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Comparative Study of the Use of Double Negatives
by Native English Speakers and Spanish Learners
of English

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, knowing more than one language is a skill that only few people have from birth. This paper demonstrates that Spanish learners of English have many problems when learning this foreign language, being double negation one of these difficulties. This grammatical structure results to be problematic due to its different usage when we compare English and Spanish. In order to know if this statement is correct, three different tasks about double negation were designed and they were answered by two different groups of students; one formed by American English Natives and another one composed of Spanish learners of English.

Key words: -Double negation, Transference, Acquisition, Learning, Foreign Language (FL), and First Language-.

En la actualidad saber más de un idioma es una habilidad que muy pocas personas poseen desde su nacimiento. Este trabajo de Fin de Grado demuestra que los españoles estudiantes de inglés tienen muchos problemas a la hora de aprender este segundo idioma, siendo la doble negación una de estas dificultades. Esta estructura gramatical es problemática ya que se utiliza de distinta manera en español e inglés. Para saber si esta afirmación es correcta, se crearon tres ejercicios sobre la doble negación que fueron respondidos por dos grupos de estudiantes; uno creado por nativos americanos y otro por españoles que están estudiando inglés como segunda lengua.

Palabras clave: - Doble negación, Transferencia, Adquisición, Aprendizaje, Lengua extranjera, and Lengua Materna-.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Many studies have been carried out about negation during these last years. However, these have normally focused on simple negation and on the explanation of its characteristics, as it can be seen in Hoeksema et al (2001) and Hernandez Paricio (1985). This paper deals with the phenomenon of double negation. The usage of this grammatical structure varies depending on the language (i.e. Spanish allows this kind of negation but it is grammatically incorrect when used in English); however and surprisingly, little research has been done in order to explain the main differences that occurs across different languages. The majority of the investigations focus only on the study of one language; there are other researches that deal with one language focusing on its structure and on its syntactical analysis, as it can be seen in Camus Bergareche (1992) and Frances Blanchette.

According to the American English Collins Dictionary, double negation is “the use of two negatives in a single statement having a negative force (Ex.: “I didn't hear nothing”) (*now generally regarded as nonstandard*)”. The fact that double negation is regarded as “nonstandard” in English is a fact of great importance. This means that its use is restricted to only languages such as Spanish. This phenomenon is explained in section 2 in this paper.

Palmer and Jespersen did some research about double negation in the 20th century; they tried to define this term and structure, becoming the referent for today's linguists and grammarians. Jespersen (1939) determined that “All the languages seem to have a common law, that is, two negatives makes a positive”. In my opinion, these two figures and, Otto Jespersen in particular, are essential in this paper, which focuses on this specific phenomenon. Both, Palmer and Jespersen, agreed that this structure is formed by two negative elements: one of them cancels the other one, thus creating a positive meaning. It can be considered as a grammatical rule that affirms that two negative forms make a positive one. “It seems to be a universal rule in all languages that two negatives make an affirmative if, both are special negatives attached to the same word” (Jespersen, 1917:69). Although Jespersen's research was carried out in the 20th century, it has been taken as reference for recent grammarians; therefore, I consider that explaining this notion of double negation is essential in this paper about double negation.

The objectives of this paper are twofold: first to prove the importance of the phenomenon of the double negatives due to the fact that their usage is different depending

on the language. Double negatives can be admitted as correct in some languages such as Spanish but they are not allowed in some others like English, as it is explained in the second part of this paper where some theoretical background is described. The second aim of this paper is to provide information about the problems Spanish learners of English can encounter when learning this structure. Therefore, the following hypotheses have been made so as to achieve the mentioned objectives:

- We want to prove if there is some kind of interference between the mother tongue and the second language. It is believed that the first language intervenes in the learning of a second language due to the fact that learners do not have a complete knowledge of it. For this reason, some grammatical structures such as double negatives are used in a foreign language in the same way than they are used in the first language. This is why Spanish learners of English are not going to use this property in a correct way although they affirm to know the grammatical rule perfectly.

- Spanish learners do not know how to use the different pronouns that can express negation or they do not understand the difference between those pronouns that have a positive meaning but are used in a negative sentence (*anything, anywhere...*) and the ones that are negative and that cause a sentence to be negative (*nothing, nowhere, nobody...*).

- Spanish learners are divided in two different subgroups taking into account their level of English. This research is meant to show if there are significant differences in the usage of double negatives between learners based on their level of English. A2 group of participants have more problems and errors than the B1 learners because they have only learnt some basic concepts such as the meaning of the different negative words. They know the meaning of the word “*nadie*”, for example, and that this word has a human reference but they do not know the usage of this word in a sentence. This fact makes me think that they are going to use their intuition when answering the questions because they do not know the grammatical rule.

This paper is organized as follows: in section 2, some theoretical background related to this kind of structure is explained, including some examples in Spanish and English comparing both languages. Section 3 comprises the methodology, the process carried out by two different groups of adults and teenagers (divided according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages in levels of English A2 and B1) who are asked to complete three different tasks about double negation. Moreover,

this part includes a description of the participants, the exercises, and an explanation of how this research has been carried out. These tasks are then analyzed in section 4, where there is an explanation and discussion of all the participants' answers. Finally, in section 5, some conclusions are made taking into account the results of the previous part of the paper.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This part offers an explanation of the phenomenon of the negation both in Spanish and English. First, a description of the Spanish simple and double negation is provided, in order to continue with the description of the negation in English. Finally, a brief summary of the differences found between both languages taking into account not only the structure of the phenomenon, but also, the placement of all the elements that form the negative sentences is included.

2.1 Spanish negation and double negation

This subsection of this paper describes the structure of the simple and double negation in Spanish in detail. In order to do this, different authors and sources are employed. These sources have been selected taking into account many issues such as the period in which they have been written, the author (preferably well-known and specialized people), and of course, the language in which the document is written. In this particular part, since it deals with the negation in Spanish, the majority of the sources are written in Spanish.

According to the Real Academia de la Lengua, negation is a semantic category which is used to deny or reject something. In Spanish, when referring to negation, it does not strictly mean that it is the contrary to the affirmation. In some sentences in Spanish, using a negative pronoun does not necessarily imply that the sentence is negative; for example in this sentence, "*nadie hizo nada*", the pronoun "*nadie*" implies lack of people but the whole sentence is in affirmative. Sanz Alonso (1996) affirms that negation affects all levels of a sentence; this means that it is a semantic, syntactic, and morphological category. It can change the structure of a verb ("*canta-no cantes*"), the meaning of the whole sentence ("*No compró caramelos*"), or it can modify only a part of the sentence, a complement ("*Luis es no muy agraciado*"). This grammatical category implies the lack

of something; if a person is not beautiful, it is because this person does not have beauty, so there is lack of that feature.

