

YES-NO QUESTION CONSTRUCTIONS IN VIETNAMESE

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Problems

While **khong** is the negative marker, the function and meaning of **co** in Y/N Qs in VNese is not well understood.

Co in VNese Y/N Qs has been considered to either:

1. function similarly to **do**-support in English (Thompson 1987; Duffield 1999)
2. OR behave equivalently to an emphatic marker (Nguyen 1997; McClive 2002).

Problems

Co in Y/N Qs can go before the entire VP *hat hay* ‘sing well’:

(3) Mary **co** hat hay **khong?**

(= 2) Mary **particle** sing well **negation**

‘Does Mary sing well?’

Problems

Co can go directly before an adjective in Y/N Qs:

- (4) Mary co cao khong?
Mary particle tall negation
'Is Mary tall?'

Problems

Co can go in between the main verb and an adverb in Y/N Q in this case:

- (5) Mary hat co hay khong?
Mary sing particle well negation
'Does Mary sing well?'

Problems

But NOT in this case:

- (6) * Mary thuong xuyen co hat khong?
Mary usually particle sing negation
'Does Mary usually sing?'

Questions

1. What is **co** in Y/N Qs in VNese?
2. What are the syntactic positions of **co** in Y/N Qs in VNese?

The 'English Do-Support' Approach: Proposal

Co in VNese Y/N Qs functions similarly to **do**-support in English (Thompson 1987; Duffield 1999).

The 'English Do-Support' Approach: Evidence

1. Both **co** and **do** give emphasis to its following element in positives (Thompson 1987):

(7) Mary **co** hat hay.

Mary **particle** sing well

'Mary **does** sing well.'

The 'English Do-Support' Approach: Evidence

2. Both **co** and **do** can also appear in negatives and Y/N Qs (Duffield 1999):

In negatives:

- (8) Mary **khong** **co** hat hay.
Mary **negation** **particle** sing well
'Mary **does** not sing well.'

The 'English Do-Support' Approach: Evidence

In Y/N Qs:

(9) Mary **co** hat hay **khong?**

(= 2) Mary **particle** sing well **negation**

'Does Mary sing well?'

The 'English Do-Support' Approach: Problem

1. There are some positions in which **co** can appear in VNese Y/N Qs but **do** cannot in English Y/N Qs.

The ‘English Do-Support’ Approach: Problem

Co can appear in more than one position in VNese Y/N Qs, while do auxiliary can only be sentence-initial in English Y/N Qs:

(10) Mary co hat hay khong?

(= 2) Mary particle sing well negation
‘Does Mary sing well?’

(11) Mary hat co hay khong?

(= 5) Mary sing particle well negation
‘Does Mary sing well?’

The ‘English Do-Support’ Approach: Problem

Co can go directly before an adjective in Y/N Qs, while English do auxiliary cannot:

- (3) Mary co cao khong?
Mary particle tall negation
‘Is Mary tall?’
(* Does Mary tall?)

The 'English Do-Support' Approach: Problem

2. **Co** in VNese Y/Qs functions differently from **do** auxiliary in English Y/N Qs.

The ‘English Do-Support’ Approach: Problem

Co is optional, while is do almost indispensable in Y/N Q constructions:

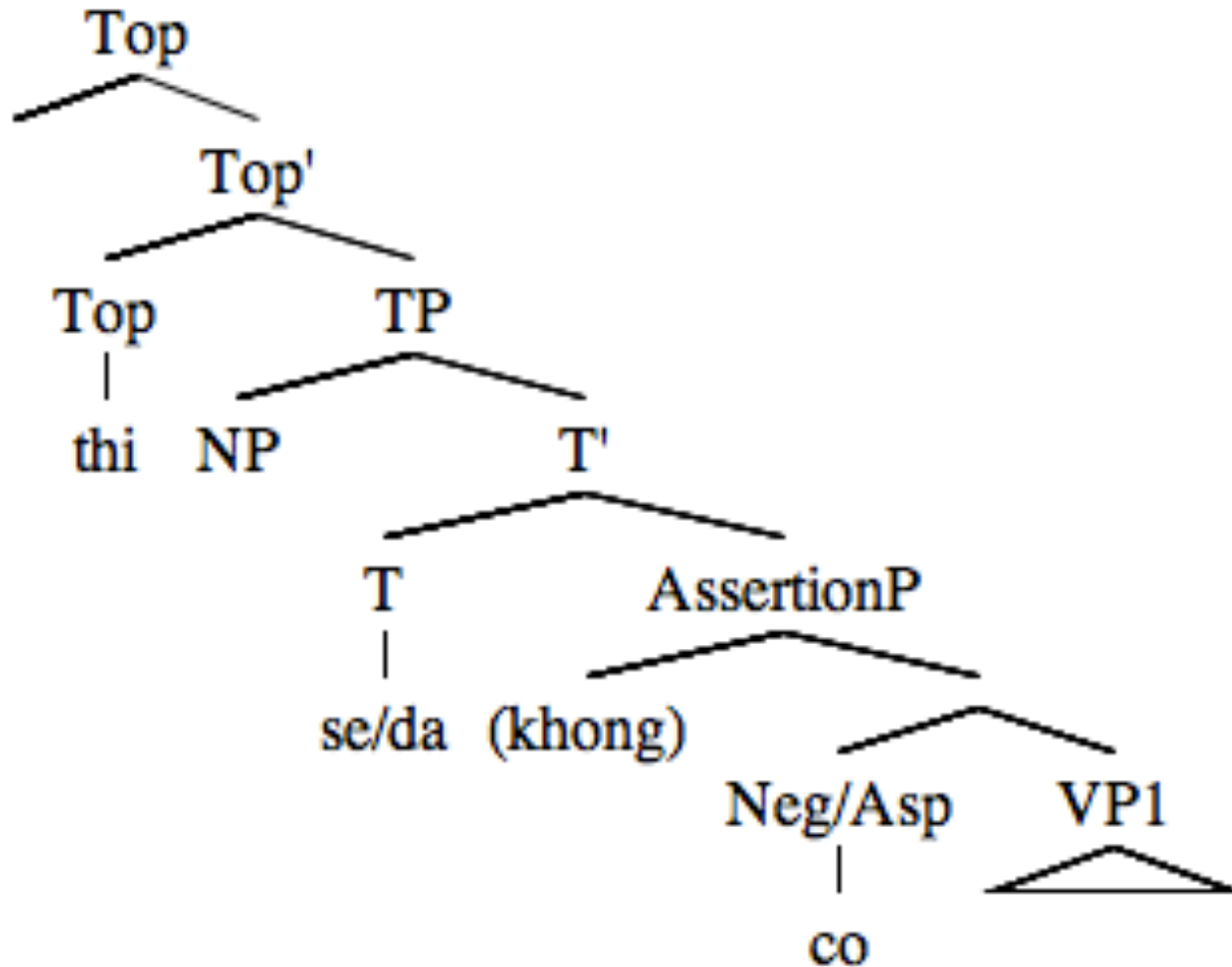
- (13) Mary hat hay **khong**?
Mary sing well **negation**
‘**Does** Mary sing well?’

The 'English Do-Support' Approach: Problem

Do-support appears between the Subject DP and the VP, and bears tense information (Radford 2004).

Co is lower than the Tense projection (Duffield 1999), and thus it does not bear tense information.

The 'English Do-Support' Approach: Problem



The 'English Do-Support' Approach: Conclusion

It is likely that **co** in VNese Y/N Qs does not function similarly to English **do**-support.

The 'Emphatic Marker' Approach: Proposal

Co functions as an emphatic marker in Y/N Qs in VNese (Nguyen 1997; McClive 2002).

The ‘Emphatic Marker’ Approach: Evidence

1. **Co** is optional in Y/N Qs (Nguyen 19997).

The presence of **khong** is sufficient to signal the question:

(14) Mary hat hay **khong**?

(= 13) Mary sing well **negation**

‘**Does** Mary sing well?’

The 'Emphatic Marker' Approach: Evidence

2. The elements surrounded by **co** and **khong** are highlighted in Y/N Qs (McClive 2002).

The ‘Emphatic Marker’ Approach: Evidence

Co and **khong** surround the entire VP *hat hay* ‘sing well’, and thus the action of the singing is emphasized in this Y/N Q:

(15) Mary **co** hat hay **khong**?

(= 2) Mary **particle** sing well **negation**

‘Does Mary sing well?’

Co and **khong** surround the adverb *hay* ‘well’, and thus the quality of the singing is emphasized in this Y/N Q:

(16) Mary hat **co** hay **khong**?

(= 5) Mary sing **particle** well **negation**

‘Does Mary sing well?’

The ‘Emphatic Marker’ Approach: Problem

1. The emphatic reading is found only in declaratives, but not in Y/N Qs in VNese:

A declarative sentence without **co** will lose its emphatic reading, but the meaning of a Y/N Q without **co** stays the same.

