

## Problems encountered by English-majored students at Duy Tan university in using English collocations built on the pattern “I + cognitive non-factive verb and epistemic adverb” for communication

Những vấn đề sinh viên chuyên ngữ Trường Đại học Duy Tân gặp phải trong việc dùng kết ngôn tiếng Anh trong cấu trúc “tôi + kết ngôn giữa động từ phi thực hữu và trạng từ nhận thức” trong giao tiếp

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### Abstract

This study aims at examining the problems that English-majored students at Duy Tan University in Da Nang, Viet Nam encounter in the use of the English pattern “I + Cognitive Non-factive Verb + Epistemic Adverb”. The pattern is herein referred to as “I + CNFV and EA” for short. The participants of the research were 162 English-majored students and 2 lecturers of English who specialize in English speaking skill teaching at Faculty of English, Duy Tan University. The students were asked to give answers to a questionnaire. The teachers were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews on their students’ knowledge of the “I + CNFV and EA” and on the problems that students are likely to encounter in using this pattern in communication. The findings showed that most of the students did not or rarely used this English pattern. They could not communicate successfully via this type of collocation since they were not fully aware of the usages and the effectiveness brought about by “I + CNFV and EA” for conveying such pragmatic features as *decreasing complaining/admonishing*, *giving counselling*, and *reducing boasting*. On account of this, it is hereby expected that the article will provide readers with some understanding of recognizable problems in using English collocations along with the possible tentative solutions that might be offered to the identified problems.

*Key words:* Cognitive non-factive verbs; epistemic adverbs; collocations, modality; problems.

### Tóm tắt

Nghiên cứu này nhằm tìm hiểu những vấn đề mà sinh viên chuyên ngữ Trường Đại học Duy Tân gặp phải trong việc dùng những kết ngôn tiếng Anh trong cấu trúc “Tôi + những kết ngôn giữa động từ phi thực hữu và trạng từ nhận thức”. Tham gia nghiên cứu này là 162 sinh viên chuyên ngữ và 2 giảng viên dạy kỹ năng nói tại khoa Tiếng Anh, trường

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Đại học Duy Tân. Các sinh viên được yêu cầu đưa những câu trả lời cho một bảng câu hỏi. Giảng viên được yêu cầu tham gia những cuộc phỏng vấn bán cấu trúc về kiến thức của sinh viên về kết ngôn tiếng Anh này và những vấn đề mà sinh viên có thể gặp trong việc sử dụng loại kết ngôn này. Sinh viên hiếm khi hoặc không bao giờ dùng loại kết ngôn này vì họ không biết cách dùng và hiệu quả của kết ngôn này mang lại qua những đặc trưng ngữ dụng của nó như *giảm lời phàn nàn, đưa ra lời khuyên, và giảm sự khoe khoang*. Mong rằng bài báo sẽ giúp độc giả nhận ra được các vấn đề khi sử dụng kết ngôn này cùng với những giải pháp có thể cho những vấn đề này.

*Từ khóa:* Động từ phi thực hữu; trạng từ nhận thức; các kết ngôn; tình thái; những vấn đề.

## 1. Introduction

In linguistics, modality has been one of the major concerns among linguists because of its complexity and variety. Modality can be seen as the soul of the utterance. According to Perkins, “*Doing research on modality is very similar to trying to move in an overcrowded room without treading on anyone else’s feet*” [41, 4]. There are a lot of lexical devices expressing modality such as modal nouns, adjectives, adverbs and lexical verbs. Combinations of modal lexical devices with other elements employable for communication have aroused so much interest that Hoyer [22, 3] claimed “*Modal elements frequently combine and interact dynamically*”.