Two different types of negation are distinguished by Sanz Alonso. These types are the grammatical negation and the lexical one. Grammatical negation deals with the structure of sentences and this author differentiates three different types; it can affect the whole sentence which corresponds to the *full grammatical negation*, part of the sentence (*partial grammatical negation*), or it can focus on the *subordinate clauses* when negation affects to this specific part of the sentence. The following sentences [(1), (2), and (3)] exemplify these types of negation perfectly.

(1) “*No vayas a esa ciudad, es peligrosa*”¹ → full grammatical negation.

(2) “*Canta pero no canciones de rock*” → partial grammatical negation.

(3) “*Me dijo que no contara su secreto*” → negation of a subordinate clause.

Lexical negation is possible because some words are considered as negatives. This type of negation does not affect the whole sentence or a part of it, but it modifies the meaning of a particular word. It is the case of the pronouns “*nadie*” or “*ninguno*” in the following two sentences [(4) and (5)].

(4) “*Nadie ha elegido esta opción*”

(5) “*Ninguno de los niños quiso jugar al fútbol*”

Sanz Alonso states that negative words can be included in three different grammatical categories: pronouns, adverbs, and indefinite adjectives. However, lexical negation does not occur with all types of pronouns; personal pronouns do not have this negative connotation. They are included in a group formed by some functional words that cannot be negated grammatically or lexically. Determiners, conjunctions, articles, and prepositions are included in this particular classification. In the case of the following example (number 7), the adverb “no” appears before the preposition but this does not mean that this preposition is negated, what is negated is the whole prepositional phrase (“*por mucho madrugar*”).

(6) “* *No tú puedes hacer gimnasia*”

(7) “*No por mucho madrugar amanece más temprano*”

¹ Source of examples: Vanesa Del Río Zamora.

Moreover, following the ideas of Camus Bergareche (1992), in Spanish, negation can be expressed in many ways, not only by using the adverb “no”. Some indefinite pronouns are also relevant to this act of negating. As their name suggests, these pronouns are not definite and do not have a clear reference; this is the case of “*bastantes*” or “*cualquiera*”, among others. The same happens with the pronoun “*nadie*” which has positive origin and it does not have any specific reference although it always refers to a human being. It can be placed in different parts of a sentence; however, the change of place implies a change of structure. “*Nadie*” can appear at the beginning of a sentence as subject such as in (8) or it can appear after the main verb such as in (9). Nevertheless, in this last option, the adverb “no” is required to introduce the sentence.

(8) “*Nadie ha venido a mi fiesta*”

(9) “*No te necesita nadie*”

This last example shows an interesting grammatical structure known as “double negation”, a phenomenon that contains two different negation markers. In Spanish, double negation is allowed but just when one of the negative forms is the adverb “no” and the other is used to emphasize the negation. The structure of this grammatical feature is always the same; the adverb “no” must appear before the pronoun which can be “*nadie*”, “*nada*”, and “*ninguno*” among others. However, according to Sanz Alonso, there is another structure formed by a subordinate clause functioning as direct complement of the sentence (“*no quiero no hablarte*”) that does not function in the same way as the double negation although there are two negation markers; in this last case, the meaning of the sentences is positive contrary to the negative meaning that the double negation causes.

Adverbs can also indicate negation and many of them can be substituted by a prepositional phrase. “Un tipo de sintagmas preposicionales de valor adverbial cuya distribución respecto al adverbio de negación es idéntica a la de aquellas [palabras negativas]” (Hernández Paricio, 1985: 157-8). This is the case, for example, of phrases with a particular structure formed by the preposition “*en*” followed by a determiner and a noun which refers to time (“*en la vida*”). In this instance, it can be observed that this prepositional phrase could be a substitute of the adverb “*nunca*” which is the negative word of “*siempre*”; it has Latin origin and it refers to the negation of time.

2.2 English negation and double negation

In English, there are two methods that can be used to form the negation; one of them is by using some words whose origin is negative, such as the case of *neither* or *never*; and another one is by adding some affixes to some words. These affixes sometimes do not negate the whole sentence but only the word in which they are placed. Some examples of these affixes are *un-*, *dis-*, *in-*, *im-*, and *il-*. However, although this characteristic is of importance, in this language it is essential to know the distinction between some types of negation.

In the following subparts, the differences between verbal and nonverbal negation, analytic and synthetic negation, and clausal and sub-clausal negation are explained. There is also an explanation of another type of negation which is the double negation, the main topic of this paper.

2.2.1 Verbal and Nonverbal Negation

These types of negation are distinguished by taking into account the main verb. In the case of the verbal negation, the verb is linked to the negation marker. It acts as the head of the clause; it is the most important word within the sentence such as it is illustrated in number (10):

(10) “He does not go out with his friends”.

In this sentence, the negation marker is the adverb “*not*” which is associated with the verb that in this specific example is “*go out*”. According to Huddleston (2003), this kind of negation can be sub-divided in other three types which have also some differences among them. The first one is the primary verbal negation which is characterized by using an auxiliary which is always needed to create a negation. In this context, the adverb “*not*” is linked with this auxiliary (*do*). In the previous example the auxiliary is “*does*” which corresponds with the third person singular of “*do*”. Additionally, numbers (11) and (12) show this sort of verbal negation. The second mentioned example represents the primary verbal negation when the auxiliary is not “*do*” but the verb “*to be*”. In this instance, only the adverb “*not*” is needed and the auxiliary “*do*” does not appear because it is substituted by “*be*”.

(11) “I do not play the guitar”

(12) “You are not selfish”

In this university grammar, it is stated that the secondary verbal negation is only used when the main verb of the sentence is an infinitive or a gerund which are non-finite verb forms. In this case, the auxiliary “do” does not have to be used and the adverb “not” appears alone before the infinitive or the gerund. Examples number (13) and (14) represent this type of verbal negation.

(13) “It is important not to break the rules”

(14) “Not smoking is what can improve your health”

Following Huddleston (2003), the last type of verbal negation is the one that is exemplified in number (15). It deals with the imperative and, for this reason, the auxiliary “do” is always required, and it is also needed when the main verb and the head of the sentence is “be”.

(15) “Do not be rude”

These kinds of verbal negations are contrary to the nonverbal negation. The previous ones focus on the verb as main part of the sentence; however, nonverbal negation deals with the complements of the verb and not with the verb itself. Nonverbal negation is formed by the negation of the adjuncts and complements of the verb, which are the ones that are going to be negated. This is showed in example number (16) where what is negated is the direct object (*nothing*) and the verb is in affirmative and past tense (*said*).

