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# A study of some linguistic features of the transferred negation of cognitive non-factive verbs in English

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**Abstract:** Cognitive non-factive verbs are one of lexical verbs used a lot in modality because of their linguistic features. One of their special characteristics is the transfer of negative form or transferred negation from a complement clause to the main clause or matrix clause. In order to see the scope of the raising of negative form of these verbs better, we will examine them in syntactics, semantics and pragmatics, based on 300 utterances collected from different sources such as novels, short stories and the internet. Particularly, I hope the scope of negation and purpose of transferred negation will help Vietnamese learners of English use them effectively in communication. Also, the findings might be useful for teaching English as a foreign language in the Vietnamese setting.

**Keywords:** Transferred Negation, Cognitive Non-Factive Verbs, Modality, Syntactics, Semantics, Pragmatics, Utterances

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## 1. Introduction

There is a considerable vitality left in the study of modality, despite the fact that as a philosophical and linguistic concept it has been the object of the continual scrutiny and reformulation since at least the time of Aristotle. The quantity of recent works on modality by linguists is evidence of the continuing fascination it still demands. Yet, according to Jongeboer “*Comparing the relevant grammars and the monographs to [...] modal aspects in general, one is astonished to find that in seemingly no other field of grammar so much disagreement prevails as in what I summarize under the term of modality. It is the true sense of the word a maze in which every grammarian is searching for his way*” cited [Wynmann, p.14]. Therefore, a study on some linguistic features of negative transfer of cognitive non-factive verbs in English, based on 300 utterances seems to be a significant task, contributing to the study of language in general and the study of English as a foreign language in particular in Vietnam.

## 2. Literature Review

Up to now transferred negation has been concerned by a lot of linguists in the world such as Klima, Edward S.

(1964), Lakoff, R. (1969), Quirk, R. et al (1985), Horn, Laurence R. (1989), Bublitz, Wolfram (1992), Halliday M.A.K. (2004)... In Vietnam, a great deal of interesting work has been carried out in this area, for example Ngũ Thiện Hùng (2004), Trần Văn Phước (2004), Nguyễn Kim Thân (1972)... In spite of the attention that has been devoted to negation, there are still vast lacunae in our knowledge of the forms, meanings and functions of this phenomenon, especially the findings on pragmatic meanings in the transferred negation of cognitive non-factive verbs in positive politeness strategy will be an interesting and useful linguistic feature to Vietnamese learners of English.

## 3. The Transferred Negation of Cognitive Non-Factive Verbs

In English, when we want to express negative ideas in complex sentences with cognitive non-factive verbs like *think, believe, expect, suppose, fear, assume*.... in matrix clause, we prefer to make transferred negation, particularly common in informal style. It is the transfer of the negative element from a subordinate clause (generally a *that*-clause), where semantically it belongs, to the matrix clause. (Quirk,

1985). The problem with transferred negation is that it is not a simple matter, as Horn (1978), among others, quite clearly found when he was looking for syntactic evidence for the rule of transferred negation. He shows convincingly that transferred negation is not just a syntactic matter but “*betrays a fundamental syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic process*” (3:130,216). For example, we usually say *I don't think it's a good idea* but we don't usually say *I think it isn't a good idea*. The two are not synonymous, even though there may not be a difference in truth conditions. They clearly differ in conditions of use and in other, less clearly storable, semantic respects.

**3.1. The Raising of Negative Form with Cognitive Non Factive Verbs in Syntactics and Semantics**

**3.1.1. The Transferred Negation with CNF Verbs in Matrix Clause**

In normal syntactic condition, the negative form can be found in complement clause as follows:

(1) *I suppose she had never/ not ever really cared for her husband.* [18, p.107]

*Tôi cho rằng chị ta không thật sự yêu chồng.*

(2) *I think she doesn't feel sorry for herself, certainly not over lack of money.* [19, p.386]

*Tôi nghĩ rằng bản thân cô ấy không hối tiếc về số phận của mình, dù sao thì cũng không phải vì lý do cô ấy không có tiền.*

Transferred negation will make some changes like the movement of negative element from the area in which it shows its immediate power by analyzing *not ever* and These utterances like (1) and (2) are considered common negative form (unmarked form), the negative particles stand before negated element and show the direct power in complement clause. Compare above utterances with these following ones

(1a) *I do not suppose she had ever really cared for her husband.*

(2a) *I don't think she feels sorry for herself, certainly not over lack of money.*

