copula in the present study may be transferred from the native languages of the participants, Dari and Sorani Kurdish, which do not use the copula the way it is used in Finnish or in the languages spoken by the participants in Puro's study (see Thackston 2006; mylanguages.org 2011).<sup>1</sup> In addition, the

teacher-talk used in both AECs (especially in AEC B) may have given learners the impression that the copula is not frequently used in Finnish either. Rana's example (3) also shows the variation typical of L2 learners, as on the same day she uses a different word order (*mies ei hyvä*) to express the same idea.

In January, the first disjunctive interrogative utterance occurs in Asra's data when she produces a negative construction of the type *ei* + a lexical verb, shown in Example (4):

- (4)  
Asra: Kirja ei kirja? (target: Kirjoitanko vai en?)  
Write+SG3 no+SG3 write+SG3? "Shall I write or not?"

It is interesting that the first instance of lexical verb use in Asra's data was found in a complex disjunctive interrogative utterance instead of, for instance, declarative or basic question. Although her construction is not target-like, it clearly expresses the idea of opposition and a question; the interrogative is marked with a rising intonation towards the end of the utterance. However, the construction contains no inflectional elements referring to the speaking subject.

In the data from March, Asra uses *ei* with a lexical verb in both an interrogative (Example 6) and a declarative (Example 7) utterance for the first time, while Amina and Husna use *ei* without a lexical verb—Amina in an interrogative (Example 5) utterance and Husna in a declarative (Example 8). This is also the first occurrence of a negative construction in Husna's data. The illustrations are as follows:

- (5)  
Amina: Ei koira? (target: Eikö sinulla ole koiraa?)  
No+SG3 dog? "Don't you have a dog?"
- (6)  
Asra: Ei kirjoita? (target: Enkö kirjoita tätä?)  
No+SG3 write+NEG? "Shall I not write this?"
- (7)  
Asra: Minä ei tiedä (target: (Minä) en tiedä)  
I no+SG3 know+NEG "I don't know"
- (8)  
Husna: Käsi ei hyvä (target: Käsi ei ole terve)  
Hand no+SG3 good "The hand is not well"

In examples (6) and (7), the typical pattern of Asra's negative constructions can be seen. In the data, when she uses a new type of negative construction for the first time, she includes a lexical verb. Later, the presence of a lexical verb depends on the target verb: The nonuse of the copula is systematic and there are no examples of its use in the data. On the other hand, Asra occasionally uses verbs like *mukkua* ("to sleep") and *kirjottaa* ("to write") in negative constructions. The data show only one exception to this pattern, when in April Asra again uses the construction *Minä ei tiedä* in exactly the same format as in March. It is likely that *ei tiedä* has been picked

up from the teacher's speech and memorized as a construction. However, Asra has added *minä* to it, which shows development in her language skills. Example (6) shows that she can also use other verbs in the same construction. The use of the personal pronoun *minä* varies in Asra's examples, as it also does in spoken Finnish.

For Amina, the negative interrogative presented earlier in Example (5) is the second type of negative construction occurring in her spoken language. She has clearly noticed that in Finnish it is possible to ask both affirmative and negative questions, even if her construction in Example (5) is non-target-like. However, when compared to her first negative construction expressed five months earlier, this example shows clear development in her language skills.

In Husna's data, three out of four negative constructions are of exactly the same type as Example (8) with *ei* in second position in the utterance and without the copula. It is only in her last example from May (*Ei yksi kilo maitto*, "No one kilo milk") that the negative auxiliary is in the initial position. The lexical verb *kantaa* ("to carry"), is missing. Based on the data, Husna seems to start using negative constructions notably later than the other participants, and their number is particularly small.

In April, Amina uses a lexical verb both in a declarative utterance and in a disjunctive interrogative, as shown in Examples (9) and (10):

(9)  
Amina: Tämä ei kirjoittaa (target: Tätä en kirjoita)  
This no+SG3 write+SG3 "This one I don't write"

(10)  
Amina: Lukee...ei kirjoita (target: Luenko vain, en kirjoita?)  
Read+SG3 no+SG3 write+NEG "Shall I just read this, not write?"