- (17) Mary hat hay **khong?**
(= 13) Mary sing well **negation**
‘Does Mary sing well?’

The ‘Emphatic Marker’ Approach: Problem

2. **Co** as an emphatic marker cannot explain the restriction that blocks **co** from splitting the main verb and an adverb:

(18) * Mary thuong xuyen **co** hat **khong?**

(=6) Mary usually **particle** sing **negation**

‘Does Mary usually sing?’

The ‘Emphatic Marker’ Approach: Conclusion

It is likely that **co** is not an emphatic marker in Y/N Qs in VNese.

The 'Assertive Marker in Negatives' Approach: Assumption

I will base my analysis on some assumptions made in previous studies:

1. **Co** and **khong** are in the Assertion Phrase (AsrP), which is lower than the Tense Phrase (TP) (Duffield 1999).
2. **Khong** is moved to the sentence-final C to form Y/N Qs (Duffield 1999).

The ‘Assertive Marker in Negatives’ Approach: Assumption

3. **Khong** can appear in two positions in negative sentences (McClive 2002).

Khong can either go before the entire VP:

- (19) Mary **khong** **co** hat hay.
(= 8) Mary **negation** **particle** sing well
‘Mary does not sing well.’

or split the VP:

- (20) Mary hat **khong** **co** hay.
Mary sing **negation** **particle** well
‘Mary does not sing well.’

The ‘Assertive Marker in Negatives’ Approach: Assumption

4. It is possible for a head to be in a specifier position in VNese.

“Predicate fronting in Vietnamese is topicalization of a single verb to [Spec, C]” (Trinh 2009):

(21) **Doc** thi no nen **doc** mot quyen sach.
Read TOP he should **read** one classifier book
‘As for reading, he should read a book.’

Trinh’s study shows that in VNese, V can still be moved to the specifier position while being the head of VP.

The ‘Assertive Marker in Negatives’ Approach: Proposal

Co in Y/N Qs is related to an assertive marker in negative sentences in VNese, while **khong** is the specifier of **co** under the AsrP.

The ‘Assertive Marker in Negatives’ Approach: Evidence

1. VNese Y/N Qs are more related to negative sentences than emphatic reading of positives.
2. In VNese, it is possible to have a head in a specifier position. This allows *khong* to be in Spec-AsrP, with *co* being the head of AsrP.

The ‘Assertive Marker in Negatives’ Approach: Analysis

1. Y/N Qs and negatives in VNese are related.

In negatives, the particle **co** and the negative marker **khong** are in the Assertion Phrase (AsrP), lower than the Tense Phrase (TP).

In Y/N Qs, **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.

The 'Assertive Marker in Negatives' Approach: Analysis

2. As there are two possible structures for negatives, we can generate two possible yes-no questions.

The ‘Assertive Marker in Negatives’ Approach: Analysis

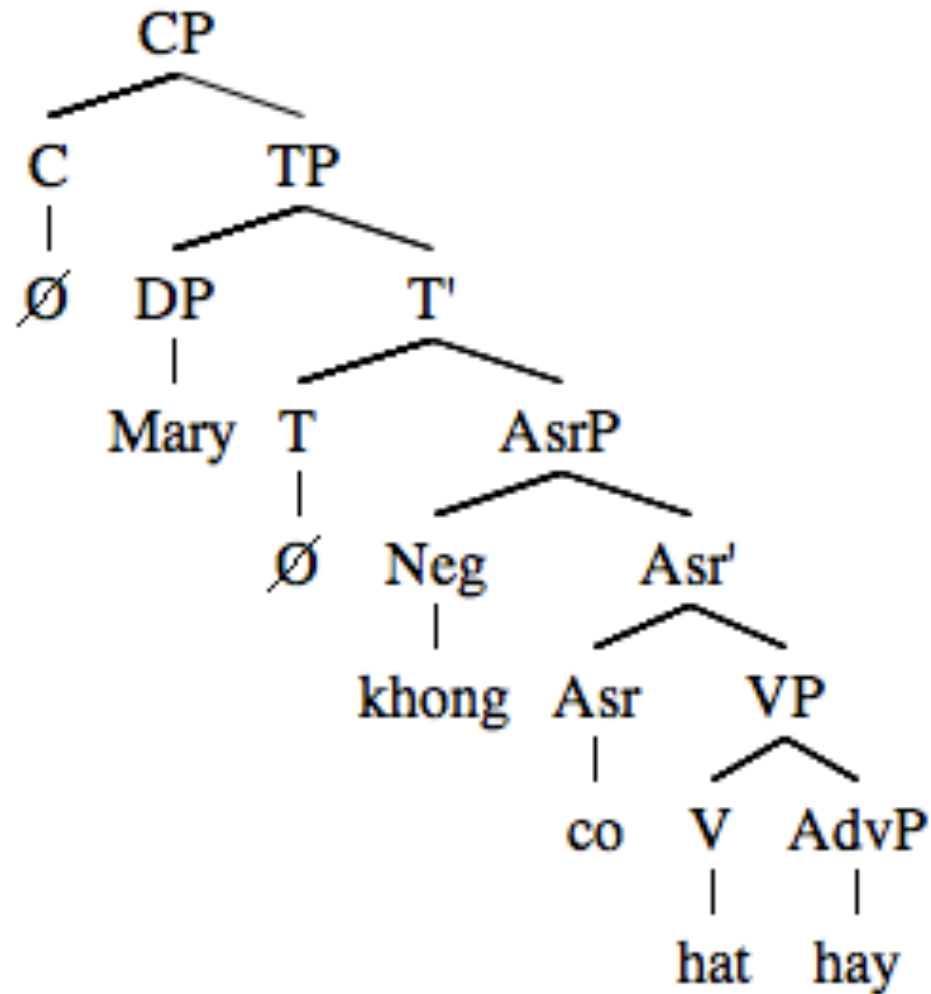
The first possible structure of negative sentences in VNese:

(22) Mary **khong** **co** hat hay.

(= 8) Mary **negation** **particle** sing well

‘Mary does not sing well.’

The 'Assertive Marker in Negatives' Approach: Analysis

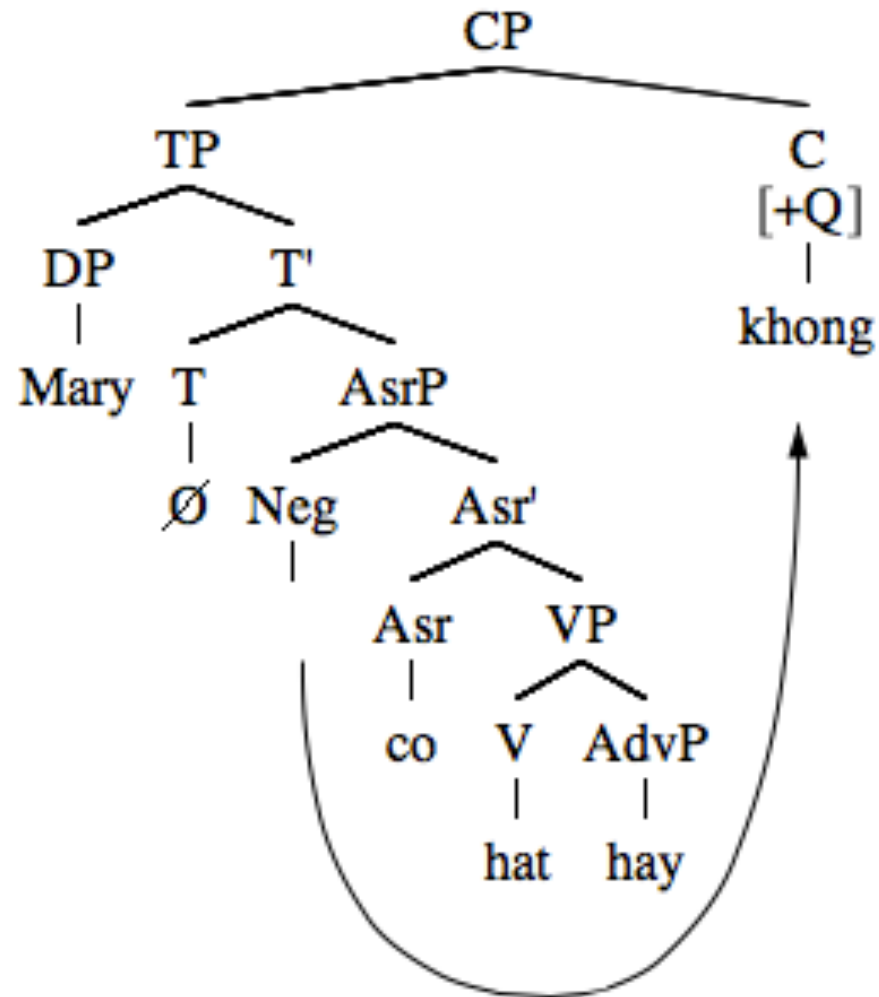


The ‘Assertive Marker in Negatives’ Approach: Analysis

The VNese Y/N Q that is related to the structure of the negative sentence in (22):

- (23) Mary **co** hat hay **khong?**
(= 2) Mary **particle** sing well **negation**
‘Does Mary sing well?’