In (1a) and (2a) the negative part is thematized to forefront the hearer the negated content in the rheme. Therefore, the negative content is no longer unexpected and less powerful. Consequently, negating the predication in the main clause or mental clause will decrease the speaker's commitment to the proposition. We can see the raising of negative form from the complement clause to the matrix clause more clearly in the following tree diagrams

Besides, the syntactic negative transfer of (1) can also be demonstrated in bracket diagram like this

[*I don't suppose [she had ever really cared for her husband]*]

Cognitive non-factive verbs are very active. They can occur before, middle and at the end of their complement clause, therefore they have been termed “*parenthetical verbs*” by Urmson [12, p.481], who defines them as verbs “*which, in the first person present, can be used ... followed by 'that' and an indicative clause, or else can be inserted at*

*the middle or end of the indicative sentence*”. However, in English the transferred negation of cognitive non factive modal verbs only takes place in the initial position without in medial or final positions. It is also significant that when parenthetical verbs occur in medial and final position they can be negated only if the complement clause is also negated like in the following ones.

(3) *Mencken hates Paris, I believe.* [16, p.42]

*Mencken ghét Pari, tôi tin vậy.*

(3a) *Mencken doesn't hate Paris, I don't believe.*

\* *Mencken không ghét Pari, tôi không tin vậy.*

(3b) \* *Mencken hates Paris, I don't believe.*

\* *Mencken ghét Pari, tôi không tin vậy.*

Interestingly, in (3a) despite the fact that the clauses with cognitive non factive verbs don't appear to be negated in medial and final position, the two negatives acting upon the complement clause do not cancel out. In fact, we can see (3a) have the same meaning as (3). It means that if the negation takes place in both clauses, we can have an affirmative sentence. However, with the verbs such as *guess, expect, bet* the transferred negation never occurs in all positions.

In my corpus, the negative transfer only happens to the cognitive non factive verbs such as *think, believe, suppose, fear, assume...* without the verbs such as *guess, expect, bet ...* Here the question is why there is the distinction among them. Look at the following examples

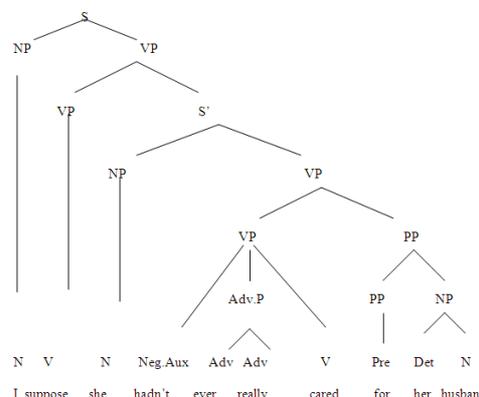


Figure 3.1. The tree diagram with negative particle Not in the complement clause.

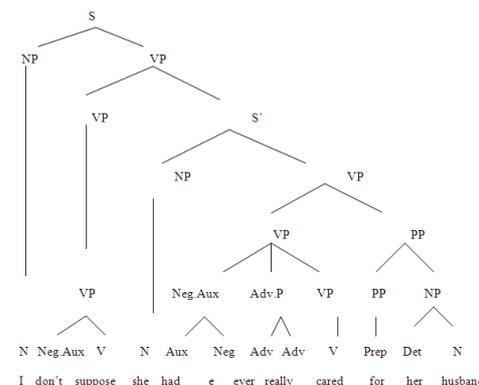


Figure 3.2. The tree diagram with the transferred negation from the complement clause to the matrix clause.

(4) *I expect the fact is, you haven't time.* [14, p.60]

*Cha nghĩ rằng con không có thì giờ.*

(5) *I guess you don't pedal it.* [16, p.116]

*Tớ chắc người ta không đạp nó.*

(6) *Scarlet, I bet my life your pa didn't even know half the time what she was talkin' about.* [20, p.423]

*Scarlet ạ, tôi dám đem đầu tôi ra đánh cuộc rằng phần lớn thời gian ba cô chẳng biết Xuelon nói gì.*

In (4) – (6), the negative transfer can't occur with the cognitive non factive verbs in the matrix clause such as *expect, bet, guess*. With these verbs, we can't use negation because these verbs have strong semantic features with the high certainty level. On the other hand, the speaker wants to choose the strong way of speaking to emphasize his/ her status of knowledge to the truth of the expressed proposition and therefore the negation is always in the complement clause. Accordingly, these following examples are unacceptable in English discourse

(4a) \**I don't expect the fact is, you have time.*

(5a) \**I don't guess you pedal it.*

(6a) \**Scarlet, I don't bet my life your pa even knew half the time what she was talkin' about.*

In contrast, in Vietnamese the negative form of cognitive non factive verbs which can be accepted in the initial position in translational versions as mentioned previously mostly stands in initial position but not in medial and final positions. Vietnamese people don't often have the habit of using negation of cognitive non factive verbs such as *tôi không nghĩ, tôi không đoán, tôi không tin...* in their utterances.