Up to now there have been several studies on such collocations. However, most of the studies so far conducted only focus on the theoretical side of modality collocations and there have not been any surveys on the actual use of these collocations in reality. As a matter of fact, employing these collocations for verbal interaction is not an easy task for learners of English. Therefore, it is useful to conduct a mixed-method research consisting of both qualitative and quantitative analysis with the survey using a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews and the participation of 162 English-majored students and two English teachers in order to find out the problems encountered by learners of English in using collocations built upon the pattern “I + Cognitive Non-factive Verb and Epistemic Adverb” herein referred to as “I + CNFV and EA” whereby the epistemic adverb (EA) is

mobile, i.e. it can occur either initially, medially or finally in the collocation. This is herein set forth as the major concern of the article; and as indicated in the title of the article, the scope is narrowed down to the problems encountered by English-majored students at Duy Tan University in using these collocations.

The study is specifically aimed at (i) examining problems that English-majored students at Duy Tan University in Da Nang, Viet Nam encounter in using “I + CNV and EA” collocations for communication and (ii) tentatively finding out possible solutions to the problems identified.

In harmony with the specific aims mentioned above, the following research questions are set forth as further elaborations:

1. *What are the problems encountered by English-majored students at Duy Tan University in using English “I + CNFV + EA” collocations for verbal interaction?*

2. *What are the possible tentative solutions to the problems identified?*

In reality, the paper used to be presented orally in an international convention, VietTESOL in October, 2019 in Hue city ; however , it has never been published in any proceedings or articles so far. Before sending to DTU Journal of Science & Technology Studies, the paper had been improved better, so hopefully it will contribute something useful and practical to English language in general and learners of English in particular on the use of the English modal pattern “I + cognitive non-

factive verb and epistemic adverb” more effectively in daily communication.

## 2. Literature review

There have been research works on collocations of modal lexical devices by linguists such as McIntosh [32], Lyons [26], Coates [11], Perkins [41], Hoyo [22], Cappelli [7] [8], Vo Dai Quang [52], Tran Thi Minh Giang [50] [51], Luu Quy Khuong and Tran Thi Minh Giang [28].

McIntosh [32] gave a clear and comprehensive definition of collocations. Later, Lyons [26], Coates [11] and Perkins [41] made brief introductions to collocations. Next, Hoyo [22] conducted a study of modal adverb collocations. He found out a marked tendency for epistemic modals to attract adverb satellites. Then, Cappelli [7] also mentioned modulating attitudes via adverbs but she only presented her general overview of adverbs co-occurring with cognitive verbs. For collocations, Vo Dai Quang [52] discussed the possible collocations of adverbs and cognitive verbs; however, it is just a general introduction. Anyhow, his study advocated a basic theoretical ground of modality that has inspired us to the appearance of our research. Noticeably, Tran Thi Minh Giang [50] investigated the harmony between adverb satellites and non-factive verbs. Tran Thi Minh Giang [51] continued her study on the harmony of cognitive non-factive verbs immediately followed by epistemic adverbs along the line of certainty and possibility conveyance. In addition, the study by Luu Quy Khuong and Tran Thi Minh Giang [28] makes clear one of the pragmatic features inherent in English “I + CNFV and EA” collocations: speech-act modality with such uses as *decreasing complaining/admonishing, giving counselling, and reducing boasting*.

## 3. Research Methodology

### 3.1. Research participants

The majority of participants in the study were 162 English-majored students from 4 second year English classes at Duy Tan University in Da Nang, Viet Nam (male: 33.9%; female: 66.1%) in the academic year 2018-2019. They all are third-year English-majored students aged between twenty-one to twenty-three. These students were asked to give answers to a questionnaire. The other participants were 2 lecturers of English with more than three years of English language teaching experience. They were invited to take part in semi-structured interviews.

### 3.2. Research methods

As mentioned above, the aims of the study are to find out the problems encountered by English-majored students at Duy Tan University and to tentatively provide some possible solutions to the identified problems; therefore, a mix-method study was conducted along the line of both qualitative and quantitative analysis. The survey, by means of using a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, was implemented with 162 English-majored students and 2 English lecturers who specialize in speaking skill teaching. Data collection, data analysis and presentation of findings were conducted in line with descriptive research method to make explicit the usage frequency of English “I + CNFV and EA” collocations used by English-majored students at Duy Tan University in Da Nang, Viet Nam.