Based on these examples above and those earlier in this chapter, it is evident that the negative constructions used by Amina have reached a more complex structure over time even if they are not yet completely target-like.

Finally, in the data from May, Rana uses several new types of negative constructions: first *ei* a lexical verb in a declarative utterance, then *ei* without a lexical verb in a disjunctive interrogative and in a basic negative interrogative. These types are shown in Examples (11), (12), and (13):

(11)  
Rana: Ei nukkuu (target: En nuku)  
No+SG3 sleep+SG3 "I don't sleep"

(12)  
Rana: Hyvä ja ei hyvä (target: Onko tämä hyvä vai ei?)  
Good and no+SG3 good "Is this good or not?"

(13)  
Rana: Ei kotona opettaja? (target: Eikö mennä kotiin, opettaja?)  
No+SG3 at home teacher? "Don't we go home, teacher?"

Rana's data shows clear development in using negative constructions. In addition to the number of new negative construction types expressed by her in May, the number of negative utterances in total increases notably during the last month of observation. Moreover, all the negative constructions that include a lexical verb occur in May, and the complexity of negative expressions increases over time, even if at this point none of them are target-like.

## Discussion

The data we have presented provide us with a window on the very beginning of L2 development. This is a level clearly below A1, which is the lowest level that has been included in the previous studies on the development of negation in learner Finnish. Furthermore, L2 acquisition is complicated by the lack of reading skills and explicit grammatical knowledge that enable most learners to benefit from descriptions of negative constructions, such as the one in the earlier section on Negation in Finnish.

### *A construction approach*

The first negative constructions consist simply of *ei*. It either precedes or follows a noun phrase (*tämä ei / ei tämä* "this not / not this"). Both word orders are used with similar frequency by Amina (8/9), Asra (14/16), and Husna (3/1), but Rana fronts the particle *ei* most of the time (9/22). This is not in complete agreement with previous results on the acquisition of Indo-European languages, where the first phase has been found to be placement of the negative word first in the utterance (see the section on Negation in Finnish: A Construction Approach). However, a usage-based approach would predict this result, as in Finnish the negative word is normally in the second position while the first position is also possible, when the speaker wishes to emphasize the negation.

The frequent absence of a lexical verb, obligatory in target-like negative constructions in Finnish, persists throughout the data collection period both in declaratives and questions. This is common in other languages as well (Becker 2005, 305). There are also examples of this in the research on educated learners. Puro (2002) studied the oral production of Finnish negative constructions during the first semester of a university Finnish course. Although Puro found some examples of negative constructions without a lexical verb in the participants' spoken Finnish, in most cases it was included. Honkimäki and Kultu (2006, 151), who conducted an experimental study in which university students at different levels of L2 proficiency in Finnish produced negative answers to a large set of questions, found that the lexical verb was missing in 6 percent of instances at the lower elementary level and that 36 percent of the utterances included a lexical verb in a non-target form (5 percent and 21 percent, respectively, at the higher elementary level). In the large Cefling (2009) corpus of written data, independently assessed to represent the *Common European Frame of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) levels A1–C2, Halttunen (2014, 52) found that adolescents at the A1 CEFR level of Finnish included a lexical verb very systematically while adults at the same level sometimes omitted it.

The present participants did not conjugate the auxiliary *ei* at all during this study. This also occurred in the oral data of Honkimäki and Kulta (2006, 153), although noncongruent instances only amounted to 3 percent at the lowest level but, surprisingly, were 16 percent at the next level, falling again at the higher levels. In Halttunen's (2014) data, noncongruence is also fairly rare, even at the A1 level, particularly among the younger Cefling participants, who attend Finnish schools and mainly acquire Finnish in interaction with peers, unlike Puro's (2002) and Honkimäki and Kulta's (2006) university students and the participants of this study, who have few Finnish contacts outside the classroom.

The negative construction with a lexical verb in the target-like stem form does not appear in this data, but then it is also the last one mastered by educated learners. This is probably due to the irregular relationship between the affirmative and negative forms, as illustrated in table 5–5.

