

The Marker *Co* in Yes-No Questions in Vietnamese

Thuy Bui

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## Abstract

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This thesis examines the syntax of the marker *co* in yes-no questions in Vietnamese. In particular, I address the controversial issue of whether *co* behaves similarly to English *do*-support or whether it functions as an emphatic marker in Vietnamese yes-no questions. I argue that *co* in yes-no questions in Vietnamese is equivalent to neither English *do*-support nor an emphatic marker on the basis of (i) the differences between the syntactic environments in which *co* occurs in Vietnamese yes-no questions and those of English *do*-support and an emphatic marker, and (ii) the similarities between the yes-no question formation in Vietnamese and the structure of negative particle questions in Hokkien. I show that the distributions of *co* in yes-no questions exhibit syntactic structures and semantic effects distinct from those of English *do*-support and an emphatic marker. I propose that the structures of yes-no questions in Vietnamese are related to negative sentences, and that the marker *co* in Vietnamese yes-no questions is related to an assertive marker in negative contexts. I suggest that the structure of negative sentences in Vietnamese has both the marker *co* and the negative marker *khong* in the Assertion Phrase projection with *khong* being the specifier of *co*. The process of yes-no question formation in Vietnamese then involves the movement of *khong* to the end of the sentence, leaving *co* as the only remaining marker in the Assertion Phrase. By comparing yes-no questions in Vietnamese to negative particle questions in Hokkien, I propose that the patterns of question constructions in these two languages have many similarities, suggesting new perspectives on a cross-linguistic phenomenon.

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## Abbreviations

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The following is a list of the abbreviations used in this thesis.

ASR	assertive
AUX	auxiliary
CL	classifier
FUT	future tense
EMP	emphatic
NEG	negative
NPQ	negative particle question
PRT	particle
PAST	past tense
PERF	perfective
PRO	pronoun
Q	question particle
SUB	subject
TOP	topic
Y/N Q	yes-no question

## 1. Introduction

Languages make use of different strategies to form yes-no questions. For example, in English, subject-auxiliary inversion is involved in the formations of yes-no questions, as shown in (1), while in Mandarin Chinese, a question particle *ma* (吗) is added at the end of the sentence, as shown in (2):

- |     |    |                |      |        |             |                  |
|-----|----|----------------|------|--------|-------------|------------------|
| (1) | a. | He             | can  | dance. | Declarative | English          |
|     |    | SUB            | AUX  | V      |             |                  |
|     | b. | Can            | he   | dance? | Y/N Q       |                  |
|     |    | AUX            | SUB  | V      |             |                  |
| (2) | a. | 他              | 来    | 了.     | Declarative | Mandarin Chinese |
|     |    | ta             | lai  | le     |             |                  |
|     |    | he             | come | PERF   |             |                  |
|     |    | 'He came.'     |      |        |             |                  |
|     | b. | 他              | 来    | 了      | 吗?          | Y/N Q            |
|     |    | ta             | lai  | le     | ma          |                  |
|     |    | he             | come | PERF   | Q           |                  |
|     |    | 'Did he come?' |      |        |             |                  |

Vietnamese exhibits an interesting strategy for forming yes-no questions, which involves the presence of two elements, namely *co* and *khong* in the sentence. In Vietnamese, *khong* literally means “no,” and is usually used to denote negation or signal questions. Meanwhile, there is no consensus as to the grammatical function or the semantic contribution of *co* in yes-no questions in Vietnamese. While some believe that *co* functions similarly to English *do*-support, others regards *co* as an emphatic marker in Vietnamese yes-no questions.

A common way to construct a simple yes-no question in Vietnamese is having *co* placed before the verb phrase and *khong* placed at the end of the sentence, as shown in (3):

- (3) a. John chay. Positive Vietnamese  
 John run  
 ‘John runs.’
- b. John **co** chay khong? Y/N Q  
 John PRT run Q  
 ‘Does John run?’

As shown in (3b), *co* in yes-no questions in Vietnamese appears directly before the main verb *chay* ‘run’. *Co* may also be placed in other positions in yes-no questions in Vietnamese, as shown in examples (4) and (5) below:

Not only can *co* appear before a verb in yes-no questions, it can also go directly before adjectives, such as *cao* ‘tall’, as shown in (4):

- (4) John **co** cao khong?  
 John PRT tall Q  
 ‘Is John tall?’

*Co* can also go in between a verb and an adverb in Vietnamese yes-no questions. In (5), *co* goes in between the verb *chay* ‘run’ and the adverb *nhanh* ‘fast’ in the verb phrase *chay nhanh* ‘run fast’:

- (5) John chay **co** nhanh khong?  
 John run PRT fast Q  
 ‘Does John run fast?’

However, *co* cannot go in between the adverb *thuong xuyen* ‘usually’ and the verb *chay* ‘run’, as shown in (6)<sup>1</sup>:

- (6) \* John thuong xuyen **co** chay khong?  
 John usually PRT run Q  
 ‘Does John usually run?’

From the problems presented above, my study aims to answer two questions regarding the syntax of the marker *co* in yes-no questions in Vietnamese. The first question is about the

<sup>1</sup> Asterisks (\*) are used to indicate ungrammaticality.

<sup>2</sup> This tree presents both the structures of a positive sentence and a negative sentence. *Khong* is a negative marker in negative sentences, much like *not* in English. Therefore, the fact that *khong* is put in

function of the particle *co* in Vietnamese yes-no questions. The second point relates to the syntactic positions in which *co* can occur in yes-no questions in Vietnamese.

In previous literature, the syntactic functions as well as the positions under which *co* appears in yes-no questions are not very well understood. There are few attempts to study the structures of yes-no questions in Vietnamese, especially on the syntax of the marker *co* in yes-no questions. There exist two common approaches to analyze the particle *co* in Vietnamese yes-no questions. One approach, exemplified by the studies of Thompson (1987) and Duffield (1999), considers *co* in Vietnamese yes-no questions to behave similarly to *do*-support in English. Throughout this paper, this approach is referred to as the ‘English *do*-support’ approach. The other approach, shown in the studies of Nguyen (1997) and McClive (2002), considers *co* to be equivalent to an emphatic marker. This approach is referred to as the ‘emphatic marker’ approach.

One common theme that these two approaches share is that they both suggest that the particle *co* in yes-no questions in Vietnamese is related to an emphatic marker in positive sentences. However, the ‘English *do*-support’ approach likens the function of *co* to that of English auxiliary *do*, as they interpret *co* as an emphatic marker in positives, but as a question particle in interrogative contexts. Meanwhile, in the ‘emphatic marker’ approach, *co* is analyzed as an emphatic marker in both positive sentences and yes-no questions.

In this thesis, I investigate the roles and behaviors of the marker *co* in yes-no questions in Vietnamese. By comparing and contrasting the syntactic environments in which yes-no question *co*, English *do*-support, and an emphatic marker occur, I argue that *co* in Vietnamese yes-no questions function similarly to neither English *do*-support nor an emphatic marker. I show that

the distributions of *co* in yes-no questions exhibit syntactic structures and semantic effects distinct from those of English *do*-support and an emphatic marker.