### 3.1.2. The Transferred Negation with CNF Verbs in Tag Questions

Regarding modality in some grammatical structures, my corpus yielded some instances that certain grammatical environments constitute metaphorical realizations of modality. Especially in the structures of tag question, cognitive non factive verbs show their distinction and power, as shown in the followings.

(7) *Yes, Father, I'll be all right. I have the books to keep, and five sons left-six if you count Frank, only I don't suppose we can count Frank, can we?* [19, p.273]

(8) *I guess you know why I'm so anxious to make money quickly, don't you?* [20, p.357]

In (7) and (8) the subjects of the cognitive non factive verbs in *I don't suppose, I guess* are functioning as the realization of the cognizers of the mental process in expressions of modality, which show no grammatical relation to the question tags such as *can we?* and *don't you?* respectively, rather than *do I?* Or *don't I?* Here the mental clauses *I don't suppose, I guess,...* are the metaphorical realization of probability: the probability is realized by a mental clause as if it was a figure of sensing. Being metaphorical, the clause serves not only as the projecting part of a clause, but also as an Adjunct, just as *probably* does. For this reason, this modal meaning is not syntactically shown by the grammatical tag. Accordingly, if

we tag the clause in (8), for example, we get:

*I guess you know why I'm so anxious to make money quickly, don't you?*

\* *I guess you know why I'm so anxious to make money quickly, don't I?*

However, if we replace the subject *I* with *he*, we will get the tag like in (8a)

(8a) *He guesses you know why I'm so anxious to make money quickly, doesn't he?*

The mental clause *he guesses* was able to be tagged because it doesn't signal the meaning of modality. It is the fact that a mental clause is a modal clause and serves as an Adjunct that showed no grammatical relation to the tag. If it was just an ordinary mental clause, *I guess* should be able to be tagged. But since it has a metaphorical status and serves as Adjunct, it cannot be tagged.

In other case, some cognitive non factive modal verbs are subject to transferred negation in initial position, for example

(9) *I don't suppose she even uses a knife and fork, does she?* [15, p.118]

*Tôi tin rằng đến cầm con dao ăn và chiếc đĩa cô ta cũng không biết nữa.*

(10) *I don't believe he's coming, is he?* [9, p.98]

*Tôi tin rằng anh ta sẽ không đến mà.*

That it is, in fact, the complement clause that is negated in such cases can be ascertained by attaching a tag to the sentence, therefore the appropriate tag for (9) and (10) is not “*do I?*” but “*does she?*” and “*is he?*”. Lakoff (1969) in fact proposed that all reversal tag questions have a deep structure of the form [ *I suppose/believe... S* ], and that Tag formation attaches a tag to the complement of *suppose/believe* with present tense and first person singular subject.

(9a) *I suppose she doesn't use a knife and fork, does she?*

(9b) \* *I don't suppose she even uses a knife and fork, doesn't she?*

We note that besides sentences such as (9a), in which a negative complement S is combined with its normal reversal tag, there are also sentences such as (9) with approximately the same meaning but with the negation in the main S. Apart from this, not only (9) but also (9a) has the same meaning of a reversal tag rather than of a reduplicative tag, in which case there is a problem in accounting for (9b). We see, however, that these facts make sense if the derivation involves not only whatever rule is involved in forming tags but also transferred negation which means the transformation is highly raises a *not* from the complement of a cognitive non factive verbs such as *think, suppose, believe...* and moves it into the higher S

### 3.2. Pragmatic Meanings in the Transferred Negation of CNF Verbs in Positive Politeness Strategy

The negative transfer of cognitive non factive modal verbs appears very often in English discourse. In syntactics, we can see clearly the raising of negative form from the complement clause to the matrix clause with some cognitive non factive verbs; however, in order to recognize

the importance and motivation of the raising of negative form, we should analyze it on pragmatic aspects.