(16) “He said nothing about it”

2.2.2 Analytic and Synthetic Negation

The other two types of negation are the analytic and synthetic negations (Huddleston, 2003). These two kinds of negation are differentiated due to the usage of some words with the aim of negating the sentence.

Focusing on the first one, the analytic negation appears in the process of negation when some words that are only used to negate are present in the sentence. It is being referred for example to the adverbs “not” or “no” (when it is contrary of “yes”). These two adverbs are only employed when the sentence is going to be negative. This kind of negation is exemplified in number (17).

(17) “This exercise is not finished”

Nevertheless, in the case of the synthetic negation, there are other words that are not only used to negate but they can also have another syntactic function. It is the case of *nobody*, *few*, or *hardly*. Moreover, this sort of negation can be subdivided into two groups which are the synthetic verbal negation and the synthetic nonverbal negation (Huddleston, 2003). The first one can be mistaken with the analytic negation because the verb is the only thing that it is negated and this negation is made using a contraction (*n't*). This type of negation can be seen in example number (18). However, the main difference between these two types of negations deals with the style. Whereas synthetic verbal negation is really informal, the analytic one is used in formal contexts (Huddleston, 2003: 799-800). These two negations cannot be interchanged because synthetic verbal negation is exclusively employed in informal conversations and informal writings to create a familiar and close environment between speaker and listener or between writer and reader.

Contrary to the synthetic verbal negation, the synthetic nonverbal negation can be marked by three different types of negation: absolute negators which express a complete negation, for example, *nobody*, *never*...; approximate negators which are words that create a partial negation, for instance, *few*, *little*...; and affixal negators which are characterized by the usage of prefixes and suffixes such as *un-*, *in-*, *-less*... The following examples show these different types of negators.

(18) “*This essay isn't finished*” → Synthetic verbal negation

(19) “*Nobody wanted to go there*” → Absolute negator

(20) “*Few of them wanted to go there*” → Approximate negator

(21) “*He is really careless when driving a car*” → Affixal negator

2.2.3 Clausal and Sub-clausal Negation

Other types of negation distinguished in Huddleston (2003) are the clausal and sub-clausal ones. To differentiate these two types, it is important to focus on how to make the question tag. A clausal negation requires the usage of a positive question tag. However, in the case of the sub-clausal negation, the question tag is often negative. This happens because the first one refers to the negation of the whole sentence, but the second one deals with the negation of only a part of it.

Moreover, the sub-clausal negation is characterized by the usage of prefixes and suffixes that are responsible for marking the negation. Clausal negation, in addition, can

be divided in other two types that are verbal clausal negation and non-verbal clausal negation (Huddleston, 2003). The structure of the first one is usually formed by the adverb “*not*” followed by an auxiliary (can, be, do...); however, non-verbal clausal negation consists on the negation of one of the words that appears in the sentence whereas the verb continues being in affirmative. This last kind of negation is done using pronouns or adverbs such as *rarely* and *never* among others. Examples number (22), (23ab), and (24abc) refer to these last types of negation.

- (22) “*Anne is unemployed*” → sub-clausal negation [*isn't she?*]
- (23a) “*He isn't intelligent*” }
 (23b) “*He doesn't like apples*” } Verbal clausal negation [is/does he?]
- (24a) “*Nobody is kind*” }
 (24b) “*Not everybody likes apples*” } Non- verbal clausal negation
 (24c) “*I never listen to the radio*” }

2.2.4. Double negation and Negative Concord

The term “negative concord” refers to the characteristic that many languages possess that consists on the approval of the use of double negatives. This means that these languages share the idea that it is correct the usage of two or more negative markers in the same sentence, and that this phenomenon does not change the negative meaning into a positive one. “Negative concord (NC) is the indication of multiple points in a clause of the fact that the clause is to be interpreted as semantically negated” (Ladusaw, 1992: 240). When a language accepts constructions such as the one of the example number (25) it is because this language presents negative concord.

- (25) “*Nobody says nothing*”

This particular sentence expresses only one negation but it appears in two different places (in the subject *-nobody-* and in the direct object *-nothing-*), so it could be considered as redundant. Nevertheless, Ladusaw (1992) affirms that this is not correct and that not all the negative markers are irrelevant.

Moreover, the usage of this phenomenon of double negation is not acceptable in Standard English due to the fact that there are two negative forms that create a positive meaning. “But it should be noted that the double negative always modifies the idea, for

the result of the whole expression is somewhat different from the simple idea expressed positively” (Jespersen 1939: 63). This refers to the fact that it is not the same using double negation than a sentence in affirmative, so it cannot be completely substituted by it although the meaning of the result of this phenomenon is also positive. For example, it is not the same saying “*it is not undone*” than saying “*it is not done*” because in the first instance, there is more emphasis in the action than in the subject of the sentence (person who performs the action).

As it is mentioned in the first part of this work, one of the objectives of this paper is to explain the differences between the double negation in Spanish and in English. The main distinction between these two languages deals with the idea that in Spanish, double negation is allowed but in English is not grammatically correct due to some factors detailed in the previous parts. However, this is not the only difference; another issue in which these two languages and their double negations differ is what refers to the collocation of the negation marker in the sentences. Whereas in English there is a specific structure, in Spanish, the adverb “*no*” can be placed in many different parts of the sentence, forming other structures such as the mentioned double negation, where the adverb “*no*” is followed by the main verb and a negative indefinite pronoun.

In addition, this can cause some problems to foreign language learners because there is interference between their native language and the foreign language. Normally, this happens when the level of the second language is low, and learners take into account the characteristics and grammatical rules of their first language. This phenomenon is really common among people who started learning the second language when they were adults (Bhela, 1999). Moreover, this interference does not only affect the grammar of the second language but also to the phonology and vocabulary. This phenomenon is more usual between languages that although they share some characteristics, they also differ in some others such as English and Spanish

3. METHODOLOGY

This section includes a description of the methodology carried out to demonstrate if the hypotheses mentioned in the first part of this paper are refused or validated. These hypotheses deal with the idea that Spanish learners of English do not use the structure of the double negation in a correct way because they do not know the appropriate use of the

different negative pronouns. B1 group of participants make many errors due to the fact that they follow their own intuition, although they know the grammatical rule. However, A2 participants pay much attention to their intuition due to the fact that they still do not know this grammatical rule according to the Plan Curricular del Instituto Cervantes. [See table 1]. This means that when we compare them with the other group of participants, both groups of learners (A2 and B1) make more mistakes and have a higher percentage of errors than the English native participants. Regarding this issue, I decided that it was better to take Plan Curricular del Instituto Cervantes as reference since the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages gathers the skills at each level of the language, but it does not describe in which level the double negation has to be learnt as it can be seen in table 2.