Given that neither the ‘English *do*-support’ nor the ‘emphatic marker’ approach can fully explain all the occurrences of *co* in yes-no questions in Vietnamese, I follow neither of the approaches. Instead, I adopt certain insights from previous studies, elaborate and combine them in novel ways in my analysis of *co* in yes-no questions in Vietnamese. In particular, I base my study on the four main assumptions taken from previous analyses. Firstly, following Duffield (1999), I assume that *co* and *khong* are in Assertion Phrase, a projection lower than TP. Secondly, also following Duffield (1999), I assume that *khong* undergoes some movement to the sentence-final position to form yes-no questions in Vietnamese. I assume following McClive (2002) that the negative marker *khong* can appear in more than one position in negative sentences in Vietnamese. The last assumption that I take in my analysis is from Trinh (2009), in which Trinh suggests that it is possible for a head to be in a specifier position in Vietnamese.

Adopting some of the points from previous studies, I, then, propose that yes-no questions in Vietnamese are not related to the structure of positive sentences, but rather establish a close connection to the structures of negative sentences. In particular, negative sentence structures in Vietnamese have both the marker *co* and the negative marker *khong* in the Assertion Phrase projection. In this Assertion Phrase of negative sentences, I assign *khong* to be in the Spec-AsrP, with *co* being the head of AsrP. Then, the process of yes-no question formation in Vietnamese involves the head movement of *khong* to the end of the sentence, leading to the fact *co* is the only element left in the Assertion Phrase. As a result, this study suggests that the marker *co* in yes-no questions in Vietnamese is related to an assertive marker in negative contexts.

I, then, expand my research by relating this marker *co* in yes-no questions in Vietnamese to the marker *u* in negative particle questions in Hokkien. The reason for this relation is that negative particle question constructions in Hokkien also involve two elements *u* and *bo* that are similar to the two particles *co* and *khong* in yes-no questions in Vietnamese. The arguments made about the particles *u* and *bo* in Hokkien in the study of negative particle questions conducted by Lisa Cheng, James Huang, and Jane Tang (1996) supports my analysis on Vietnamese yes-no questions being related to negative sentences. With the similarities that the formations of yes-no questions in Vietnamese and negative particle questions in Hokkien share, my analysis provides a new data point for evaluating competing analyses of question constructions, suggesting new perspectives on a cross-linguistic phenomenon.

Based on the different distributions that yes-no question *co*, English *do*-support, and an emphatic marker have, as well as the similar properties in question particles between Vietnamese and Hokkien, I conclude that the marker *co* in yes-no questions in Vietnamese is related to an assertive maker in negative contexts. As a result, in yes-no questions in Vietnamese, the negative marker *khong* is moved to the Complementizer head at the end of the sentence and functions as a question particle, while the marker *co* remains in the same positions that it has in the Assertion Phrase in negative sentences.

## **2. The ‘English Do-Support’ Approach**

### **2.1. The Proposal**

In previous literature, the marker *co* in yes-no questions in Vietnamese is generally considered to function equivalently to *do*-support in English. One of the earliest mentions of the

syntax of the marker *co* in yes-no questions in Vietnamese is in Thompson (1987). She states that “the auxiliary *co* is ... in many ways similar to the English auxiliary verb *do*” (Thompson 216). Meanwhile, in a later study (1999), Duffield also follows this approach while analyzing the syntax of yes-no questions in Vietnamese. Like what Thompson has previously claimed, Duffield notes that “in many respects, *co* functions very similarly to English *do*-support” (Duffield 98). While there exist some differences in the details of these two studies, both Thompson and Duffield agree on the major idea that the presence of *co* in yes-no questions in Vietnamese is quite similar to the insertion of *do* in English sentences.

### 2.1.1. Thompson’s Analysis (1987)

Thompson shows various reasons on why she regards the marker *co* in Vietnamese as auxiliary *do* in English (Thompson 216). Firstly, both Vietnamese *co* and English *do*-support do not appear often in positive sentences. Moreover, the presence of the particle *co* and auxiliary *do* in positive sentences usually indicates some sort of emphasis on the verb that immediately follows them, as shown in (7) below:

- (7) a. Hom qua      toi    di      san.  
       yesterday    I      go      hunt  
       ‘Yesterday I went hunting.’  
       b. Hom qua      toi    **co**      di      san.  
       yesterday    I      PRT    go      hunt  
       ‘Yesterday I did go hunting.’

In order to have some emphatic reading in the regular positive sentence (7a), both Vietnamese and English involve some insertion. In English, it is *do*-insertion that makes the sentence become “I did go hunting.” In this case, *did*, the past tense of *do*, is not a main verb, but it is considered as an element to emphasize the action of *go hunting*. Likewise, in Vietnamese,

the particle *co* in the positive sentence (7b) also carries the same function, as it also highlights the action *di san* ‘go hunting’ in (7a).

Secondly, considering the syntactic environments in which they occur, both Vietnamese *co* and English *do*-support appear in negative sentences, as shown in (8) below:

- (8) Toi khong **co** hieu.  
 I NEG PRT understand  
 ‘I do not understand.’

The third piece of evidence Thompson shows in her study is that like auxiliary *do* in yes-no questions in English, *co* in Vietnamese is a fundamental element in interrogative sentences. With this statement, she then introduces the formation of yes-no questions in Vietnamese with the presence of *co* being a necessary step, as shown in (9) below:

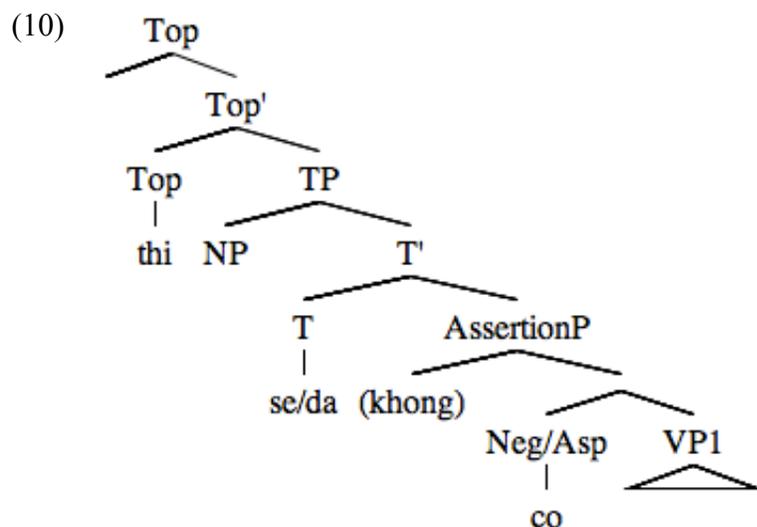
- (9) Ong **co** di khong?  
 you PRT go Q  
 ‘Did you go?’

In many cases, the presence of auxiliary verb *do* allows subject-auxiliary inversion to occur to form yes-no questions in English (Radford 157). For the reason that *co* is also present in yes-no questions, Thompson believes that *co* functions equivalently to English *do*-support.

Based on the three points she has made in her study, Thompson claims that like English *do*-support, *co* acts as an emphatic marker in positive sentences, and functions as a question particle in yes-no questions in Vietnamese. As a result, based on the similar syntactic functions and environments that *co* in Vietnamese and *do*-support in English share, Thompson concludes that *co* in Vietnamese yes-no questions functions in a similar way that *do*-insertion works in English.