### 3.3. Research instruments and contents of the questionnaire and the interviews

The three research instruments employed for data collection are a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews and observation.

The questionnaire for students consists of two parts: background and content. The former is designed to seek students' background information on gender, age, knowledge of the English "I + CNFV and EA" collocation type. The latter consists of questions on the usage frequency of the specified English collocations via the use of these three adverbs of frequency: *often, sometimes, never*.

The semi-structured interviews include two main interview questions and other follow-up questions. These questions were used to collect in-depth information about the problems encountered by the students in their classroom speaking activities.

One of the three above-mentioned research instruments which is really necessary to conduct the study is observation. During the speaking classes, all English-majored students were under observation in order to find out in reality whether the students knew how to use the English pattern "I + CNFV and EA collocations" and how often they use it in communication.

### 3.4. Data collection procedure

The 162 copies of the questionnaire (see Appendix B) on students' background information (gender and age) and knowledge of the English "I + CNFV and EA" collocation type were delivered to the English-majored students in the 4 English classes. These participants were given fifteen minutes to provide their answers to the questionnaire before their answers were collected. Another source of data came from the answers by the two lecturers of English who specialize in teaching speaking skills. These two lecturers were invited to participate in several 30-minute interviews (see Appendix A) on the problems the students encountered in their classroom speaking activities, and especially these

interviews were carried out individually in Vietnamese and their answers were recorded for later analysis.

## 4. Theoretical background

The concepts and issues given in the following report on English "I + CNFV and EA" collocations, to a large extent, constitute the theoretical background for the research.

### 4.1. Epistemic adverbs

Epistemic adverbs are often considered as one of the most popular lexical devices transmitting modality because, in communication, the speaker almost always employs them to impart his/her commitment and attitudes towards the possibility of the states of affairs. This modal meaning embraces the propositional content being conveyed in the same way as the outer hard part of an oyster embraces its inner soft part. According to Biber et al. [4], there are three kinds of epistemic adverbs: *epistemic stance adverbs, attitude stance adverbs* and *style stance adverbs*. He argued that epistemic stance adverbs often used in communication are single word adverbs such as *certainly, perhaps, probably, possibly, maybe, surely, definitely, etc.,...* For example:

(1) *Perhaps you'll be hurt just a little in the foot.* [20, 149]

(2) *That is **certainly** the simplest explanation.* [31, 58]

Luu Quy Khuong and Tran Thi Minh Giang [27], however, support the division of epistemic adverbs into two kinds: assertive epistemic modal adverbs such as *certainly, surely, definitely, clearly...* and non-assertive epistemic modal adverbs such as *probably, possibly, perhaps, maybe....*

Based on the scale of certainty by Givón [15], assertive adverbs can be presented on the continuum below:



Figure 1. The scale of certainty expressed by assertive epistemic modal adverbs

Palmer [39] suggested that epistemic modality should involve any modal systems indicating the degree of commitment by the speaker to what he or she says - the extent to which the truth of a proposition is possible.

Therefore, non-assertive epistemic modal adverbs can be described as possibility-based. The degree of possibility can be presented as follows:



Figure 2. The scale of possibility conveyed by non-assertive epistemic modal adverbs

In this study, epistemic adverbs are also classified in accordance with the scale of certainty and possibility. Epistemic adverbs are divided into two kinds: assertive and non-assertive epistemic adverbs.

#### 4.2. Cognitive non-factive verbs

There are a lot of modal lexical devices as modality-expressing means such as modal nouns, modal verbs, modal adjectives, and modal adverbs. Among them, modal lexical verbs are the modal devices with the highest frequency of usage in both languages (i.e. English and Vietnamese), especially in English with 75.11%" (Nguyen Thi Thu Thuy [36, 60]).