| A2 | B1 |
|--|---|
| <p>- <u>Negativos</u> Nada, nadie Aislados como respuesta a una pregunta</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ¿Qué has comprado? <p>Nada.</p> | <p>- <u>Negativos</u> Nada, nadie, ninguno</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Condiciones de aparición de las palabras negativas. <p>No vino ninguno./ *Vino ninguno.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referencia a personas. Invariable nadie; con variación de género en singular: ninguno/ninguna/ ninguna persona • Referencia a cosas. Invariable nada; con variación de género en singular: ninguno/ninguna/ninguna cosa • <u>Diferencia semántica:</u> <p>Nada/nadie; nadie/ninguno No tengo nada [- humano]. / No tengo a nadie [+ humano] No me ha llamado nadie [primera mención]./ No me ha llamado ninguno [segunda mención] Nada, nadie, ninguno en combinación con más. No ha venido nadie más. No quiero nada más.</p> |

TABLE 1: Plan Curricular del Instituto Cervantes: negative makers.

Source: Cervantes Institute

<http://cvc.cervantes.es/ensenanza/biblioteca_ele/plan_curricular/niveles/02_gramatica_inventario_b1-b2.htm>

| LEVEL | DESCRIPTION OF THE ABILITIES |
|-----------|---|
| A2 | Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need. |
| B1 | Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes & ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. |

TABLE 2: Common Reference Levels: global scale²
Source: Council of Europe <http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/elp/elp-reg/Source/Global_scale/globalscale.pdf>

This research divides participants in two different groups: English natives and Spanish learners of English. There is a total of 36 participants who agreed to answer all the exercises about double negation. They are between 15 and 22 years old. 26 of the participants are from Spain and they are subdivided in two other subgroups depending on their level of English. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages is taken into account when doing this division.

Before starting with the description of the tasks and participants it is important to highlight the distinction between the terms “*learning*” and “*acquiring*”³, because this distinction is essential to understand the difference between the native and the non-native group. The first one is characterized because they have acquired English as their mother tongue and they are in contact with this language since birth. However, in the case of the second group, they have learnt English; they had their first contact with English after they were 4 years old. This means that they started learning English after the called critical period (Johnson and Newport, 1989). This last concept refers to one of the most important properties in second language acquisition; it can be explained taking into account two different bases: the biological and the linguistic. Both describe that before the age of 4

² This table is modified to include the two studied levels although the original document is formed by a total of six different ones.

³ The distinction between the terms “*acquiring*” and “*learning*” and the difference between biological and the linguistic bases are taken from notes of previous courses provided by Professor Raquel Fernández Fuertes (*Gramática Comparada: Español/Inglés*).

years old our brain is prepared to receive all type of information regarding languages but after this moment, it is believed that the whole acquisition is not possible. This means that if the first contact with a language is after this critical period, the possibility of being native-like is much difficult according to Johnson and Newport.

Thus, in the following two subparts, these participants are described in detail (their division in levels, their age, their nationality...), as well as, the exercises they answered, explaining how much time they have to respond them, and the different instructions they had to follow in order to answer the tasks about double negation correctly.

3.1 Materials

In this research, participants are divided in two main groups: English native speakers and Spanish learners of English. The native group is formed by 10 people from the USA and the other group of learners is composed by 26 people being divided in two subgroups of 13 people each of them. Both groups, English natives and Spanish learners, are differentiated by some aspects regarding bilingualism and the acquisition of a second language.

The participants of the native group acquired English in a natural environment because they were from Minnesota (US) and they were in contact with this language since birth. They acquired English without going to any school or academy to study the mentioned language. They were between 15 and 22 years old. The group of the Spanish learners were in contact with this second language after being four years old. They learned English in an institutional context, in schools and academies. Whereas the English natives acquired the language in an effortless way, the second group employed much effort to learn grammatical rules, vocabulary, and pronunciation, for example.

Regarding the second group, Spanish learners of English, it is important to clarify that they were also divided in two other subgroups. These groups were selected taking into account the participants' level of English. One of these subgroups was formed by people who have an A2 level of English according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, and the second subgroup had B1 level. This distinction was made because the first group was expected to make more mistakes regarding the double negation than the second one due to the fact that they still did not know the grammatical

rule about double negatives. Spanish learners of English were from Ágreda (Soria) and they were students of an academy named “Leonor Vera”⁴ located also in this town.

Furthermore, before starting the research, tasks were checked by a native woman. She is from Minnesota as the rest of the native group. She studied a degree on Spanish in the USA and she was also interested on this research because she knew that Spaniards have so many problems when using the studied structure so she also agreed with the proposed hypotheses. These tasks are explained in the following subsection.

3.2 Procedure

Participants answered three different tasks that are explained in detail in this subsection of the paper. The exercises included in these tasks are own elaborated. They were checked and revised by an American English native to verify that they can be answered without problems by people with an intermediate and a basic level of English such as it is the case of the B1 and A2 participants. This American woman also checked if these sentences are used in a natural environment and if they are grammatical. Since these tasks were used to analyze double negation, whenever participants encounter any problem with the vocabulary, it was agreed that it can be solved by the person responsible for the realization of this research. These tasks are included in Annex number 1 at the end of this paper.

The order of the tasks was also important because they were organized taking into account the level of difficulty, starting with the easiest one to increase the confidence of the participants; continuing with the shortest but also the most difficult one, and finally ending with the longest one but with an intermediate level of difficulty. Besides, some instructions were given to the participants before they started doing the exercises in order to help them to fulfill the tasks without additional difficulties.

The first task is a multiple choice exercise composed by ten questions; students had to answer or indicate if the correct option was letter “A” or “B”. In this exercise, participants had to differentiate between the usage of a positive pronoun in negative sentences (*anything*) and a pronoun with negative connotations which has to be used in

⁴ Due to the fact that the Spanish learners of English belong to an academy and most of them are not older than 18 years old, I had to ask for permission to the principal of this academy (Leonor Vera), and also, to their parents. Moreover, all students agreed to answer the question without any obligation.

affirmative sentences (*nothing*). Participants had to know if the verb had to be in affirmative or negative form taking into account the pronoun that goes with that verb. There was also an example of a word that was used negatively due to a prefix (*illegal*) which was supposed not to cause any problem to the participants due to its similar equivalent in Spanish.