### 2.1.2. Duffield's Analysis (1999)

Like Thompson, Duffield notes that *co* functions like English *do*-support because it “appears in several different types of Vietnamese sentences: in interrogative and emphatic contexts” (Duffield 98). In his study, Duffield presents an analysis of Vietnamese clause structure, in which he states that there are at least three functional categories above VP. They are CP (or as Duffield marks, Topic Phrase – TopP), TP, and Assertion Phrase – AsrP (or Negation Phrase – NegP), as shown in the structure (10) below (Duffield 94)<sup>2</sup>:



Based on this structure, Duffield suggests that *co* is the head of the functional projection labeled Assertion Phrase. He then points out that the presence of *co* is optional in both negative sentences and yes-no questions in Vietnamese, as shown in (11) below (Duffield 98)<sup>3</sup>:

- (11) a. Hom qua anh khong (co) den nha chi.  
 yesterday PRO NEG ASR go house PRO  
 ‘He did not go to your house yesterday.’

<sup>2</sup> This tree presents both the structures of a positive sentence and a negative sentence. *Khong* is a negative marker in negative sentences, much like *not* in English. Therefore, the fact that *khong* is put in parentheses in this tree does not mean *khong* is an optional marker. Rather, it is to show the two possible types of sentences that this tree can represent. If *khong* is present in the sentence, this tree presents the structure of a negative sentence in Vietnamese. Otherwise, it shows the structure of a positive sentence.

<sup>3</sup> In his study, Duffield uses the gloss “ASR” for *co*.

- b. Hom qua anh (co) den nha chi khong?  
 yesterday PRO ASR go house pronoun Q  
 ‘Did he go to your house yesterday?’

Contrary to Thompson’s earlier claim, which states that *co* is “almost indispensable” in yes-no questions in Vietnamese (Thompson 216), Duffield states that the presence of *khong* is sufficient to signal the question (Duffield 99). In this case, Duffield’s analysis is *co*

Like what Thompson notes earlier, Duffield also believes that *co* in yes-no questions carries a role like English *do*-support because they can appear in both emphatic and interrogative contexts.

Furthermore, Duffield also notes that in positive sentences, *co* always follows the tense morphemes, namely the future tense marker *se* and the past tense marker *da*, as shown in (12) below (Duffield 99):

- (12) a. Co X. (\*co) da (co) an hoi lo.  
 PRO X. ASR PAST ASR eat bribes  
 ‘Miss X. did not take bribes.’
- b. Co X. (\*co) se (co) an hoi lo.  
 PRO X. ASR FUT ASR eat bribes  
 ‘Miss X will not take bribes.’

He furthers his argument by noting *co* also heads a functional projection immediately above VP in yes-no questions, as shown in (13):

- (13) Chi co viet thu khong?  
 PRO ASR write letter Q  
 ‘Did you write/ Will you write the letter?’

Based on the observations that both the negation marker *khong* and the marker *co* appear in preverbal positions, Duffield believes that *co* and *khong* are jointly linked in the functional head of Assertion Phrase, which is placed between T and VP in Vietnamese clause structures.

From the points he has made in his study, Duffield concludes that like auxiliary *do*, *co* is interpreted as a question particle in yes-no questions, but as an emphatic marker in positive sentences.

## 2.2. Some Problems

Based on the roles and the placements of *co* in positive sentences, the ‘English *do*-support’ approach suggests some reasonable explanations for *co* in yes-no questions. Like what Thompson and Duffield both claim, Vietnamese *co* and English *do*-support have the same functions and placements in positive sentences, as they both appear in preverbal positions and emphasize the phrase that immediately follows them. However, the distribution of *co* in yes-no questions will not be fully explained if *co* is merely regarded as *do*-support in English.

Firstly, both analyses do not address the possible placement of *co* before adjectives, as shown in (14):

- (14) John **co** cao khong?  
 John PRT tall Q  
 ‘Is John tall?’

In this case, *co* in yes-no questions in Vietnamese is not equivalent to auxiliary *do* in English. In English, yes-no questions like “Does John tall?” are deemed ungrammatical. On the other hand, it is grammatical for the marker *co* to be placed directly before an adjective in yes-no questions in Vietnamese. Hence, by likening *co* to English auxiliary *do*, both Thompson’s and Duffield’s analyses cannot address this function and position that *co* can establish with adjectives in yes-no questions in Vietnamese.

While *do* can only be placed at the beginning of yes-no questions in English, *co* can be placed in more than one position in yes-no questions in Vietnamese, as shown in (15) and (16):

(15) John **co** chay khong?  
 John PRT run Q  
 ‘Does John run?’

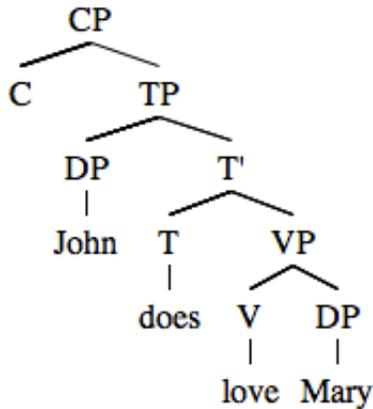
(16) John chay **co** nhanh khong?  
 John run PRT fast Q  
 ‘Does John run fast?’

In (15), *co* is placed after the subject *John* and before the verb *chay* ‘run’, while in (16), *co* appears between the verb *chay* ‘run’ and the adverb *nhanh* ‘fast’. Meanwhile, *do* is in a sentence-initial position for both cases. Questions like “John runs does fast?” do not reflect the structure of a yes-no question in English. Therefore, in terms of distributions in yes-no questions, *co* in Vietnamese is different from auxiliary *do* in English.

Thirdly, the process of yes-no question formation involves a T-to-C movement (Radford 221), as shown in (17) below:

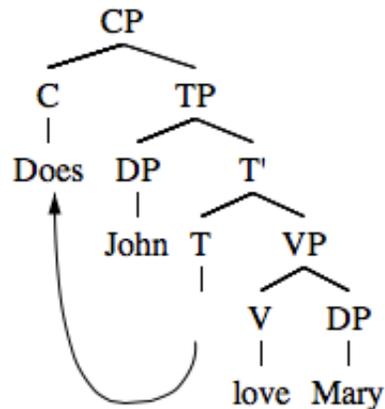
(17) a. John does love Mary.

Positive



b. Does John love Mary?

Y/N Q



On the other hand, the formation of yes-no questions in Vietnamese does not involve any movement of *co* to the Complementizer head. Therefore, in term of the process of yes-no question formation, the marker *co* in Vietnamese does not behave similarly to auxiliary *do* in English.

While Thompson and Duffield share these same general problems in this ‘English do-support’ approach, there are also some particular problems evoked in each analysis.

### 2.2.1. Problems with Thompson’s Analysis (1987)

Thompson has incorrectly stated that like auxiliary *do* in English, it is almost impossible to remove the marker *co* from yes-no question structures in Vietnamese (Thompson 216). In fact, like what Duffield later claims, *co* is just an optional marker in yes-no questions in Vietnamese, as shown in (18):

- (18) Hom qua anh (co) den nha chi khong?  
 yesterday PRO ASR go house PRO Q  
 ‘Did he go to your house yesterday?’