According to Kiparsky [23], modal lexical verbs are divided into two main types: factive verbs and non-factive verbs. Non-factive verbs work as operators to mitigate the commitment and bring open-hearted atmosphere to the cooperation. In his research, Ngu Thien Hung [38] deals with three main types of non-factive verbs: (i) cognitive non-factive verbs: *believe, think, expect, suppose, guess, hope...*, (ii) perceptive non-factive verbs: *look, feel, sound, seem, appear...* and (iii) reportive non-factive verbs: *say that, tell, hear, it is said that, etc....* Cognitive non-factive verbs do not inform the listener or hearer of the subject's action, but show the speaker's attitude towards the

propositional content. From the views on cognitive non-factive verbs by Palmer [39], Thompson & Mulac [49], Halliday [19], and Hann [18], it is observed that, syntactically, to become a modal lexical device, propositional attitude verbs like non-factive verbs must satisfy the following distinctive features:

- The subject is always in the singular first person.
- The verb is in simple present tense.
- Adverbial phrases of cause or purpose must not be added in the sentence.
- In tag questions, the tag only aims at the subject of proposition (complement clause)
- As a modal device, these structures can occupy different positions in the sentence such as initial, medial, and final. Besides, they function as adjuncts.
- The complementizer *that* is often omitted (in about 90 % of the cases).

For example,

(3) ***I think*** you're really rude to throw off on my poor hands. [33, 347]

(4) *The advance of Red China, the challenge to Democracy, the role of the West - these, I suppose, were the complete works of York Harding.* [16, 549]

(5) *They ragged him about me at the café, I guess.* [21, 242]

### 4.3. Mobility of Epistemic Adverbs in the Matrix Clause

According to Quirk et al. [45, 991], a whole sentence containing a main clause and a subordinate clause is called a superordinate

clause in which the main clause is known as a matrix clause like in the following example.

(6) *“I really believe you’re quite glad to see me.”* [30, 727]

The following Figure 3 will make the above example (6) clearer with such terms as *Matrix Clause*, *Subordinate Clause*, *Superordinate Clause*

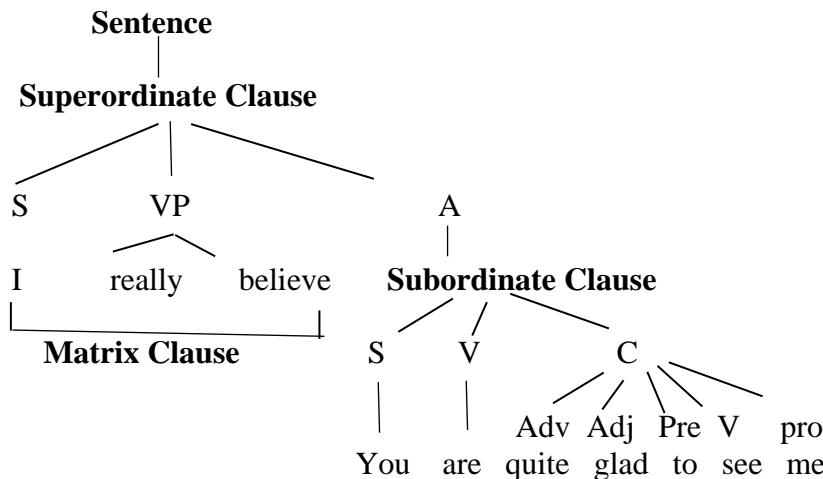


Figure 3. Matrix and subordinate clause in the superordinate clause

“*I really believe*” is known as the matrix clause, and “*you’re quite glad to see me*” as the subordinate clause. Therefore, structures like *I certainly think, I possibly believe, I suppose perhaps ...* are derived from purely the matrix clause, they behave more like modal auxiliary adverbs and they show signs of grammaticalization. Furthermore, these epistemic adverbs are so mobile that they can occur at various places in the matrix clause (medially, and finally).

Initial position: at the beginning of the matrix clause

Medial position: in the middle of the matrix clause.