The 'Assertive Marker in Negatives' Approach: Analysis



The ‘Assertive Marker in Negatives’ Approach: Analysis

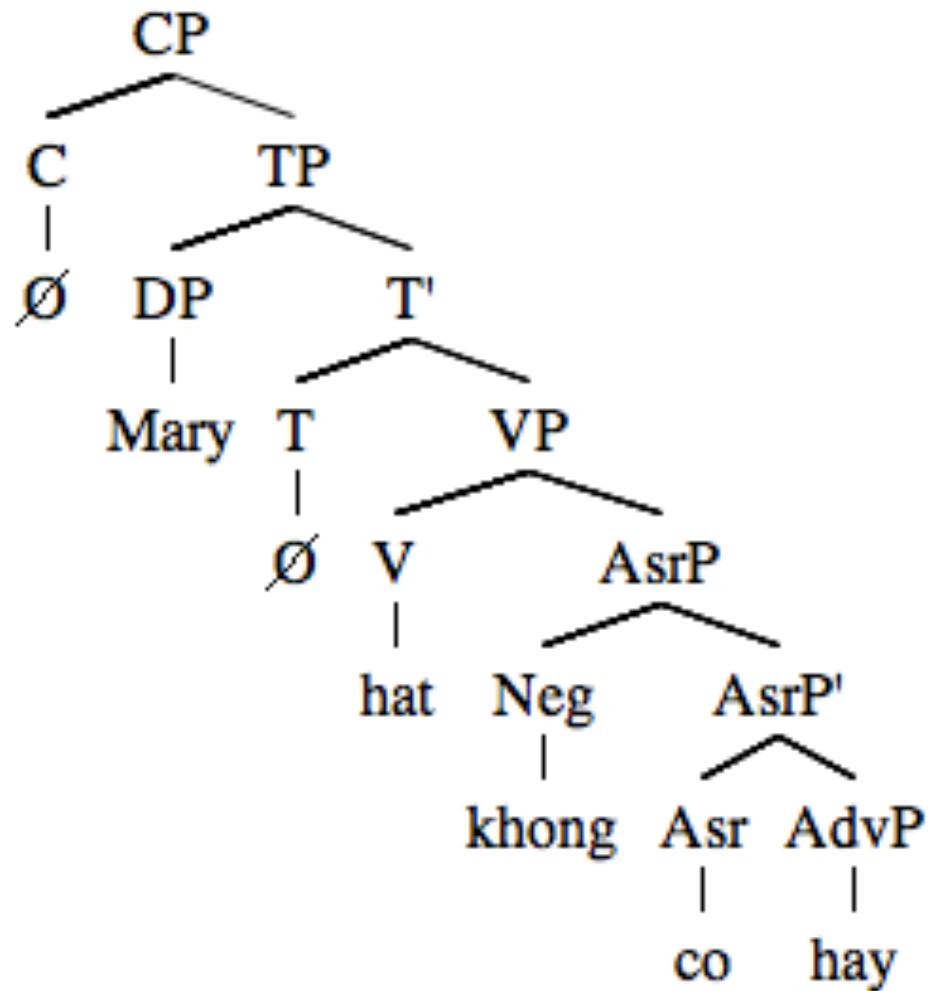
The other possible structure of negative sentences in VNese:

(24) Mary hat **khong** **co** hay.

(=20) Mary sing **negation** **particle** well

‘Mary does not sing well.’

