A Study of Negation-Indicated Words in Vietnamese

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Abstract: *Negation understood in normal sense is "rejecting the existence, the necessity of something". Thus, along with affirmation, negation is an important manipulation of the human perception toward reality and things mentioned. Negation in speech is formed by lexical means (lexical words, functional words) or the structure of sentences. This article examines the similarities and the differences between two functional words, which are "không" and "chẳng" in Vietnamese under the perspectives of the syntactics, semantics, and pragmatics. Under the syntactic perspectives, the position of "không" and "chẳng" normally positions before language expressions which contain negative sense, but "không" can be combined with nouns. In terms of semantics, "không "and "chẳng" express negation and rejection of what is going to utter (negative objects can be a phenomenon, things, activities, statuses, characteristics, etc.). The negative nuance of "không" is objective, whereas the negative of "chẳng" is subjective that evaluates and emphasizes the state of affairs..., rather various and vivid. In regards to pragmatics, the objective negation enables "không" to occur in all language styles, such as in sciences, administration, journals, conversational style, activities, etc. The article collects data from the literary works in different genres such as proses, poems, short stories, novels, daily communication, and two dictionaries. To clarify and distinguish the mentioned functional words, the depicted and replacing methods were used.*

Keywords: *Functional words, negation, synonym, Vietnamese*

I. INTRODUCTION

Negation understood in normal sense is "rejecting the existence, the necessity of something" [1,778]. Thus, along with affirmation, negation is an important manipulation of the human perception toward reality and things mentioned. Negation in speech is formed by lexical means (lexical words, functional words) or the structure of sentences. This comparative analysis examines two Vietnamese functional words with negative indication *"không"* and *"chẳng"* in the light of syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic perspectives. Researching functional words under syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic perspectives is an allegedly new approach in Vietnam. These perspectives: syntactics, semantics and pragmatics are separated and related to each other, which can determine the function of languages as a communicative tool of human beings. In respect to semantics, general and nuanced meanings of each functional word will be analyzed based on the meanings of sentences and speeches. In regards to syntactics, the article will model the position and combination of each functional word in phrases and sentences. Under the view of pragmatics, the article will analyze functional words in accordance with their possibility and

utility scopes such as the ability of taking part in speech acts and argument structures; the ability of determining language styles, times, and spaces in speech acts.

II. THEORETICAL REVIEW

It can be summarized researches on Vietnamese functional words by three trends as follows:

Firstly, functional words are considered as a grammatical domain, and this trend has celebrated authors: Ly [13], Kim [10], Than [18]… Ly mentioned *"a word has little or no meaningful content"* when identifying functional words [13, 66]; Than stated that functional words were elements which were *"absent of basic characteristics of grammatical form and decreased the primitive lexical meanings"* [18,107]. It can be seen that all the above authors' perceptions do not determine lexical meanings of functional words which are too similar to word form, grammatical word, or structural word in syntactic in general.

Secondly, when describing and classifying functional words under the consideration of generalized meanings and grammatical function, the generalized meanings are understood as the meanings of category and grammar. Almost Vietnamese grammatical books classify and describe functional words. Noticeable Authors are: Can [3], Ban [1], Duc [9], Bien [2]… Therefore, functional words are subdivided into groups by generalized meaning of times, targets, reasons, level meanings, similarities…; or based on words' functions such as functional words supporting lexical words called auxiliary and particle; functional words used to denote the relationship between lexical words called conjunctions. This is reasonable separations of functional words because they are tools to express meanings or grammatical categories or concrete relation of lexical words. This trend, however, still considered meanings of functional words in the inactive system of languages and hasn't considered functional words in their activities. Functional words were attributed to having only grammatical meaning and function; therefore, many semantic functions of them were not further accounted for.

Lastly, investigating the semantic meanings of functional words under perspective of pragmatics is not impossible to mention several authors: Lai [11], Chinh [4], Lap [12], Que [16], Dong [6] [7] [8], Dan [5], Phuong [15]… These authors' researches confirmed that functional words had no empty meanings or only had grammatical meanings. According to Que's point of view, *"If functional words are considered as available primitive elements that discretely occur in a language system and grammars are the rules to organize words, available elements to form sentences or speech factors. If so, then in grammar, we initially don't need to divide lexicon into lexical words and functional words, but we differentiate them by their functions of participating in sentences or speech factors."* [16, 28]. The author emphasized: *"when analyzing functional words, especially, functional words in Vietnamese, we must consider their lexical meanings"* [16, 74]. However, the meanings of functional words should be based on the meanings that functional words bring to sentences. Logically, *"Functional words should be considered in the use of language that connecting its communicative effects under pragmatic perspectives"* [11, 50]. In other words, semantic functions of functional words are classified by the meanings of speeches. Researchers on this trend also suppose that functional words take the role of making sense of sentences or notification of speeches.