Final position: at the end of the matrix clause.

(7) *“Certainly I think the election of John Kennedy and all he stood for was one that really was an inspiration.”* [5]

(8) *“My own appetite came back miraculously. I am ashamed to record it, but I really believe I forgot Dora for a little while. I am satisfied that Mr. and Mrs. Micawber could not have enjoyed the feast more, if they had sold a bed to provide it.”* [14, 392]

(9) *“Remarkable - most remarkable! I think perhaps, we had better go down to Tredannick Wartha without further delay. I confess that I have seldom known a case which at first sight presented a more singular problem.”* [12, 830]

In (7) the position of the EA, *certainly* at the beginning of the matrix clause makes an emphasis in displaying the speaker’s attitude to the truth of the content of the proposition. In (8) and (9), together with cognitive non-factive verbs, epistemic adverbs such as *really, perhaps* occur in the middle and at the end of the matrix clause, they occupy a marked position. The different positions of epistemic

adverbs in the matrix clause show us various degrees of emphasis in the speaker's commitment to the truth of expressed proposition. In (8) the epistemic adverb *really* combines with the CNFV like *believe* to show a remark which signals the speaker's knowledge. Besides, in (9) the epistemic adverb *perhaps* seems to affect the complement clause rather than the matrix clause although it really stands in the main clause and in the harmony of the cognitive non-factive verb *think*. In brief, in these instances, the epistemic adverbs such as *certainly*, *really*, *perhaps* strengthen the force of the cognitive non-factive verbs *think*, *believe*. In other words, it allows the speaker to come across as much more certain than the case if merely using *think*, *believe* alone, thus taking much more responsibility for what the speaker is saying.

#### 4.4. Speech-act modality

##### 4.4.1. The concept 'Speech-act modality'

In his study, Nordstrom [37] stated that all linguistic studies involving modality must eventually have a connection with the speech act theory by Austin [3] and the notions of performatives & illocutionary force because one of the functions of modality is to denote speech acts (Nordstrom [37, 49]).

According to Siewieska [47], in the past, most logicians only paid attention to the necessity and the possibility of the proposition and the speaker's attitude towards what is conveyed in the proposition, whereas nowadays functional linguists or pragmatists consider communicative intention as an element in the content of 'modality' concept.

Usually, all types of speech acts originate from speaker's communicative purposes, such as *promising*, *complimenting*, *apologizing*, *complaining*, *requesting* or *inviting*. There are

three related acts in producing an utterance: (i) locutionary act, (ii) illocutionary act and (iii) perlocutionary act. The locutionary act (or just say locution) is made up of three sub-acts, i.e. phonic, phatic, and rhetic. By illocutionary act (or illocution) is meant the communicative function assigned to the utterance. Perlocutionary act (or perlocution) refers to the communicative effect brought about by the utterance. This trichotomous distinction between locution, illocution, and perlocution in utterance making sheds new light into the semantico-pragmatic analysis of modal expressions in general and modal lexical verbs in particular.

After Austin [3] and Searle [46], Yule [53, 53-54] declared that "One general classification system lists five types of general functions performed by speech acts: declarations, representatives, expressives, directives, and commissives."

Utterances are of two types: constative and performative. Within the scope of this study, the authors mainly deal with the form of representatives or assertives as constative utterances. In fact, cognitive non-factive verbs and epistemic adverbs are contrary to performative verbs and adverbs. According to Austin [3, 3] these modal verbs and modal adverbs only show the speaker's state of cognition or attitudes to the truth of the proposition without doing the act of uttering when producing utterances.

Searle [46]'s view on speech acts is concerned with the relation between the speaker and what is said. This relation was also mentioned by Sweetser [48] and Cinque [10]; especially Paparofragou [40]'s study showed the speech-act modality in detail. Noticeably, in our study Sweetser's [48] proposal on 'speech-act modality' was applied. The following examples with the presentation of the "I +

CNFV and EA” collocations illustrate the category of speech-act modality in daily communication.