### 3.2.1. Hearer-Oriented Pragmatic Meanings of Transferred Negation of CNF Verbs

Through the syntactic transferred negation, the speaker wants to mitigate illocutionary force of his claim of knowledge in order to decrease the disagreement and respect the hearer's face. Besides, the speaker also wants to show his/ her attitude to the content of the proposition with lesser certainty, which means the speaker is performing an illocutionary act to confirm his/ her hypothesis. Let us consider the examples below

(11) *I don't think it was childish temper and I don't believe you've changed.* [20, p.169]

*Tôi không cho đó là cơn nóng giận trẻ con và không tin rằng bà đã thay đổi.*

(12) *I'm not a Roman Catholic. I don't think you could even call me a Christian.* [15, p.562]

*Tôi không phải là người thực hành đạo thiên chúa. Tôi cũng không tin rằng ông có thể coi tôi là người tin ở chúa.*

In (11) and (12), we can see the negative part thematized like "I don't think", and "I don't believe" which foretells the hearer the content negated in the rheme. Accordingly, the unexpected thing in negated content doesn't remain any longer and the negative transfer also reduces the power of negation in the sentence. In addition, negating the matrix clause or status of knowledge can decrease the speaker's commitment to the content of complement clause. However, on pragmatic aspect, there are different purposes of the speaker in using negative transfer. As in (11), the speaker wants to share his/ her thoughts relating to the hearer by using negative transfer in the matrix clause in order to show his sympathy to the hearer and consider that "it was not childish temper and you've not changed". As in (12), the speaker would like to give his consideration or hypotheses to the hearer with his commitment "I don't think you could even call me a Christian".

### 3.2.2. Mitigating the Illocutionary Force of Claims of Knowledge by Using Transferred Negation of CNF Verbs

In addition to the pragmatic meanings of transferred negation of cognitive non factive verbs, the speaker can use it to avoid threatening the hearer's face by reducing the hearer's disadvantages or decreasing the goodness of the speaker like in the following examples

(13) *I expect you are a good man. I don't suppose you've ever had much to regret.* [15, p.562]

*Tôi chắc ông là một người lương thiện và chẳng bao giờ làm điều gì đáng hối hận.*

(14) *I lead a normal life and I don't assume there is anything I can impart to people.* [21]

*Tôi có một cuộc sống bình thường và tôi không cho rằng có điều gì tôi có thể truyền đạt cho người dân.*

In (13) with the negative transfer, the speaker uses "I don't suppose" to reduce the force of a face threatening act

to the hearer, which is called a politeness strategy in which the speaker is afraid that his or her statement may be criticism to the hearer and can threaten the hearer's face. Especially "I don't suppose" isn't translated in Vietnamese translational version with the aim of the speaker's mitigation, whereas in (14) the speaker uses negative transfer "I don't assume" in making a politeness strategy to mitigate illocutionary force of the respect positive face of the speaker and so as to do it, the speaker has to negate his/ her good virtues. From (13) and (14), we can recognize that in order to lessen good virtue of the speaker or mitigate harm to the hearer, syntactic negative transfer of cognitive non factive verbs is often used in discourse depending on the speaker's purposes.

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*Cha nghĩ rằng con không có thì giờ.*

(16) *I guess you don't pedal it.* [16, p.116]

*Tớ chắc người ta không đạp nó.*

(17) *Scarlet, I bet my life your pa didn't even know half the time what she was talking about.* [20, p.423]

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(17a) \**Scarlet, I don't bet my life your pa even knew half the time what she was talkin' about.*

*Some linguistic features of transferred negation of cognitive non-factive verbs.*

<b>Syntactics</b>	- Transferred negation with CNF verbs in matrix clause - Transferred negation in tag questions - Mitigating the direct negative power in complement clause
<b>Semantics</b>	- Decreasing the speaker's commitment to the proposition. - Hearer-oriented pragmatic meanings of transferred negation of CNF verbs
<b>Pragmatics</b>	- Mitigating the illocutionary force of claims of knowledge by using negative transfer of CNF verbs

## 4. Conclusion

Transferred negation which has been observed for many

centuries really proves the mobility and importance of CNF verbs in English. I hope the study will bring Vietnamese learners of English useful understandings of these verbs on *syntactics and semantics in structures of the transferred negation with CNF verbs in matrix clause and in tag questions*, especially *the use of CNF verbs in positive politeness strategy* will certainly help language learners use CNF verbs effectively in communication. The findings of transferred negation are really useful for learners of English and especially Vietnamese learners of English.

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