Task 2 is more difficult than the previous one; it consists of five different sentences which all share the same problem: they contain double negation. Participants were expected to correct them, changing the verb or the negative pronoun; both solutions were correct and accepted. The problem dealt with the transference of the two languages, Spanish and English, because Spanish learners read the sentences and tried to translate them literally so they did not see the mistakes due to the fact that in Spanish, there is no distinction between the pronouns with negative connotation and the ones with positive connotation; both types are translated with the same Spanish pronoun (*anything* and *nothing* are both translated as *nada*, for example). In this task, the teacher of the academy or the responsible of performing the research did not have permission to give any kind of clue. The main objective was that participants answered the tasks without help, writing what they believed to be the correct answer.

The last exercise is made up of fifteen questions; participants had to indicate if the sentence was correct or incorrect. Some of these sentences were wrong due to the mistaken usage of the pronoun and others because of the tense of the verbs and their relation with the mentioned pronouns. Moreover, they also had the opportunity of indicating if they did not know the answer to the task and at the end of it, they had to justify their answers. This was required to avoid random answers if they did not know the right answer. In this exercise, sentences were repeated using the same vocabulary but changing their structure, the pronoun, or the verbal tense, in order to know how participants justified their answers: explaining these changes, using their intuition; or, in the case of B1 group of participants, writing the grammatical rule.

The three different groups were asked to answer these three tasks in a maximum of 15 minutes because the exercises are not long and they can be answered with short responses. When I was analyzing the results of these exercises, I detected a problem with one of the participants of the B1 level group due to the fact that when the academy's teacher told the students that they had 5 minutes to finish the exercises, this participant decided to change most of his answers in task number 1. He firstly answered these

questions correctly but then he changed many of them; it could be seen because she crossed out many of the questions of the task. This makes me think that this participant did not know the grammatical rule although he belonged to the intermediate group (B1). Moreover, participants were free to answer or not these exercises and, they were not forced to take part in this research. In addition, to ensure the anonymity of the participants, they only had to include their age and sex on top of the page where the tasks were answered. Also, a correction sheet was created and revised by an English native with the aims of correcting the tasks in an easier way and without committing any mistake. [See Annex 2].

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results obtained by the participants in the different tasks are explained and discussed in this section. These results were assessed using the correction sheet that appears at the end of this paper, annex number 2. The correction sheet was used with the aim of having an unbiased correction so that the three groups shared the same correction criteria. This section contains the results of both groups of participants, native speakers of English and Spanish learners (this last group appears divided according to the level of English of the participants). These results were used to validate, or reject, the hypotheses.

First of all, the results of the non-native group are explained starting with the subgroup that has a basic level of English, which is the A2 group of participants. Then, the results of the B1 participants are discussed, and finally, there is an explanation of the marks of the native group paying special attention to the justification of their answers which appears in the third and last task.

The mistakes made by the participants, without exception, were classified according to the number of errors they performed. Error classification was done separately for each task. The purpose was to know how many participants answered the task correctly, that is, without any error. In tables 2 and 3, participants were classified according to the number of errors they made when answering the tasks; they were also divided according to the level in which they were included.

| A2 – 13 Participants⁵ | | | |
|---|-----------|-----------|------------------|
| TASK 1 | | | |
| 0 errors | 1 error | 2 errors | 3 or more errors |
| 3 (23%) | 1 (7.7%) | 4 (30.7%) | 5 (38.4%) |
| TASK 2 | | | |
| 0 errors | 1 error | 2 errors | 3 or more errors |
| 3 (23%) | 4 (30.7%) | 2 (15.4%) | 4 (30.7%) |
| TASK 3 | | | |
| 0 errors | 1 error | 2 errors | 3 or more errors |
| 1 (7.7%) | 0 (0%) | 3 (23%) | 9 (69.2%) |

TABLE 3: A2 participants classified according to their errors
Source: Vanesa Del Río Zamora

| B1 – 13 Participants | | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------|----------|------------------|
| TASK 1 | | | |
| 0 errors | 1 error | 2 errors | 3 or more errors |
| 4 (30.7%) | 3 (23%) | 3 (23%) | 3 (23%) |
| TASK 2 | | | |
| 0 errors | 1 error | 2 errors | 3 or more errors |
| 8 (61.5%) | 3 (23%) | 1 (7.7%) | 1 (7.7%) |
| TASK 3 | | | |
| 0 errors | 1 error | 2 errors | 3 or more errors |
| 2 (15.4%) | 4 (30.7%) | 3 (23%) | 4 (30.7%) |

TABLE 4: B1 participants classified according to their errors
Source: Vanesa Del Río Zamora

Although it was supposed that the first task was the easiest one, five of the A2 participants (group with the lower level of English) made more than three mistakes. In their explanation, most of them agreed that they tried to translate the sentences into Spanish but that their translation was less useful than what they expected because both options could be the correct one. For example, in the case of the second question of this first task, they had to choose between “*anything*” and “*nothing*” and both options mean “*nada*” in Spanish so these participants did not know which of them was the appropriate answer. In this basic level, the differences between these types of pronouns are supposed to be known. Nevertheless, this is not the only question which was wrongly answered because in the case of the negation using a prefix, they also found some problems. It is being referred to question number 4 whose response was “*b, illegal*”. This word is exactly

⁵ The different results that appear in these two tables are not the exact percentages; they have been rounded in order to improve the understanding.

the same as in Spanish but they thought that it was impossible to have such an easy answer and they believed that there was another possible and more difficult response.

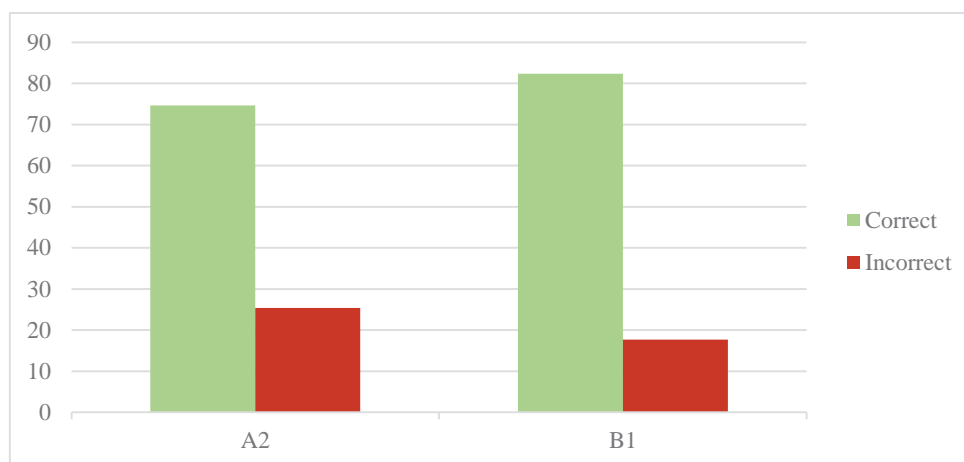
The second task is the shortest one and, although many participants failed in some of the sentences, in general, it was the task with fewer mistakes as it was shown in the two previous tables. I would like to highlight that in this exercise, 8 out of the 13 participants belonging to the B1 level group did not make any mistake; this represents the 61.5% of the participants with the highest level. Nevertheless, what matters in this task is that some of the participants corrected two or three sentences leaving the rest without answering because they thought that the examples were correct. However, all the sentences included exactly the same number of mistakes so this makes me think that these participants did not know the grammatical rule or they had not learnt it properly.