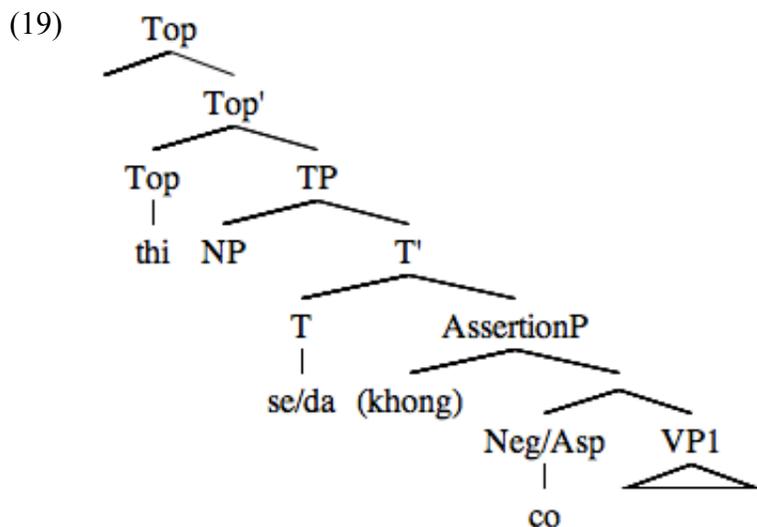
The emphatic reading is found only in positive sentences. If *co* is removed from a positive sentence, the emphatic reading is also removed from that sentence. However, if *co* is

removed from a yes-no question, the interrogative sense is still present, and the yes-no question construction is still grammatical with just the negation *khong* placed at the end of the sentence (Duffield 99). As a result, with these problems, the points that Thompson has made in her study while using the ‘English *do*-support’ approach cannot be used as an explanation for the circumstances in which *co* can occur in yes-no questions in Vietnamese.

### 2.2.2. Problems with Duffield’s Analysis (1999)

Duffield has proposed a plausible clause structure of Vietnamese with CP, TP, and AspP. This structure can help provide some explanations for the placements and movements of some elements in Vietnamese structures. It is indeed possible for *co* and *khong* to both appear in Assertion Phrase. In fact, later in this thesis, I will develop an analysis for Vietnamese yes-no questions based on this core idea of the Assertion Phrase that Duffield has proposed in his study.

Firstly, the tree structure in (19) that Duffield presents only shows that the Assertion Phrase is placed after T and before the entire VP (Duffield 94):



Having the same general problems with the ‘English *do*-support’ approach, this tree only has *co* placed before the entire VP projection. Therefore, it cannot explain the circumstances in which *co* goes in between a verb and an adverb in yes-no questions in Vietnamese, as shown in (20):

- (20) John chay **co** nhanh khong?  
 John run PRT fast Q  
 ‘Does John run fast?’

Moreover, in English, *do*-support appears between the subject and the verb phrase, and is used to bear tense information (Radford 121). Meanwhile, *co* does not only appear between the subject and the verb phrase, but *co* is also lower than the Tense projection. As *co* appears at a lower level than TP, *co* does not bear tense information like English *do*-support does. Therefore, it is likely that *co* in yes-no questions has different placements and functions from English *do*-support.

As a result, regarding the interaction between *co* and adjectives, the positions that *co* can occur in yes-no questions, as well as the absence of T-to-C movement of *co* in yes-no questions in Vietnamese, the marker *co* and *do*-support are concluded to behave differently in yes-no question structures.

### 3. The ‘Emphatic Marker’ Approach

#### 3.1. The Proposal

Besides the ‘English *do*-support’ approach, the marker *co* in yes-no questions in Vietnamese has also been analyzed as an emphatic marker in previous literature. In some ways, this approach may appear similar to the ‘English *do*-support’ one, for it also focuses on the

emphatic reading that *co* provides in positive sentences. However, Thompson and Duffield show that the marker *co* share some similarities with English *do*-support, as they interpret *co* as an emphatic marker in positives, but as a question particle in interrogative contexts. On the other hand, in the ‘emphatic marker’ approach, *co* is considered as an emphatic marker in both positive sentences and yes-no questions. In his book *Vietnamese* (1997), Nguyen proposes the structure of yes-no questions in Vietnamese with the particle *co* noted as an emphatic marker (Nguyen 212). Meanwhile, in "The Question of Không: Use and Effects of the Vietnamese Negative and Interrogative Über-Particle" (2002), McClive also suggests that *co* in yes-no questions in Vietnamese carries an emphatic function, as it is believed to stress the immediately following element. Despite sharing the same major idea, there are some differences between Nguyen’s and McClive’s studies. While Nguyen focuses on the similar positions that *co* has in both positive sentences and yes-no questions, McClive bases his analysis on the domain that the paired elements *co* and *khong* establish in yes-no questions in Vietnamese.

### 3.1.1. Nguyen’s Analysis (1997)

In his book *Vietnamese* (1997), Nguyen generally considers the particle *co* to carry on the function as an emphatic marker, which it has in positives, into yes-no questions in Vietnamese. In fact, Nguyen considers the particle *co* that appears in yes-no questions in Vietnamese as an emphatic marker, as shown in (21) (Nguyen 212)<sup>4</sup>:

- (21) Anh    **co**        muon    mua    khong?  
       PRO    EMP    want    buy    or-not  
       ‘Do you want to buy it?’

---

<sup>4</sup> In his study, Nguyen uses the gloss “EMP” for *co*, and “or-not” for *khong*.

This analysis is based on the observation that the particle *co* in yes-no questions and the particle *co* that provides an emphatic reading for positive sentences appear in the same preverbal position. As shown in (22) below, the emphatic *co* goes right after the subject and immediately before the verb *ban* ‘sell’ in a positive sentence, just like the way the marker *co* is placed in yes-no questions in (21) above (Nguyen 239):

- (22) Co ay    **co**     ban    dau phu.  
       PRO    EMP    sell    tofu  
       ‘She does sell tofu.’

Based on the similar position that *co* has in both positive sentences and yes-no questions in Vietnamese, Nguyen concludes that the particle *co* functions similarly in both positive and interrogative contexts. As a result, Nguyen assumes that if *co* offers an emphatic reading in positive sentences, it will also provide an emphatic reading for yes-no questions in Vietnamese.

### 3.1.2. McClive’s Analysis (2002)

McClive (2002) observes an interesting pattern between *co* and *khong* in yes-no questions in Vietnamese. In this study, *co* and *khong* are claimed to create a domain that surrounds a certain area, which may either be a verb phrase or an adverbial phrase. An area surrounded by these two particles is the particular topic that the question seeks for an answer (McClive 237). In other words, the presence of the marker *co* helps highlight the important goal for which a yes-no question aims, as shown in (23) below:

- (23) a. Mary    **co**     hat     hay    khong?  
       Mary    PRT    sing    well    Q  
       ‘Does Mary sing well?’
- b. Mary    hat     **co**     hay    khong?  
       Mary    sing    PRT    well    Q  
       ‘Does Mary sing well?’