The 'Assertive Marker in Negatives' Approach: Analysis



The ‘Assertive Marker in Negatives’ Approach: Analysis

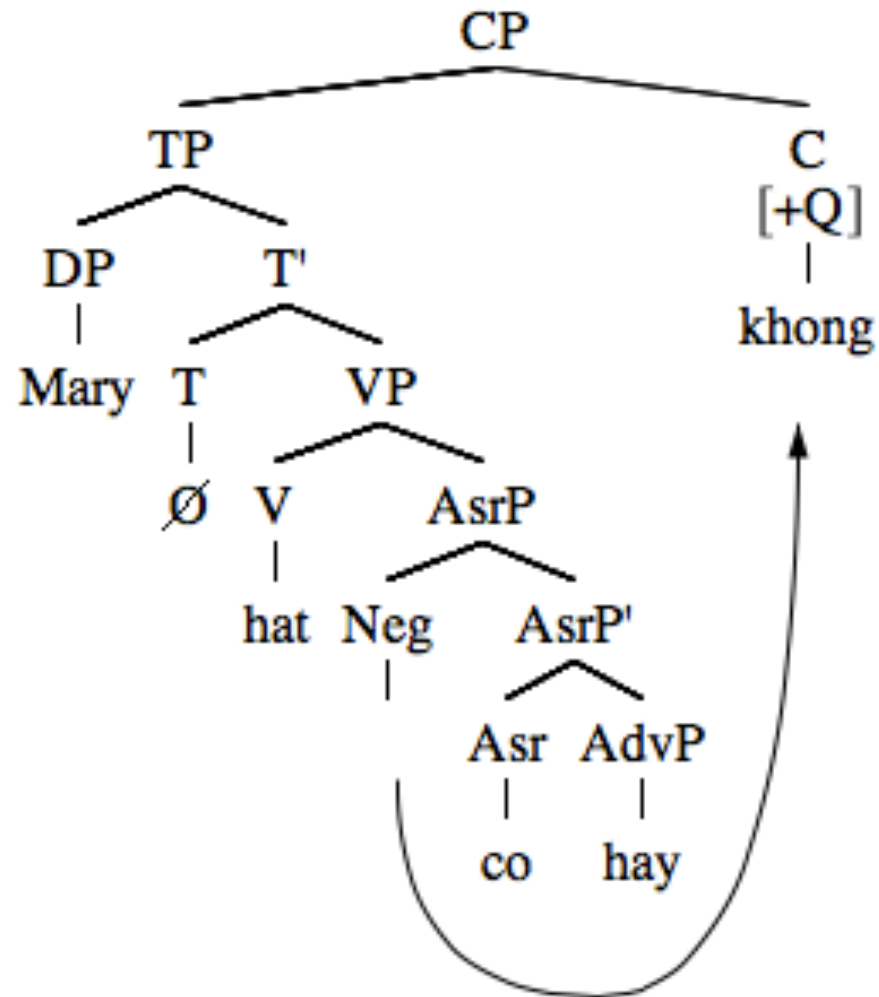
The VNese Y/N Q that is related to the structure of the negative sentence in (24):

(25) Mary hat **co** hay **khong?**

(= 5) Mary sing **particle** well **negation**

‘Does Mary sing well?’

The 'Assertive Marker in Negatives' Approach: Analysis



The ‘Assertive Marker in Negatives’ Approach: Analysis

These two structures of Y/N Qs in VNese suggests that while **co** in Y/N Qs can be either within or outside the VP, it will always be lower than TP.

Comparison with Negative Particle Questions in Taiwanese

Like Vietnamese, Taiwanese (TWese) is a head-initial language that follows the SVO word order.

In TWese, the structure of negative particle questions (NPQs) also has close relation to the structure of negative sentences.

The particle **bo** in TWese appears before the verb phrase and functions as a negative marker in negative sentences. In NPQs, **bo** appears at the end of the sentence and functions as a question particle (Cheng et al. 1996).

Comparison with Negative Particle Questions in Taiwanese

Like Y/N Qs in VNese, NPQs in Taiwanese has a sentence-final question particle that functions as a negative marker in negative contexts.

- (26) I **bo** tsiak beng Negative
He **not-have** eat rice
'He did not eat.'
- (27) I **u** tsiak beng **bo** NPQ
He **have** eat rice **not-have**
'Did he eat?'

Comparison with Negative Particle Questions in Taiwanese

In TWese NPQs, when the negative marker **bo** is moved to the end of sentence, the particle **u** appear before the verb phrase, quite similar to the particle **co** in VNese Y/N Qs.

Conclusion

1. **Co** in Y/N Qs in VNese does not have the same grammatical function or the semantic contribution as **do**-support in English and a typical emphatic marker.
2. The pattern of Y/N Q formation in VNese shares similarities to the structure of negative particle questions in Taiwanese/Hokkien, suggesting new perspectives on a cross-linguistic phenomenon
3. Further work is needed to determine to which degree the particle **co** in VNese Y/N Qs and the particle **u** in TWese NPQs are similar, and to which degree they vary.

References

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