What is really important in the third exercise is the justification of their answers because participants offered many different explanations. The majority of the A2 level students wrote that many of their answers were selected because the sentences sounded good or weird, that is just following their personal intuition. However, in the case of B1 participants, the rationale was different since many of them gave the grammatical rule as justification for their answers although some of them had errors when answering. This makes me think that they knew the theory but they did not know how to put it into practice. It is worth stressing native responses because, even though, they answered all sentences correctly, they did not know how to justify their answers, and some of them wrote that they did not know why the sentences were correct or incorrect but they knew that their answers were correct because they were natives. Moreover, some of the participants corrected the sentences they believed that were incorrect as a way of justification.

To summarize the results included in these two tables, I think that the second task was the easiest one because the three different groups of participants made fewer errors than in the other two exercises. On the contrary, the most difficult one was the last task due to the fact that in the group of B1 participants, four of them had more than three errors (31% of the participants), and in the case of the A2 group, nine of them were the ones who made more than three mistakes (the 69% of them).

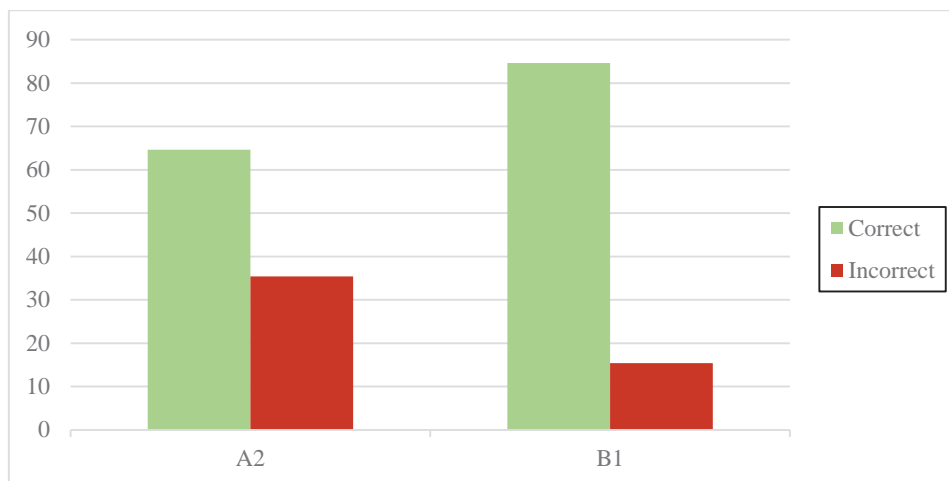
One of the hypotheses of this paper was that there were going to be significant differences between the two groups of English learners: A2 and B1 participants. The first subgroup was believed to have more errors in all the tasks than the second one because

they did not know the grammatical rule yet. In order to analyze if this hypothesis was valid and to show the results in a visual and clearer way, three graphs were made, one for each task, where the results were portrayed and later explained.



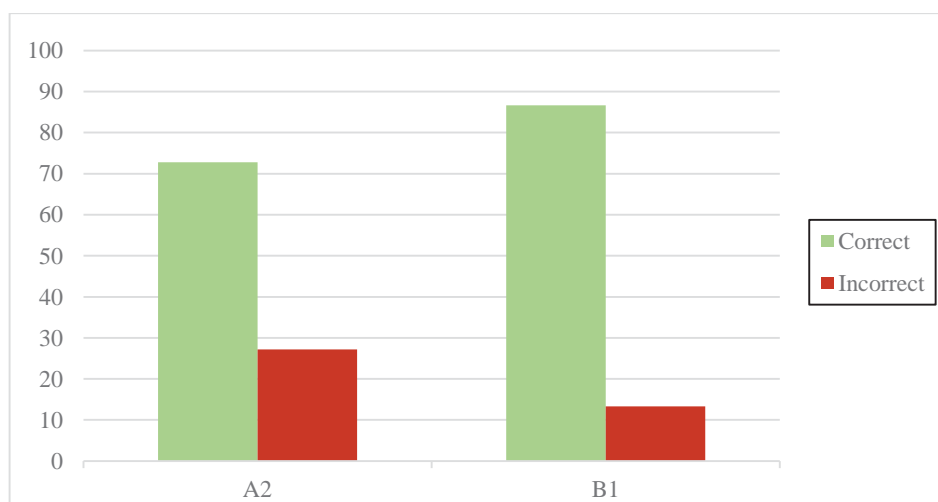
GRAPH 1: Comparison of the results: A2 and B1 participants in task 1
Source: Vanesa Del Rfo Zamora

In this first task, a maximum of 130 possible answers can be obtained. In the case of the participants with the lower level of English, a total of 97 of the possible answers were responded correctly; this corresponds to the 74.62% of the answers what is a really high percentage taking into account that, according to the Plan Curricular del Instituto Cervantes, in A2 level, double negation is not completely explained but only some basic concepts such as the differences between the negative pronouns are taught. My hypothesis was that this group would not achieve this high percentage of correct results. For this reason, my hypothesis stated that there was going to be a significant difference between both groups of learners is refused because B1 participants answered 107 questions correctly which is equivalent to the 82.3% of the sentences. Although B1 group of participants answered in a correct way more sentences than the A2 group, the difference is not significant since the group with lower level of English responded incorrectly 10 sentences more than the B1 participants that is a difference of 7.68% which cannot be considered significant.