In (23a), it is the whole verb phrase *hat hay* ‘sing well’ that *co* and *khong* surround, and thus this question aims for an answer regarding an action or event of singing. Meanwhile, in (23b), *co* and *khong* surround the adverb *hay* ‘well’, emphasizing the quality of the singing rather than the action of the singing. As a result, McClive suggests that the particle *co* that appears in yes-no questions in Vietnamese carries an emphatic function, as it stresses the immediately following element.

Moreover, McClive considers *co* to be an “emphatic lexeme” in yes-no questions in Vietnamese (McClive 233). Like Duffield, McClive also states that *co* is totally optional in yes-no questions. The presence of the sentence-final *khong* is enough to indicate yes-no questions in Vietnamese (McClive 233). McClive notes that *khong* functions as a negative marker when it is placed immediately before some element in the sentence. However, if *khong* is placed at the end of the sentence, it will function as an interrogative marker, as shown in (24) below:

(24) Mary hat hay khong?  
 Mary sing well Q  
 ‘Does Mary sing well?’

However, *co* alone cannot form a yes-no question in Vietnamese. As *co* does not carry any interrogative function in yes-no questions in Vietnamese, it is just an additional lexeme in the structure. To some degree, the fact that *co* is not required in both positives and yes-no questions in Vietnamese indicates that *co* behaves similarly in both positive and interrogative structures. Thus, similar to the way it behaves in positives, *co* also provides some emphatic reading in yes-no questions.

Furthermore, McClive examines the positions that *co* can occur in yes-no questions in Vietnamese based on the relation between the structures of negatives and interrogatives. The



### 3.2. Some Problems

While both Nguyen and McClive consider *co* to carry an emphatic function in yes-no questions in Vietnamese, the conclusion is based on different considerations. However, both studies have some problems. The pieces of evidence that Nguyen and McClive provide in their analyses to support the ‘emphatic marker’ approach cannot explain all the circumstances under which *co* can appear in yes-no questions in Vietnamese.

#### 3.2.1. Problems with Nguyen’s Analysis (1997)

The data that Nguyen examines shows that yes-no question *co* and the emphatic *co* in positives appear in the same preverbal position, and thus Nguyen proposes that the particle *co* in yes-no questions behaves similarly to the *co* that provides emphatic reading in positive sentences. However, it is not in all the cases that these two particles *co* appear in the same positions.

In fact, the emphatic *co* and the yes-no question *co* show different patterns when they interact with words that describe the quality of an object or the manner in which some action happens, such as adjectives or adverbs of manner. For instance, it is possible to ask yes-no questions like (27) where *co* appears between the verb *chay* ‘run’ and the adverb *nhanh* ‘fast’:

(27) John chay **co** nhanh khong?  
 John run PRT fast Q  
 ‘Does John run fast?’

However, it is ungrammatical for *co* to appear in between the verb *chay* ‘run’ and the adverb *nhanh* ‘fast’ in a positive sentence, as shown in (28) below:

(28) \* John chay **co** nhanh.  
 John run PRT fast  
 ‘John does fun fast.’

The particle *co* that provides emphatic reading in positives can only occur before the whole verb phrase *hat hay* ‘sing well.’ In other words, the emphatic *co* cannot appear between the verb *hat* ‘sing’ and the adverb *hay* ‘well’, while the marker *co* in yes-no questions can.

Furthermore, it is also ungrammatical for the emphatic *co* to go directly before an adjective in a positive sentence, as shown in (30):

(29) John **co**   cao khong?  
 John PRT tall Q  
 ‘Is John tall?’

(30) \* John **co**   cao.<sup>5</sup>  
 John PRT tall  
 ‘John is tall.’

While *co* can appear immediately before an adjective in yes-no questions like (29), it cannot be inserted as an emphatic marker in positive sentences like (30). This suggests that yes-no question *co* is not the same type with the particle *co* that provides emphatic reading in positives like what Nguyen has stated in his analysis. As a result, in terms of the different distributions between these two particles *co*, the marker *co* in yes-no questions is not equivalent to an emphatic marker in Vietnamese.

### 3.2.2. Problems with McClive’s Analysis (2002)

The proposal about domain that *co* and *khong* create in yes-no questions in Vietnamese that McClive has offers an explanation for the circumstances in which *co* occurs in yes-no questions, while other earlier studies cannot. For instance, this *co-khong* domain theory takes into account the fact that *co* can split a verb and an adverb, as noted in the case of (31):

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<sup>5</sup> One of the possible ways to emphasize this sentence is “John cao lam”:  
 John cao lam  
 John tall very  
 ‘John is very tall.’

- (31) Mary    hat    **co**    hay    khong?  
 Mary    sing    PRT    well    Q  
 ‘Does Mary sing well?’

According to McClive, this question focuses on the quality rather than the action of singing. However, the fact that cases like (32) are deemed ungrammatical suggests that it is likely that *co* and *khong* do not highlight the area that they surround:

- (32) \* Mary    *thuong xuyen*    **co**    hat    khong?  
 Mary    usually            PRT    sing    Q  
 ‘Is it singing that Mary usually does?’

Therefore, the domain of *co* and *khong* alone cannot be used to explain the restrictions in the types of sentences that involve some interaction with temporal adverbs.

Moreover, the cases of (31) and (32) above also show some problems in the rules that McClive presents. In particular, McClive has stated that the particle *co* cannot split a verb and a modifier in yes-no questions in Vietnamese. However, that statement is only true when it is applied to cases like (32), where it is ungrammatical for *co* to separate the verb *hat* ‘sing’ and the adverb *thuong xuyen* ‘usually’. On the other hand, this rule does not work for cases like (31), where *co* can go in between the verb *hat* ‘sing’ and the adverb *hay* ‘well.’ Therefore, one of the problems present in the rule is that McClive does not specify which particular types of modifiers that block *co* from occurring between a verb and an adverb, and which types allows *co* to go in between a verb and an adverb in yes-no questions in Vietnamese.

Furthermore, McClive claims that the negative marker *khong* must be placed before the entire verb phrase, as he shows the scope of Vietnamese negation in (33) (McClive 237):

- (33) a. Subject + *khong* + modifier + verb.

The first problem with this claim is that the “modifier + verb” part can only be applied for cases like *thuong xuyen hat* ‘usually sing,’ but not cases like *hat hay* ‘sing well’, where the VP follows the “verb + modifier” pattern.

The second problem with this claim is that *khong* can occur in more than one position in Vietnamese negative sentences. For instance, in (34a), *khong* goes before the entire verb phrase *hat hay* ‘sing well’. However, *khong* can also appear after the verb *hat* ‘sing’ and before the adverb *hay* ‘well’, as shown in the case of (34b) below:

- (34) a. Mary *khong hat hay*.  
 Mary NEG sing well  
 ‘Mary does not sing well.’
- b. Mary *hat khong hay*.  
 Mary sing NEG well  
 ‘Mary does not sing well.’

As a result, with the problems present in both Nguyen’s and McClive’s studies, it is likely that the marker *co* does not function similarly to an emphatic marker in yes-no questions in Vietnamese.