#### 4.4.2. Pragmatic uses associated with “I + CNFV and EA” collocations

##### 4.4.2.1. Decreasing complaining or admonishing

By employing such “I + CNFV and EA” collocations as *I just hope, I really believe, I think maybe, I just think...*, the speaker wants to show his/her complaint or admonition to the hearer. The following examples are an illustration:

(10) “**I just hope** you’ll have enough decency to disappear to wherever you came from.” [43, 185]

(11) “Do you think I’d go this far for sex? I can get any fucking girl in this god dam school but guess what? I chose you. I want you no one else but you.”

“I don’t think so Kyle. **I really believe** you think of me as a challenge not a lover.” [29, 13]

(12) “**I think maybe** one weekend evening a week, not two, not all day together, is a very fair restriction. There is no reason for you to follow that boy everywhere he goes.” [45, 158]

(13) “**I just think** it’s funny how you are so concerned about me forgiving my brother, while you shed nothing about your father.”

[44, 83]

In (10), the speaker expressed his/her annoyance with the hearer’s appearance; however, by using the pattern *I just hope* the speaker decreased his/her reproach a little and hoped that the hearer could identify his/her uncomfortable attitude. Similarly, in (11) the speaker expressed her real thought that Kyle’s love to her is not a truth but a challenge. With the pattern *I really believe* the speaker’s reproach was transmitted to the hearer

successfully. In addition, in (12) the speaker’s complaint was displayed to the hearer with the pattern *I think maybe*. It is certain that such admonition is from a person who is older and more experienced than the hearer and of course with higher social status. In this case, it is the father’s complaint about his daughter. Furthermore, in (13) the pattern *I just think* is employed to give the speaker’s admonition to the hearer. The speaker’s question is why the hearer is so concerned about the speaker’s brother and it is not the hearer’s business.

In brief, employing “I + CNFV and EA” collocations in giving complaint or admonition is effective in communication because the hearer will feel more comfortable to receive the speaker’s complaint or admonition.

##### 4.4.2.2. Giving counsel

The next pragmatic meaning exhibited in “I + CNFV and EA” collocations is counselling. With “I + CNFV and EA” collocations, the speaker would like to impart to the hearer his/her advice more easily. Consider the following examples:

(14) “**I think probably** - I think, you know, when you’re first dating somebody, if they’re just not that physical with you, if they don’t want to make concrete plans with you, you know, if they’re sort of ambiguous about where everything is going, I think that’s a pretty good sign that they’re not into you.” [17]

(15) “**I really think** that you have to find a partner that compliments you and is somebody that pushes you and is better at some things than you are, so they can push you to improve yourself as a person.” [2]

(16) “Whatever is about you that is translated into your art, that’s gonna keep you completely original and fresh and **I just think** that’s just the best advice I can give, to an artist creatively.” [6]



(17) “**I really believe** the only way to stay healthy is to eat properly, get your rest and exercise. If you don’t exercise and do the other two, I still don’t think it’s going to help you that much.” [35]

(18) “**I just believe** that sometimes in life you’re like a shark - you have to keep moving through water; otherwise, you’ll die.” [34]

From (14) to (18), it can be seen that *I think probably*, *I really think*, *I really believe*, *I just think*, *I just believe* are used to express the speaker’s counsel without imposition on the hearer and the hearer will feel more comfortable in receiving the speaker’s advice. In (14), with the pattern *I think probably* the speaker told the hearer his/her own experience in dating to guess whether his dating is successful or not. Besides, in (15) the speaker advised the hearer to make friends with a better person to look him/her up. By employing *I really think*, the speaker showed his certain commitment to the hearer’s case. In addition, in (16) the speaker considers that creativity in art is very important. He, therefore, suggested that the hearer should keep himself original and fresh. Similarly, in (17) and (18) with the patterns *I really believe* and *I just believe* the speaker proposed to the hearer the best way to stay healthy with moderation in eating, rest and exercise and especially in (18) the speaker encouraged the hearer to keep going ahead through difficulties in life like a shark moving in water.