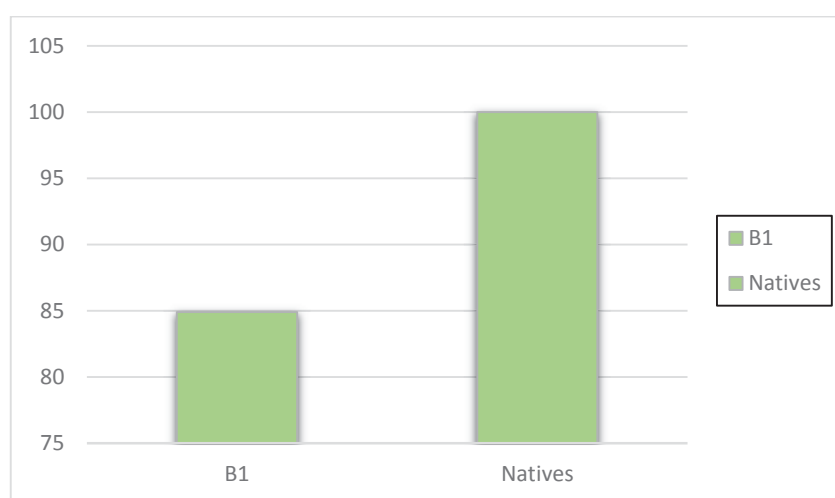
GRAPH 2: Comparison of the results: A2 and B1 participants in task 2
Source: Vanesa Del Río Zamora

This graph presents the results of the second task which was the shortest one; the total of possible correct and incorrect answers was 65 much lower than the 130 of the previous task. The participants with higher level of English (B1 group) obtained 15.4% of incorrect answers, in other words, 84.6% of correctness, as it can be seen in graph number 2. Besides, A2 participants had a higher percentage of wrong responses which corresponds to 23 sentences of a total of 65. This means that the 13 participants with an A2 level failed 35.38% of the questions although they were supposed to know the distinctions between the different pronouns and how to use them in a sentence. For this reason, my hypothesis which stated that the participants did not know the different use of the negative pronouns is validated due to the fact that both groups made a similar number of mistakes in this task, leaving many questions without correction.



GRAPH 3: Comparison of the results: A2 and B1 participants in task 3
Source: Vanesa Del Río Zamora

This third graph shows the last comparison of the different results that the Spanish participants obtained on task number 3. As it can be observed, our previous mentioned hypothesis is refused because although the participants who held a lower level of English made more mistakes than the other group, there is no a significant difference between both groups. In this particular exercise, A2 learners had the 72.82% of correct answers whereas the group who has an intermediate level of English (B1) answered the 86.67% of the sentences in a correct way; therefore, there is a difference of 13.85% which is a low percentage.



GRAPH 4: Comparison of Natives and B1 participants: correct answers
Source: Vanesa Del Río Zamora

The last graph presents a comparison⁶ between learners of English with a B1 level and the native speakers of English. Our hypothesis stated that there would be differences between these two groups being B1 participants non- native like, this means that these learners of English were not equal to the native group and that they were expected to have more mistakes than the English natives. This graph shows that the Spanish group answered 15.1% questions in a wrong way, whereas natives did not have any problem when resolving these different tasks. Whereas my hypothesis was that B1 group was expected to have more mistakes, the percentage of difference is really low since we are comparing a native group and a non-native one. For this reason, I consider that this hypothesis is not validated.

⁶ In this specific comparison, the three different tasks were taken into account and there was not distinction among them.

To conclude this section, the results of the testing of the hypotheses detailed in the first part of this paper can be summarized as follows: task 2 reveals that B1 group of participants knew how to use the different negative pronouns whereas the A2 group of participants made more mistakes and they had to learn it. B1 learners answered the 61.5% of the answers in a correct way, but A2 learners corrected only some of the sentences, although all of them included the same errors. Additionally, our hypothesis that stated that the difference between the groups was going to be significant is refused due to the fact that in tasks number 1 and 3 the percentage of errors made by the group who had a basic level of English was similar to the percentage made by the group who possessed an intermediate level. These differences are of 9.23% in the first task, and of 13.85% in the last exercise, therefore, since the percentages are low, they cannot be considered significant.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The phenomenon of the double negation is really interesting due to the fact that its usage varies depending on the language (i.e. its use is allowed in Spanish but it is grammatically incorrect in English, as mentioned in section 2). The differences between simple and double negation and their main characteristics, not only regarding the structure but also the collocation within the sentences, are important when dealing with a foreign language. This paper has focused on the distinctions between English and Spanish double negation. In Standard English, this phenomenon is not allowed since its usage produces a positive meaning instead of a negative one, whereas, in Spanish it is grammatically correct to use the double negative structure because the meaning remains negative.

When carrying out this research, I realized that it is necessary to improve the teaching of this grammatical structure because, as this paper shows, even Spanish learners of English with an intermediate level of this language (B1) had some difficulties when using double negation.

The participants of this study did not know how to put in practice the theory they knew, the differences between the negative pronouns used in this structure, or how to conjugate these verbs in order to use them correctly so as to avoid repeating the negation markers. This is seen in task number 3, where they had to justify their answers. The first hypothesis of this paper anticipated that Spanish learners of English would answer the

tasks according to their intuition and that they would try to translate the different sentences in order to deduce their meaning. After the study, this hypothesis is confirmed, as there is interference of the participants' first language, and they believed that it was correct to answer the questions applying their knowledge of their mother tongue language. For example, this can be seen in task 1 where many of the participants answered the questions in which they had to choose the correct pronoun in an incorrect way.

The second hypothesis of this paper stated that Spanish learners of English did not know how to use the different negative pronouns, regardless of their level of English. The results of the second task validated this hypothesis because, although both groups of participants had studied these differences, they made mistakes when answering this exercise. The group of participants with an A2 level of English were expected to know the differences between pronouns with negative connotations which are used in affirmative sentences (*nobody*), and the ones that have positive connotations and which are employed in negative contexts (*anybody*). However, this group failed 35.38% of the sentences, and the group of participants with a B1 level of English only made mistakes in 10 sentences, which is a 15.4%. These results validate our second hypothesis since these participants did not know these differences properly. Even though, in this hypothesis, the distinction between these groups was not influential, I found that it was significant and that B1 participants made less errors when using double negation than the other group of learners.

The last hypothesis affirmed that there was a significant difference between A2 and B1 learners due to the fact that A2 learners did not learn the phenomenon of the double negation in detail. Nevertheless, this hypothesis was rejected when the results of the tasks answered by both groups were analyzed. The results of these two exercises showed that the difference between these two groups was not truly significant. Even though the participants who had an intermediate level of English answered correctly more questions than the other group, the percentage of difference is really low. In task number 1, for example, the number of incorrect answers, which distinguish these two groups of participants, only represents a 7.68%.

After carrying out the study of this paper, it is possible to affirm that it is really difficult to learn and understand certain grammatical structures of a foreign language if the initial stage of this learning process occurs after the critical period. This statement is illustrated in graph 4 where the results of the participants with a B1 level of English were

compared to the answers of the native group. Furthermore, these results prove that there is little knowledge regarding the use of the double negatives among the Spanish students. These poor results should awake a sense of responsibility in the teachers when it comes to teaching and explaining the grammar of a foreign language, as it has been proved to be a very problematic aspect to learn when learning foreign languages; in addition, this can also help to improve the way in which grammatical structures are taught (as it is the case of the double negation) since there are significant differences between languages such as English and Spanish.