On the other hand, while other studies look for the connection between yes-no questions and an emphatic reading in positive sentences, McClive’s analysis rather considers the relationship between yes-no questions to negative sentences in Vietnamese. His observation on *co* in yes-no questions appearing in the same position that *khong* has in negative sentences can be used to explain the circumstances in which *co* occurs in yes-no questions.

For instance, there is actually some connection present in the structure of a yes-no question in (35) and that of a negative sentence in (36) regarding their occurrence with the verb phrase *hat hay* ‘sing well’:

- (35) Mary hat **co** hay khong?  
 Mary sing PRT well Q  
 ‘Does Mary sing well?’
- (36) Mary hat khong hay.  
 Mary sing NEG well  
 ‘Mary does not sing well.’

In these two cases, it is grammatical for both the yes-no question *co* in (35) and the negative marker *khong* in (36) to go in between the verb *hat* ‘sing’ and the following adverb *hay* ‘well’.

In fact, later in this thesis, along with Duffield’s Assertion Phrase, I will use this claim to support my analysis on the syntactic functions and positions that the marker *co* has in yes-no questions in Vietnamese.

## 4. The ‘Assertive Marker in Negatives’ Approach

### 4.1. The Proposal

With the problems present in previous analyses, it is likely that the particle *co* in Vietnamese yes-no questions neither behaves similarly to English *do*-support nor function equivalently to an emphatic marker in positive sentences. In fact, the differences in distributions and functions between *co* and English *do*-support, as well as between *co* and an emphatic marker show that both the ‘English-*do* support’ and the ‘emphatic marker’ approaches cannot be used to explain all the cases of *co* in Vietnamese yes-no questions. As a result, while still following some points made in previous studies, I take on a different approach to analyze the particle *co* in yes-no questions in Vietnamese. In particular, unlike what previous literature has proposed, I suggest

that the structures of yes-no questions in Vietnamese are more comparable to negative sentences than positive sentences.

Previous analyses, especially Duffield's and McClive's, have shown some connection between the structures of negative sentences and yes-no questions, yet they do not aim for an in-depth analysis of this connection. In my analysis, I bring out more of the connection that yes-no questions have with negatives in Vietnamese.

Adopting the Vietnamese clausal structures that Duffield has proposed earlier, I suggest that the marker *co* and the negative marker *khong* are in the Assertion Phrase in the structure of negative sentences in Vietnamese, and that *khong* is in the specifier position of *co*. Yes-no questions are formed when *khong* undergoes head movement to the end of the sentence. This movement of *khong* in turn leaves *co* to be the only element remained in the Assertion Phrase. This would then explain McClive's observation on *co* in yes-no questions appearing in roughly the same positions that *khong* has in negatives. As a result, with this analysis, I connect the marker *co* in yes-no questions with an assertive marker in negative contexts.

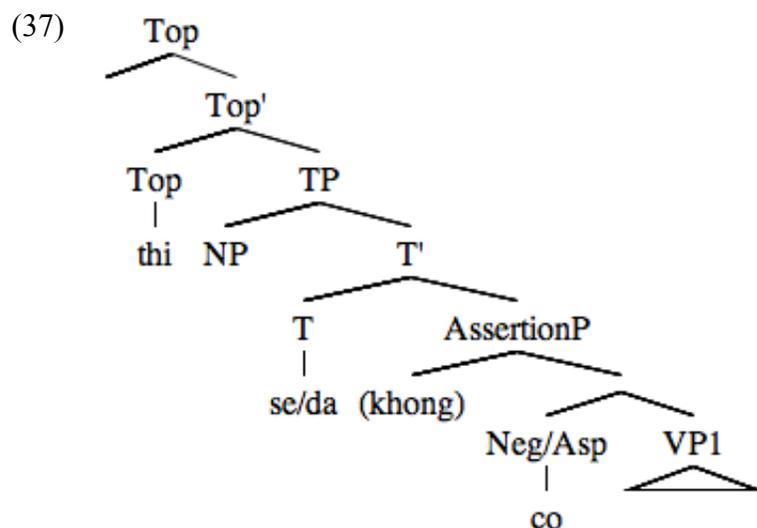
I then base my analysis on another assumption that McClive has made in his study, which states that there is more than one possible way for *khong* to appear in negative sentences. Thus, I assume that there are two ways to construct negative sentences in Vietnamese. Then, based on the relation established between yes-no questions and negative sentences, I generate the syntactic structures for the two possible Vietnamese yes-no question structures that are related to the two negative sentences.

The similarities between yes-no questions in Vietnamese and negative particle questions in Hokkien further supports the two main points I make in my approach. Firstly, like Vietnamese yes-no question structures, the negative particle questions in Hokkien also show some close

relation to the structure of negative sentences. Secondly, it is possible, and even common, for some languages to have question particles in the sentence-final position rather than in the sentence-initial position. As a result, my analysis also suggests some new perspectives on a cross-linguistic phenomenon of constructing yes-no questions.

#### 4.1.1. Assumptions from Previous Studies

As I stated earlier, I use some parts of the Vietnamese clausal structure that Duffield proposes in (37), and further develop it to support my analysis about the relationship between yes-no questions and negative sentences in Vietnamese.



The first assumption from Duffield's study that I apply to my analysis is that *co* and *khong* are in the AsrP, which is lower than TP (Duffield 97).

As Duffield briefly notes in his study, some language-specific facts as well as some cross-linguistic and theory-internal evidence have supported the idea that some type of Assertion Phrase or Polarity Phrase is a component of INFL. To some degree, this AsrP is considered as a “generalization of the “NegP” hypothesis to affirmative contexts” (Duffield 100).

The second assumption that I take from Duffield's study is that in yes-no questions in Vietnamese, *khong* in the sentence-final position does not function as a negative marker at all, but it functions as a question particle (Duffield 98).

Besides Duffield's study, I also base some points of my analysis on some assumptions made in McClive's study. One of the main observation in McClive's study that I assume is that *khong* can appear in more than one position in negative sentences (McClive 237). According to McClive, in Vietnamese negatives, *khong* can either go before the entire verb phrase, as shown in (38a), or appear between a verb and an adverb, as shown in (38b):

- (38) a. Mary khong hat hay.  
 Mary NEG sing well  
 'Mary does not sing well.'
- b. Mary hat khong hay.  
 Mary sing NEG well  
 'Mary does not sing well.'

These two negative sentences that McClive has in his study are examples for regular negatives without *co* present in the sentences. The Vietnamese negatives with the presence of *co* as an assertive marker are shown in (39) below<sup>6</sup>:

- (39) a. Mary khong **co** hat hay.  
 Mary NEG ASR sing well  
 'Mary does not sing well.'
- b. Mary hat khong **co** hay.  
 Mary sing NEG ASR well  
 'Mary does not sing well.'

Like what Duffield has claimed about Vietnamese clausal structures in the tree (37) above, the negative marker *khong* always goes directly before the assertive marker *co* in negative sentences in Vietnamese. I use these two sentences in (39) to analyze the structures of negatives

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<sup>6</sup> From this point on in my analysis, I interpret *co* as an assertive marker in negative sentences in Vietnamese. Therefore, I now gloss *co* as "ASR" instead of "PRT" like I have done earlier in this paper.

in Vietnamese, and then provide the yes-no questions structures that are related to these negative structures later in my analysis.