The use of “I + CNFV and EA” collocations in giving counsel really plays an essential part in daily communication since the hearer will feel more certain with the speaker’s persuasive reasons on account of his/her own experience.

#### 4.4.2.3. Reducing boasting

Employing “I + CNFV and EA” collocations to reduce the speaker’s boast is one of the

possible communicative strategies. By making use of “I + CNFV and EA” collocations, the speaker really wishes to reduce his/her boast so that the hearer feels more comfortable while taking part in conversations. Look at the examples below:

(19) “**I think probably** one of the coolest things was when I went to play basketball at Rucker Park in Harlem. First, who would think that Larry the Cable Guy would go to Harlem to play basketball? And I was received like a rock star. It was amazing! There were people everywhere. There were guys walking by yelling, ‘Git ‘r done!’” [25]

(20) “I went to a lovely school, and I got an incredible education. And **I actually think** that my education is what really sets me apart, ‘cause I’m very smart.” [24]

(21) “I’ve been extremely fortunate in my life. So **I actually believe** that I’m the living embodiment of living the American dream.” [13]

(22) “Honestly, this face of mine will always be familiar to people. It’s that unique quality, man. If it’s a dark and crowded room, people are just able to point me out. I think I’ll always be famous. **I just hope** I don’t become infamous.” [9]

(23) “Well, now I have suffered and struggled enough! **I really believe** I am as good as many a one who sits in the church.” [1]

With the modality patterns *I think probably*, *I actually think*, *I actually believe*, *I just hope*, *I really believe* in samples from (19) to (23), the speaker wanted to show off his/her talent in playing basketball, his/her intelligence, embodiment of American dreams, fame. Moreover, in (23) the speaker would like to confirm his/her good behavior like others in the church. Although the speakers’ main purpose is to show their boast, the presence of “I + CNFV

and EA” collocations in their utterances lowers their boasting and the hearer will feel something modest and polite in the speaker’s way of speaking. In brief, reducing the speaker’s boast or pride by employing “I + CNFV and EA” collocations is one of the most interesting pragmatic characteristics of this type of collocation.

## 5. Findings and discussion

### 5.1. Findings from the two lecturers’ interviews

In English speaking classes, all English-major students in the four classes are required to participate in conversations about daily problems such as marriage, jobs, smoking,... without being asked to use English “I + CNFV and EA” collocations to express their own opinions. The two lecturers’ comments on students’ performance can be roughly presented as follows:

L1: Well, most of the students did not or rarely use “I + CNFV and EA” collocations in expressing their thoughts. In some cases, a few of them used these collocations but they were not successful because they were not accustomed to using this type of collocations.

L2: In my opinion, most of my students had the habit of beginning their utterances with “I think...” at random, not deliberately. A likely explanation might be based on the assumption that because “I think” has the same meaning as “Tôi nghĩ” in Vietnamese.

L1: In fact, I see that most of them hardly ever use epistemic adverbs like *perhaps, possibly, certainly, maybe...* in the collocations *I think, I believe, I guess, I hope, etc....* Maybe it seems to be difficult for them to use these adverbs in this English pattern in communication.

L2: I think the most prominent problem is that all students did not know when and how to use these English collocations. In other words, they were not fully aware of such pragmatic uses of these collocations as *decreasing complaining/ admonishing, giving counseling, and reducing boasting*.

L1: To me, it’s really necessary to teach students the pragmatic features of the English pattern by designing these in textbooks so that students will be accustomed to the use of the English collocations.

L2: Well, in fact it will be very difficult if we don’t give students chances to practice the English pattern. Therefore, teachers should give students more real contexts to use the English pattern at class.

