INTERPRETING EXPLETIVE NEGATION IN VIETNAMESE

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Abstract
Vietnamese shows instances of sentential negation which seems to make no semantic contribution. We propose to analyse these as cases of structural ambiguity. The proposal incorporates the assumption that constituents may be “multi-dominated,” and turns out to account for facts beyond those concerning “expletive negation” constructions.

1. A puzzle about negation

The sentences in (1) have semantically equivalent alternatives in (2).1

(1) a. John quên đọc báo
   J. forget read newspaper
b. John trì dúc báo
   J. stop read newspaper
c. John tránh đọc báo
   J. avoid read newspaper

(2) a. John quên không đọc báo
   J. forget not read newspaper
b. John tránh không đọc báo
   J. avoid not read newspaper

Note that the sentences in (2) are ambiguous: không can but does not have to be expletive. Thus, (2a), (2b) and (2c) can mean ‘John forgot to not read the newspaper,’ ‘John stop not reading the newspaper’ and ‘John avoids not reading the newspaper,’ respectively.

1.1. Hypothesis 1: optional interpretation

The simplest hypothesis would of course be that semantic interpretation of không ‘not’ is generally optional. But this hypothesis fails to account for (3).

(3) a. John không quên đọc báo
   J. not forget read newspaper
b. John định không đọc báo
   J. intend not to read newspaper

1.2. Hypothesis 2: agreement

We might consider (1) and (2) as cases of syntactic agreement: semantically equivalent material is pronounced twice, understood once (cf. Chomsky 1995 and subsequent works).

(4) he/[+tag] read-sikkam the newspaper

Note that different readings may result depending on whether certain feature on a lexical item is intrinsic and hence interpretable, or resulting from agreement and hence uninterpretable (cf. Kratzer 1998, 2009, Heim 1994, Stechow 2003).

(5) a. only I/[+tag] did my/[+tag] homework
   ‘No one who is not me did my homework’
b. only I/[+tag] did my/[+tag] homework
   ‘No one who is not me did his homework’

We could tell a similar story for (1) and (2): negation is expletive when it is [+neg], non-expletive when it is [+neg].

(6) a. John forget+[neg] not janne[+neg] read newspaper
   ‘John forgot to read the newspaper’
b. John forget+[neg] not janne[+neg] read newspaper
   ‘John forgot to not read the newspaper’

Problem: presupposition projection

However, Vietnamese has another negative head, chữa, which has the logical meaning of không ‘not’ but also triggers the presupposition that its argument is to become true at some point in the future. Thus, chữa means something like ‘not yet.’

(7) Semantics of chữa
   [[[chữa]](p) = [[not]](p) if p will (likely) be true, undefined otherwise

(8) a. John chữa đọc báo
   J. not-yet read newspaper
b. [[[chữa]]] = John did not read the newspaper
   John will read the newspaper

When chữa is embedded under quên ‘forget,’ the logical meaning disappears but the presupposition survives.

(9) a. John quên chữa đọc báo
   John forgot not-yet read newspaper
b. [[[chữa]]] = John forget to read the newspaper
   John will read the newspaper

Problem: NPI licensing

Another fact which argues against the agreement approach is that negation can license NPIs under the ‘expletive’ reading (cf. Linebarger 1987).

(10) a. John không buồn chào M.
    John forget bother greet M.
    b. *John quên không buồn chào M.
    c. John tránh không buồn chào M.

1 Similar facts are observed in earlier stages of English (cf. van der Wurff 1998), Russian (cf. Abele 2002, 2005), Japanese and Korean (cf. Yoon 2011), Hungarian (Edith Moravcsik p.c.), certain dialects of German (Manfred Krifka p.c.).
1.3. Hypothesis 3: Right Node Raising

A possible analysis for EN constructions is to say they involve ATB extraposition of the most deeply embedded VP out of a coordinate phrase headed by a silent conjunction and.