In verbs like *syödä*, the stem form and the 3. sg. affirmative and negative are identical but learners also encounter the past tense stem *söi* ('ate'), even if they do not yet use it themselves. For verbs of the *asua* type, the difference is the length of the unstressed vowel, which most learners find quite hard to detect. Consonant gradation, as in *nukkua*, is quite common in Finnish words and adds to the difference (and saliency) between the default form (3. sg) and the stem form.

Occasional errors in lexical verb conjugation persist up to the highest levels of language acquisition, particularly with verbs like *asua* (Halttunen 2014). In Honkimäki and Kulta (2006, 151) only 85 percent of the test utterances were completely target-like even at the advanced level. The pattern found by both Puro (2002) and Halttunen (2014), where both the auxiliary and lexical verb are conjugated in a person other than 3. sg. (\**en asun*), was not found in the present data.

In her study on the writing of Swedish-speaking school children and teenagers learning L2 Finnish, Grönholm (2007) suggests that the process of learning negative constructions begins with using the uninflected *ei* and a lexical verb in the third person singular (e.g., \**minä ei menee*; target [*minä*] *en mene*). The second phase includes uninflected *ei* with a lexical verb inflected in the affirmative form (e.g., \**minä ei menen*), while in the third phase *ei* is also inflected (e.g., \**minä en menen*), resulting in double inflection. The final product of the learning process is the target-like negative construction including the inflected auxiliary verb and the bare stem of the lexical verb (e.g., [*minä*] *en mene*). Similar overall phases were also found by Honkimäki and Kulta (2006).

◆ Table 5–5. Some examples of the inflection of Finnish verbs

Person	<i>syödä</i> 'to eat'	<i>asua</i> 'to live'	<i>nukkua</i> 'to sleep'
1. sg affirm.	minä <u>syön</u>	minä <u>asun</u>	minä <u>nuku</u>
1. sg negat.	minä en syö__	minä en asu__	minä en nuku__
3. sg affirm.	hän <u>syö</u>	hän <u>asu</u>	hän <u>nukku</u>
3. sg negat.	hän ei <u>syö</u>	hän ei asu__	hän ei nuku__



The negative constructions of Finnish produced by learners seem to develop through several stages marked by the inflection of the auxiliary and the lexical verb. Word order is of minor importance. A bare  $X + ei$  or  $ei + X$  is the starting point on the gradual road to more target-like constructions.

The participants of this study, as well as those of the other studies discussed above, also show individual differences in the number of negative constructions they produce, the emergence of the first occurrence of *ei* within an utterance, the time of the first occurrence of the negative construction with a lexical verb, and the greater complexity of negative constructions at the end of the observation period. The most complex negative constructions (*ei* + a lexical verb in a question / disjunctive question) are used only by the most fluent readers (see Tammelin-Laine 2014b). The least fluent readers also use the least number of negative constructions and verbs in general. Thus the development of negative constructions seems closely related to other aspects of the growing language skills.

## Conclusion

The first research question (see the Introduction section) concerned the frequency of negation in the very early stages of learning Finnish. Somewhat surprisingly, more than half of all the utterances were negative. The need to learn how to express negation is thus obvious. The second research question asked what the negative constructions were like and was answered by Examples (1) through (13) given in the Results section presenting the qualitative findings. The development (research question 3) was described in the Discussion section.

The data presented here complement the studies previously conducted on the learning of a negation system based primarily on inflection, rather than word order, by describing the very first steps. It only presents constructions for the active voice and present tense as no other grammatical categories occurred in the data. A longer observation period is needed to obtain a more complete description of the paths of oral development for comparison with the pseudo-longitudinal study of written data (Halttunen 2014) or oral test data (Honkimäki and Kulta 2016).

The construction approach functions here as a broad background statement. More work and a more extensive set of data are needed to determine how learner constructions evolve from the simple negating of a noun phrase toward target-like verb phrases, with in-between steps where learners try out the limits of the new construction in various ways. Comparisons with other inflection-rich languages could also shed more light on the path learners follow. Better knowledge of the path could also help remove stumbling blocks through improved instruction.

## Notes

1. Puro's participants were nine university students with five different native languages: English, French, Dutch, Russian, and German. Of these, only Russian lacks a copula.

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