In order to validate this results, more research in this topic is needed. This research can be improved by adding more participants in each of the groups because 36 people is not a really high number. Furthermore, the design of the tasks can also be modified by adding more questions in each of them. This research can also be further developed by including another group of participants with a higher level such as the C1 or C2 (taking into account the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) with the aim of comparing the obtained results with the ones of the group of natives.

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7. ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: TASKS

TASK 1: Choose the correct answer

1. Do you want anything?
 - No, I _____ anything
 - a. Don't want
 - b. Want

2. What did you do yesterday afternoon?
 - I didn't do _____
 - a. Anything
 - b. Nothing

3. Do you have brothers or sisters?
 - No, I don't have _____
 - a. None
 - b. Any

4. Do you think smoking is allowed here?
 - No, it _____ illegal
 - a. Is not
 - b. Is

5. Do you know anyone at this party?
 - No, I don't know _____
 - a. Nobody
 - b. Anyone

6. Where did you go yesterday?
 - I didn't go _____. I stayed at home.
 - a. Anywhere
 - b. Nowhere

7. Did Michael cook anything for dinner?

- No, he _____ anything
 - a. Never cooks
 - b. Cooked

8. Did you see Mary at the park yesterday?

- No, I saw _____ else but you.
 - a. Anyone
 - b. No one

9. Are you going to pay the bills?

- No, I _____ to pay no bills
 - a. Am going
 - b. Am not going

10. Can you tell me Mary's secret?

- No, I promised her not to tell it to _____
 - a. Nobody
 - b. Anybody

TASK 2: Correct these sentences if necessary

1) I can't say nothing →

2) I can't make friends with nobody →

3) This attitude won't get you nowhere →

4) I didn't have nothing →

5) I don't see Peter nowhere →

TASK 3: Read these 15 sentences. In your opinion, are they correct? Write and “X” in the square you consider to be the proper one and then, justify briefly your answers in the following lines.

| | Correct | I don't know | Incorrect |
|---|---------|--------------|-----------|
| I have any children | | | |
| I didn't know nothing | | | |
| That attitude don't give you to nowhere | | | |
| He has no friends | | | |
| I didn't do nothing! | | | |
| She doesn't ever call me | | | |
| I don't have any children | | | |
| He hasn't got friends | | | |
| I didn't do anything! | | | |
| She never calls me | | | |
| I don't have no children | | | |
| That attitude give you nowhere | | | |
| He hasn't got no friends | | | |
| I didn't know anything | | | |
| She doesn't never call me | | | |

ANNEX 2: CORRECTION SHEET⁷

TASK 1: Choose the correct answer

1. Do you want anything?
 - No, I _____ anything
 - a. **Don't want**
 - b. Want

2. What did you do yesterday afternoon?
 - I didn't do _____
 - i. **Anything**
 - ii. Nothing

3. Do you have brothers or sisters?
 - No, I don't have _____
 - i. None
 - ii. **Any**

4. Do you think smoking is allowed here?
 - No, it _____ illegal
 - i. Is not
 - ii. **Is**

5. Do you know anyone at this party?
 - No, I don't know _____
 - i. Nobody
 - ii. **Anyone**

6. Where did you go yesterday?
 - I didn't go _____. I stayed at home.
 - i. **Anywhere**
 - ii. Nowhere

⁷ This correction sheet has been revised by a native linguist from Minnesota called Weronika Trejo.

7. Did Michael cook anything for dinner?

- No, he _____ anything
 - i. Never cooks**
 - ii. Cooked

8. Did you see Mary at the park yesterday?

- No, I saw _____ else but you.
 - i. Anyone
 - ii. No one**

9. Are you going to pay the bills?

- a. No, I _____ to pay no bills
 - i. Am going**
 - ii. Am not going

10. Can you tell me Mary's secret?

- a. No, I promised her not to tell it to _____
 - i. Nobody
 - ii. Anybody**

TASK 2: Correct these sentences if necessary

- 1) I can't say nothing → I can't say anything/ I can say nothing
- 2) I can't make friends with nobody → I can't make friends with anybody/ I can make friends with nobody
- 3) This attitude won't get you nowhere → This attitude won't get you anywhere/ This attitude will get you nowhere
- 4) I didn't have nothing → I didn't have anything/ I had nothing
- 5) I don't see Peter nowhere → I don't see Peter anywhere/ I see Peter nowhere

TASK 3: Read these 15 sentences. In your opinion, are they correct? Write and “X” in the square you consider to be the proper one and then, justify briefly your answers in the following lines.

| | Correct | I don't know | Incorrect |
|---|---------|--------------|-----------|
| I have any children | | | X |
| I didn't know nothing | | | X |
| That attitude don't give you to nowhere | | | X |
| He has no Friends | X | | |
| I didn't do nothing! | | | X |
| She doesn't ever call me | X | | |
| I don't have any children | X | | |
| He hasn't got Friends | X | | |
| I didn't do anything! | X | | |
| She never calls me | X | | |
| I don't have no children | | | X |
| That attitude give you nowhere | X | | |
| He hasn't got no friends | | | X |
| I didn't know anything | X | | |
| She doesn't never call me | | | X |

The ones that are incorrect is due to the use of two negatives in the sentence, a phenomenon called “Double negation”.

ANNEX 3: COMPLETE LIST OF EXAMPLES

- (1) “No vayas a esa ciudad, es peligrosa”
- (2) “Canta pero no canciones de rock”
- (3) “Me dijo que no contara su secreto”
- (4) “Nadie ha elegido esta opción”
- (5) “Ninguno de los niños quiso jugar al futbol”

- (6) “* No tú puedes hacer gimnasia”
- (7) “No por mucho madrugar amanece más temprano”
- (8) “Nadie ha venido a mi fiesta”
- (9) “No te necesita nadie”
- (10) “He does not go out with his friends”.
- (11) “I do not play the guitar”
- (12) “You are not selfish”
- (13) “It is important not to break the rules”
- (14) “Not smoking is what can improve your health”
- (15) “Do not be rude”
- (16) “He told nothing about it”
- (17) “This exercise is not finished”
- (18) “This essay isn’t finished”
- (19) “Nobody wanted to go there”
- (20) “Few of them wanted to go there”
- (21) “He is really careless when driving a car”
- (22) “Anne is unemployed”
- (23a) “He isn’t intelligent”
- (23b) “He doesn’t like apples”
- (24a) “Nobody is kind”
- (24b) “Not everybody likes apples”
- (24c) “I never listen to the radio”
- (25) “Nobody says nothing”