

A Comparative Analysis of Canonical Clausal Negation in English and Sinhala

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The generative approach to syntax investigates clausal and phrasal structures in terms of their generative properties i.e. their recursive capacity. This involves formularizing various syntactic structures within the overall framework of Principles and Parameters. As such, the particular layout of syntactic structures, their reconstructive capacities and their limitations are explained bestowing explanatory adequacy for the language user. In the present study, the canonical clausal negations are analyzed from a generative perspective in the hope of unearthing their inner mechanisms. In the analysis, established views on the canonical clausal negation in English are used as a point of comparison. Such a comparative analytical approach is taken considering the pronounced differences that exist between canonical clausal negational structures in English in Sinhala. According to the literature, the weak inflection of English prevents raising of the thematic verb from its base position to Tense and Agreement at Phonetic Form allowing the thematic verb to remain in situ inside Verb Phrase. As a result, the negation marker, “not”, precedes the thematic verb in clausal negation. In the present study, it was revealed that considering the word-order and headedness differences between Sinhala and English, the Negative Phrase is located between Object Agreement Phrase and Verb Phrase in Sinhala. The strong inflection of Sinhala allows raising of the thematic verb from its base position at the head of Verb Phrase to Tense and Subject Agreement Phrase at Phonetic Form. As a result, the negation marker, “naha”, follows the thematic verb in clausal negation. Hence, thematic verbs in Sinhala appear to the right of negation. In other words, the negative marker “naha” is placed at the head of Negative Phrase in Sinhala.

Keywords: English; negation; negative phrase (NegP); Sinhala; syntax.