#### 4.1.2. Some Modifications from Previous Studies

In my study, some of the assumptions from previous literature are adopted with modification. Firstly, in his study, Duffield introduces Topic Phrase (TopP) as CP in Vietnamese. He states that the topicalized element that can be in the specifier position of TopP is almost any type of constituent, including depending clauses (Duffield 95). In fact, he presents the topicalized constituents as [XP + thi] phrases. He then provides an example of how a NP is topicalized in Vietnamese, as shown in (40) below:

- (40) Tieng Phap        thi    toi   noi    tot    lam.  
 French language TOP I    speak good very  
 ‘French, I speak very well.’

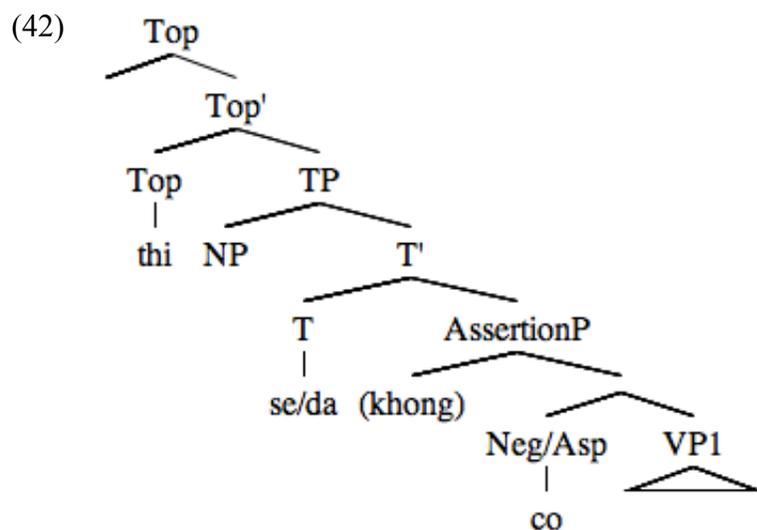
However, the statement about [XP + thi] phrases being topicalized constituents does not apply for the cases of VPs. In the article “A Constraint on Copy Deletion” (2009), Trinh claims that predicate fronting in Vietnamese is A-bar movement (Trinh 192). He then argues that the movement is “V-topicalization rather than topicalization of a remnant VP,” as shown in (41) below (Trinh 194):

- (41) Doc    thi    no    nen        doc    mot    quyen    sach.  
 read TOP he should read one CL    book  
 ‘As for reading, he should read a book.’

In other words, Trinh claims that predicate fronting in Vietnamese is topicalization of a single verb to [Spec, C]. As a result, Trinh’s study shows that in Vietnamese, V can still be moved to the specifier position while being the head of VP.

Therefore, the first point added to the assumptions from previous studies is that in Vietnamese, it is possible for a head to be in a specifier position. In fact, in my next point, I apply Trinh's study to Duffield's Vietnamese clausal structure, and show that this claim allows *khong* to be in Spec-AsrP, with *co* being the head of AsrP.

As shown in the syntactic tree (42), in the Assertion Phrase that he presents, Duffield assigns *co* to be the head of AsrP (Duffield 100). On the other hand, without stating what the marker *khong* really is in this Assertion Phrase projection, he just labels the marker *khong* as “(khong)”:



In my analysis, I suggest that *khong* is the Neg head of the AsrP, and that *khong* is placed in the Spec-AsrP position. This assignment for the function of *khong* is, in fact, possible, thanks to Trinh's earlier statement about the possibility of having a head in a specifier position in Vietnamese.

Thirdly, Duffield's syntax tree only shows the case of *khong* being placed before the entire verb phrase, and thus it does not include the case in which *khong* can go in between a verb and an adverb. In my analysis, I combine Duffield's tree structure with McClive's statement about the two possible placements of *khong* in negatives, as earlier mentioned in (38) and (39).

Based on both the original points from previous studies and some of the revisions that I have added to my analysis, I suggest that the structures of yes-no questions in Vietnamese are closely related to the structures of negative sentences, and that there are two possible ways to construct yes-no questions based on the two possible structures of negative sentences in Vietnamese.

## 4.2. An Analysis

### 4.2.1. The Structures of Yes-No Questions in Vietnamese

As I have shown that the structures of yes-no questions and negatives in Vietnamese are related, I now present the structures of yes-no questions and negatives in Vietnamese to show how these two types of sentences are related to each other. In negatives, the particle *co* and the negative marker *khong* are in the Assertion Phrase, lower than TP. In yes-no questions, *khong* undergoes head movement to the end of the sentence and function as a question particle, while *co* stays as the only remaining element in the AsrP.

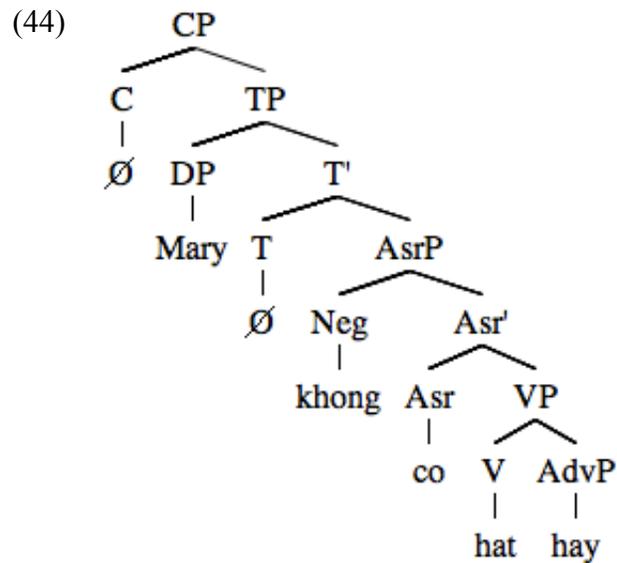
As there are two possible structures for negatives in Vietnamese, and that yes-no questions in Vietnamese are related to negatives, it suggests that there are also two possible structures for Vietnamese yes-no questions.

One possible structure for negatives in Vietnamese is the one that displays the position of the Neg head *khong* and the Asr head *co* before the entire verb phrase. The yes-no question structure related to this negative sentence structure is the one that has *co* goes before the entire verb phrase, while *khong* appears at the end of the sentence.

The first possible structure of negatives, therefore, has the same pattern to the sentence in

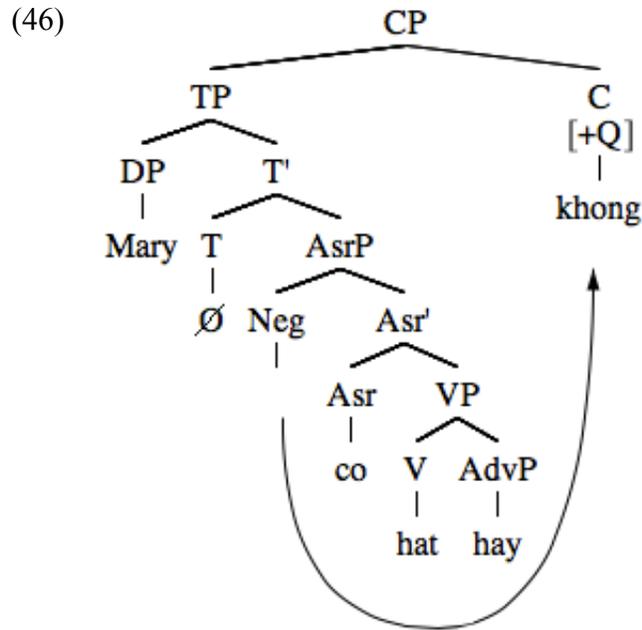
(43), and the syntax tree for this structure is illustrated in (44) below:

- (43) Mary khong **co** hat hay.  
 Mary NEG ASR sing well  
 'Mary does not sing well.'