(12) John [xp [forget typ] and [not typ]] ... [yp read newspaper]

The analysis is lent plausibility by the fact that ATB extraposition of VP out of conjunctions headed by the overt counterpart of and is possible in Vietnamese.

(13) a. John quên và không đọc báo
    J. forget and not read newspaper
b. John nên và phải đọc báo
    J. should and must read newspaper

Problem: over-generation

It is not clear why (14a) cannot mean the same as (13b), i.e. why it cannot be given the analysis in (14b).

(14) a. John nên phải đọc báo
    J. should must read newspaper
    'John should have the obligation to read the newspaper' / 'John should and must read the newspaper'
b. John [ [should typ] and [must typ]] [yp read newspaper]

2. Analysis

2.1. Multidomiance & Propositional Modification

We propose that (15) is ambiguous between (16) and (17) where (16) is the parse that underlies the expletive negation reading" (cf. Gärtner 2002, Citko 2005, Bachrach & Katzir 2009, Temmerman 2012, Johnson 2012, among others).

(15) John quên không đọc báo
    John forget not read newspaper

(16) [NP | TP | T | VP | TP | NP | John
     T | forget | not | read | newspaper

(17) [NP | TP | T | VP | NP | John
     T | forget | not | read | newspaper

The constituent XP in (16) has two daughters.

(18) a. VP = John forget read newspaper
b. VP = John not read newspaper

given that ([VP]) \subseteq ([VP]), we have {[VP]} \cap {[VP]} = {[VP]}. Thus, we predict that ([{16}]) = ([{19}]) if we say that ([{19}]) = ([{16}]) \cap ([{VP}]), or more generally if we assume the syntax-semantic mapping rule in (20), which we call "Propositional Modification" because it parallels the rule of Predicate Modification proposed in Heim & Kratzer (1998).

(19) [xp John T [yp John forget read newspaper]]

(20) Propositional Modification (first version, to be revised)
    If A and B are daughters of C and both [[A]] and [[B]] are members of 2^W, then [[C]] = [[A]] \cap [[B]]

2.2. Linearization

It turns out that (16) is mapped to exactly the attested word order John < forget < not < read < newspaper if we adopt the linearization rule proposed in Wilder (2008) and make the assumption that XP in (16) is a projection of VP, but not VP, (see subsection 4)."  

(21) Linearization Rule (Wilder 2008)
    If a non-terminal node X c-commands a non-terminal node Y, every terminal fully dominated by X precedes every terminal fully dominated by Y

(22) Definitions
    a. X 'c-commands' Y if
        i. Y is dominated by a sister of X
        ii. X is not an intermediate projection
    b. X 'fully dominates' Y if X is a member of every dominance path of Y
    c. A 'dominance path' of a node X is a sequence of nodes <C, ..., C_n> such that C_i is the root and C, is X and for every i, 1 \leq i \leq n, C_i immediately dominates C_{i+1}

    a. Precedence among terminals in a tree must be a linear ordering (i.e. a total, transitive, asymmetric and irreflexive relation)
    b. a proceeds b iff a is pronounced before b

(24) Labeling XP as VP,

(25) Ordering statements for (24)
    a. John < forget, John < not, John < read, John < newspaper
    b. forget < not, forget < bring, forget < umbrella
    c. not < read, not < newspaper
    d. read < newspaper

* The resulting string is John < forget < not < read < newspaper, as attested.
* If "fully dominated" is changed to simply "dominated" in (21), we would have read < read and newspaper < newspaper < by virtue of VP, c-commanding VP, thus violating irreflexivity.
* If we let intermediate projections be C-commanders, we would have forget < not by virtue of V_I, c-commanding V_N, and not < forget by virtue of C c-commanding V_I, violating asymmetry.
* If A is labelled "VP," B would become a maximal projection, hence a C-commander, and we would have not < forget by virtue of B c-commanding V_I, thus generating the wrong word order.