Hence, to analyze the meanings of functional words that rely on the functional, pragmatics aspect makes a significant step forward to researching meanings of functional words in particular and functions of functional words in general.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data serving for this study was collected from literary works in different literary genres such as proses, poems, short stories, novels. etc… as well as the daily communication and two dictionaries - The dictionary explaining functional words in Vietnamese [14]; Vietnamese functional words dictionary 19].

To sufficiently collect the primary data, the following methods and tactics were deployed - the depict and replacing methods as well as the transformational, substitutive, and empty context tactics.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Findings
4.1.1 Syntactic Perspectives:
"Không" and *"chẳng"* have similarly grammatical features. In terms of position, these two words usually precede linguistic expressions containing negative connotation.

> Tôi **không** <u>tin vào giọt nước mắt của ba</u>. Tôi **không** <u>tin vào bất cứ điều gì</u>.
> Tôi **chẳng** <u>tin vào giọt nước mắt của ba</u>. Tôi **chẳng** <u>tin vào bất cứ điều gì</u>.
> (I **don't** believe in your tears. I **don't** believe in anything).

Regarding the combination, *"không"* and *"chẳng"* can be used with words indicating time: *không/ chẳng + bao giờ/ khi nào/ lúc nào/ từng/ hề…;…*words indicating place: *không/ chẳng + đâu/ ở đâu, chỗ nào, chốn nào*; indefinite words: *không/ chẳng + ai/ gì/ sao….* These expressions create colloquially-fixed language combinations with negative meanings.

Grammatical differences between *"không"* and *"chẳng"* are the features of linguistic expressions that contain negative content. *"Chẳng"* cannot precede nouns or succeed negative expressions like *"không"* in following examples*:

- *Anh ta nói chuyện **không** <u>đầu</u> **không** <u>cuối.</u>*
  *(He talked **without** beginning and ending.)*
- *Những căn nhà **không** <u>cả vách che đằng trư</u>ớc vì chẳng ai thèm tham lam của ai cái gì.*
  *(The houses **have no** front doosr because no one is greedy for anyone's.)*
- *<u>Đường</u> **không**. <u>Cầu</u> **không.***
  *(**No** road. **No** Bridge.)*

4.1.2 Semantic Perspectives:
"không" and *"chẳng"* express negation and rejection of what succeed them (negative objects can be phenomenon, things, activities, statuses, characteristics, etc.).

The first difference between *"không"* and *"chẳng"* is negative nuances. While *"không"* has an objectively negative nuance, *"chẳng"* is regularly accompanied by speaker's subjective attitude or judgment towards negative objects. Let's take a look at the following sentences:

(1) *Có lớn nhưng* **không** *có khôn*

(2) *Có lớn nhưng* **chẳng** *có khôn*

(being *mature but* **not** *wise*)

The first sentence describes opposing characteristics of an individual, whereas the second, in addition to the description, is also accompanied by negative attitude of the speaker to those characteristics.

The next point that distinguishes *"không"* from *"chẳng"* is that *"không"* is of absolutely negative nuance compared to *"chẳng"* of relatively negative nuance. Here are some examples:

Anh ta **chẳng** *chịu làm ăn gì. Mở một quán nước được hơn một năm thì phá sản.*

(*He* **did not** *do anything. Having a pub which was bankrupted after one-year operation)*

If replacing *"không"* with *"chẳng"*, this context would become illogical. The relatively negative nuance of *"chẳng"* creates a kind of equivocal meaning, subtle and witty (negation but not negation):

Lời nói **chẳng** *mất tiền mua/ Lựa lời mà nói cho vừa lòng nhau.*

(Courtesy costs **nothing**/ Words **do not** cost money, choose words to satisfy each other.)

4.1.3 Pragmatic Perspectives:

"Không" is occurred in most contexts, whereas *"chẳng"* is commonly used in spoken language and informal communicative situations.

The subjective nuance in negative meaning of *"chẳng"* narrows the using scope of word in functional styles imprinting the ego of the speaker such as art, activities, and reasoning discourse.

4.2 Discussion

As the results mentioned above, although *"không"* and *"chẳng"* are functional words with negative meanings, they are different not only in their order or combination with parts of speech but also in their objective and subjective negative nuance speaker's attitude or judgment towards the negative object. Besides, *"không"* is used in most contexts while *"chẳng"* is mainly used in spoken communication.

V. CONCLUSION

As far as grammatical aspect is concerned, *"không"* and *"chẳng"* are usually placed in front of linguistic expressions with negative content, nonetheless, only *"không"* could be put either after the linguistic expressions with negative content or at the end of a sentence. *"Không"* and *"chẳng"* can be combined with words of time like *bao giờ, khi nào, hề, từng...*; words of space such as *ở đâu, chỗ nào, đâu...*; or indefinite words *ai, gì, sao, ...* In terms of connotative meaning, *"không"* and *"chẳng"* have negative meanings and reject the existence of a certain event, a thing, an action or a characteristic. The negative nuance of *"không"* is objective and *"chẳng"* is subjective to evaluate and emphasize an utterance. In terms of pragmatics, *"không"*

can appear in most communication situations, but *"chẳng"* is used in daily communication, particularly in discourse or art.

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