The yes-no questions that is related to the structure of the negative sentence in (43) has the pattern like that of sentence (45), and its syntax tree is illustrated in (46) below:

- (45) Mary **co** hat hay khong?  
 Mary ASR sing well Q  
 'Does Mary sing well?'

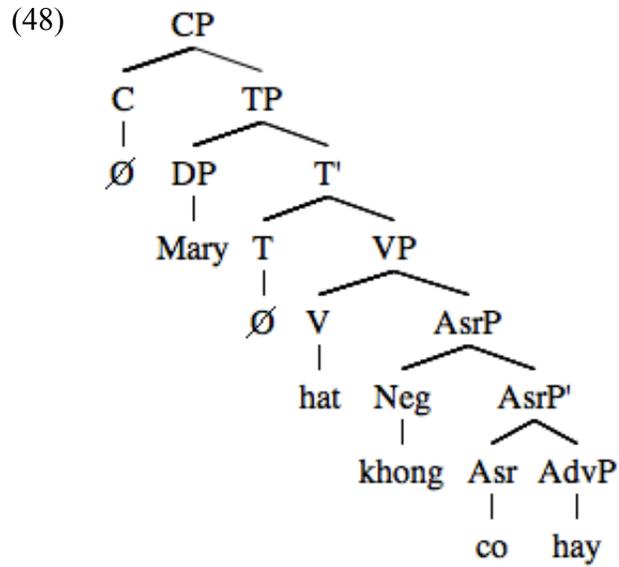


Then, the second possible structure for negatives in Vietnamese is the one that presents the possibility of the Neg head *không* and the Asr head *co* to split a verb and an adverb.

Therefore, the yes-no question structure that matches the pattern of this negative sentence is the one that has *co* appearing between a verb and an adverb, while *không* still appears at the end of the sentence to signal the interrogative context.

Therefore, the second possible structure for negative sentences in Vietnamese is similar to the pattern of (47), in which the negative marker *không* and the following assertive marker *co* occur between the verb *hát* ‘sing’ and the adverb *hay* ‘well’. The syntax tree for this structure of negatives is then illustrated in (48) below:

- (47) Mary hát không **co** hay.  
 Mary sing NEG ASR well  
 ‘Mary does not sing well.’

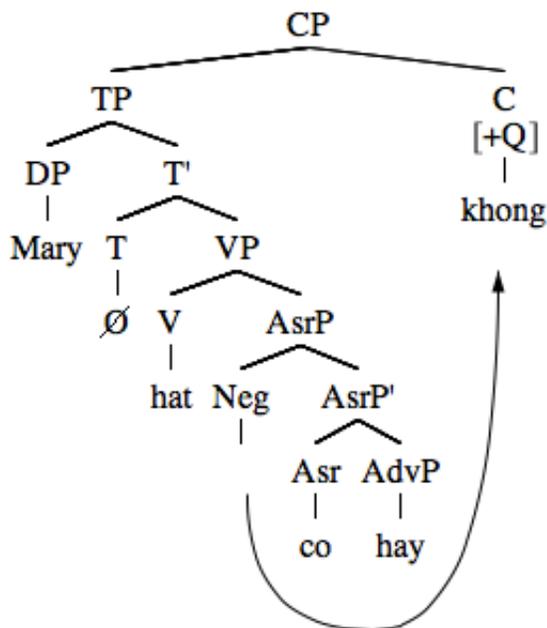


The yes-no question structure that is related to the negative sentence in (47) above is (49), as the assertive marker *co* in this yes-no question appears between a verb and an adverb in this sentence, while *không* is moved to the end of the sentence and functions as a question particle.

The syntax tree for this yes-no question is illustrated in (50) below:

- (49) Mary    hat    **co**    hay    không?  
 Mary    sing    ASR    well    Q  
 'Does Mary sing well?'

(50)



These two structures of yes-no questions explain why McClive has an observation that while *khong* moves to the end of the sentence in yes-no questions, *co* seems to appear in the position that *khong* has in negative sentences. In the structures of negatives in Vietnamese, while the Neg head *khong* and the Asr head *co* of the AsP can be either inside or outside VP, they are always lower than TP. Likewise, in the structures of yes-no questions in Vietnamese, no matter if the assertive marker *co* is inside or outside VP, it is always lower than TP. As a result, the structures of yes-no questions and negatives in Vietnamese are closely related, and the marker *co* in yes-no questions in Vietnamese is more comparable to an assertive marker in negative contexts than an emphatic marker in positive sentences.

#### 4.2.2. Comparison with Negative Particle Questions in Hokkien

While *co* in yes-no questions in Vietnamese does not have similar grammatical functions or semantic contribution as *do*-support in English and a typical emphatic marker in positive



similar to McClive's comment about *co* in Vietnamese yes-no questions occurring in the same positions that *khong* has in negatives.

Based on these similarities established in question formations between the two languages, I suggest that the markers *co* and *khong* in yes-no questions in Vietnamese are comparable to the particles *u* and *bo* in negative particle questions in Hokkien. As a result, it is likely that the similarities in structures between Vietnamese yes-no questions and Hokkien negative particle questions suggest new perspectives on a cross-linguistic phenomenon.

## 5. Conclusion

In this thesis, I concern the syntactic functions and positions of the marker *co* in yes-no questions in Vietnamese. Unlike the approaches that previous studies have taken to analyze the syntax of *co*, I propose that *co* in yes-no questions in Vietnamese does not have the same grammatical function or the semantic contribution as do-support in English and a typical emphatic marker in positive sentences. I then suggest that the structures of yes-no questions in Vietnamese are related to the structures of negative sentences, and that *co* in Vietnamese yes-no questions are rather related to the assertive marker in negative contexts. This study implies that *co* in different sentence structures, particularly in positive sentences and yes-no questions, corresponds to different, though possibly related, meanings in Vietnamese. Therefore, my analysis on the function and meaning of *co* in yes-no questions provides a new data point for evaluating competing analyses of both the marker *co* and yes-no question structures in Vietnamese.

Furthermore, I suggest that the particle *co* in Vietnamese yes-no questions is more comparable to the particle *u* in Hokkien negative particle questions. The pattern of yes-no

question formation in Vietnamese shares similarities to the structure of negative particle questions in Hokkien, bringing new viewpoints on a cross-linguistic phenomenon. As a result, further work is needed to determine to what degree the particle *co* in Vietnamese yes-no questions and the particle *u* in Hokkien negative particle questions are similar, and to what degree they vary.

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