



A Double Negative Laugh

The last student I tutored was in 2009 and he was a very educated man from Argentina. We had a very good time together, he wanting to understand all aspects of the English language. And while he was a terrific student, his nine year old daughter, who often accompanied him in the summer months, was in many ways more advanced in her knowledge of English. Being so young and having many English speaking friends, she had ample opportunities to speak and write English. She could speak English and Spanish equally well. It didn't go against her nature to inform her dad that he was wrong when he made an error during our sessions, much to the dismay of dear old dad.

It was always amusing to me when the father/daughter duo would argue a fine point about proper usage or spelling or punctuation or whatever. Of course I became the arbitrator of these disagreements. They both knew that their arguments were amusing to me and so they made it bigger than it really was.

One day they were particularly feisty toward each other. Now we all know that use of double negatives is perfectly acceptable when speaking Spanish, but not so when speaking English. Their argument became a little more heated than usual and finally dad said to his daughter, "you don't know nothing about English." After laughing so hard, I took the opportunity to explain that double negatives are not permitted. He laughed sheepishly and his daughter gave him a big hug.

Sad to say, he left the Green Bay area but became I successful minister catering to both English and Spanish speaking church members. I have very fond memories of our time together.

Bob Conway