\footnote{\textsuperscript{5} Wilder’s (2008) system explains the following paradigm in English, the relevant generalization being that the gap corresponding to the SBR in constituent must be at the right edge of the conjunct that contains it.}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{6} For arguments that negation is a verb in Vietnamese see Trinh (2005).}
3. A multi-dominance account of modal concord

3.1. Revising Propositional Modification

One question which arises immediately is why (26) cannot be parsed as (27) to mean 'John forgot to read the newspaper and John hated reading the newspaper.' Instead, this string must be parsed as (28) which means 'John forget to hate reading the newspaper.'

(26) John quên đọc báo

(27) TP

John forget hate read newspaper

(28) TP

John forget hate read newspaper

We propose to resolve this question by restricting the domain of Propositional Modification to phrases in which one daughter entails the other.

Given the revised Propositional Modification, we predict that VP must be interpreted as an entailment of VP, which means that the ordering source for the modal may in VP must be understood as the set of injunctions issued by Mary (cf. Kratzer 1981). This prediction is correct (27c) cannot mean 'Mary forbid John to read the newspaper and according to the house rules John may not read the newspaper.' This is incoherent to context (27c) with "That's wrong. The house rules do not say John may not read the newspaper."

The other cases on "expletive modals" in (27) can be analyzed similarly.

Problem: quantification force

It turns out (30a) does not have the modal expletive reading, even though nothing prevents the analysis in (31) in which one argument of Predicate Modification entails the other, modulo the appropriate resolution of the ordering source.

(30) Mary bắt John đọc báo

M. force J. may read newspaper

'Mary forces John to be allowed to read the newspaper.'/*Mary forces John to read the newspaper.'

(31) [xp [yp Mary forces John read newspaper] [yp John may read newspaper]]


(32) [xp [a exh.a] [yp Mary force John read newspaper] [a exh.a] [yp John may read newspaper]]

(33) a. D' = (John may read newspaper, John must read newspaper)

b. [exh.(p)](p) = 1 iff p = 1 & ∀S' ∈ X: p ⊆ [[S']] v [[S']] = 0

Problem: duals

(34) a. Mary cấm John không được đọc báo

M. forbid J. not may read newspaper

b. "Mary cấm John phải không đọc báo

M. forbid J. must not read newspaper

The contrast seems to parallel that in (35).

(35) a. Mary cấm John đọc báo nên John không được đọc báo

M. forbid J. read newspaper hence John not may read newspaper

b. "Mary cấm John đọc báo nên John phải không đọc báo

M. forbid J. read newspaper hence John must not may read newspaper

Solution: future research.

4. A parsing principle

Another question left open from the discussion above is why it is not possible to replace the negative verb (e.g. forbid, forget etc.) in expletive negation constructions with a semantically equivalent sequence of negation and another verb.

(36) Mary không cho John không đọc báo

Mary not allow John not may read newspaper

'Mary does not let it happen that John may not read the newspaper' / *'Mary forbids John to read the newspaper.'

We take this to be evidence that (36) can only be parsed as (37b) but not as (37a). We propose to account for this fact by stipulating the parsing principle in (38).

(37) a. [tp Mary T [xp [yp Macy not allow John read newspaper] [yp John not may read newspaper]]]

b. [tp Mary not [yp Macy allow John may not read newspaper]]

(38) Parsing Preference

Parse negation as high as possible.
Thus, projection in this case (37) as an analysis of (36), given the possibility of the parse in (37b).

Consequence: projection pattern

It turns out that the Parsing Preference can serve as possible explanation for the choice of label of XP in (39).

(39) \( \text{John} \) forget not read newspaper

Given the Parsing Preference in (38), the word order resulting from \( \text{XP} = \text{VP} \) would force the sentence to be parsed as (41), thus conveying a non-intended meaning.

(41) \( \langle \text{John} \ [\langle \text{VP} \not\text{not} \text{read} \rangle \text{newspaper} \rangle \rangle \)

Thus, projection in this case is determined by non-syntactic factors (cf. Chomsky 2013).

References