### 5.2. Findings from the questionnaire for students

From the survey by using the questionnaire (see Appendix B, question 3), we got the results of students’ knowledge on the use of the English pattern “I + CNFV and EA collocations” in the below table

Table 1. Students’ knowledge on the English pattern “I + CNFV and EA collocations”

Classes	No	Yes	A little	Total number of students
Eng 209 AC	28	2	10	40
Eng 209 AA	26	1	13	40
Eng 209 C	22	1	18	41
Eng 209 I	25	0	16	41
Total	101	4	57	162
Percentage	62.35	2.46	35.19	100

With the above results, the majority of students (62.35%) had no knowledge on the English pattern. Some of them (35.19%) had a little, and only few of them (2.46%) knew it. It is obvious that the English pattern is quite strange to most of them and of course all of

them hardly ever knew pragmatic features of the English pattern.

In addition, the findings on the usage frequency of “I + CNFV and EA” collocations are now provided in the following table:

Table 2. Frequency of the use of the “I + CNFV + EA” collocations

Frequency of the structure	No	%
Never	143	88.27
Sometimes	19	11.73
Often	0	0
Total	162	100

The results from the survey questionnaire showed that most of the English-majored students (88.27%) never used “I+ CNFV and EA” collocations. Only a few of them (11.73 %) sometimes employed this type of collocation to express their own opinions.

As a matter of fact, from the results of semi-structured interviews with the two lecturers and the survey by using the questionnaire, the question raised here is *what are the problems that hinder students from using this type of collocation?* These problems will be presented in the section that follows.

## 6. Conclusions

Based on the findings mentioned above, the following concluding remarks on the specific aims of the study can be obtained:

### 6.1. Problems encountered by students at Duy Tan University in using English “I + CNFV and EA” collocations

Some common problems that most Vietnamese students of English often meet when using English “I + CNFV and EA” collocations are as follows:

The first observable problem is students’ **lack of knowledge** related to pragmatic features of English ‘I + CNFV and EA’ collocations. When giving their own opinions during the discussion, students rarely use “I + CNFV and EA” collocations as assertions for

their strong claims. Most of them often present the descriptive information of the proposition with a highly strong force rather than give the hearer some open cooperation. In addition, the collocation “*I think*” is often used in the habit of beginning students’ utterances at random not on purpose because “*I think*” also has the same meaning as “*Tôi nghĩ*” in Vietnamese. Besides, they do not know they can use this collocation type for expressing such pragmatic meanings as *decreasing complaining / admonishing, giving counseling, and reducing boasting*.

Another problem encountered by students is **lack of real situations** for students to practice using “I + CNFV and EA” collocations. In reality, mastering and using English “I + CNFV and EA” collocations in communication is not easy for the majority of learners of English as a foreign language because, generally, most English utterances used in classrooms are declarative, especially the purpose of sentences that students use in the classroom is to reply to teachers’ questions; therefore, they seldom express the speaker’s commitment to what is said and his/her attitude to the hearer. It means that learners of English do not have many real situations to use collocations of this type.

One more problem encountered by students is the fact that **due attention is not paid by**

**teachers to this type of collocation** in the process of teaching. English “I + CNFV and EA” collocations are not properly evaluated by most Vietnamese teachers of English. Most of them only give their students Vietnamese translated versions or just explain grammatical properties of English “I + CNFV and EA” collocations. They pay little attention to the modal meanings inherent in these collocations, especially to the speaker’s attitude as an important component in the semantic structure of the utterance.

Using English “I + CNFV and EA” collocations always requires the exact expression of speakers’ commitment to the truth of the proposition. However, textbooks never mention the use of English “I + CNFV and EA” collocations as a separate teaching/learning point and, as a result, students have difficulties in using this type of collocation in communication. It is hereby hoped that this study can provide an overview of linguistic features of “I + CNFV and EA” collocations to help teachers and learners of English gain an insightful look into the phenomenon under investigation.

## **6.2. Tentative solutions to the problems encountered by students at Duy Tan university in using “I + CNFV and EA” collocations**

In teaching the English “I + CNFV and EA” collocation by way of conversations, teachers need to analyze the speaker’s implication when using them; for example, the speaker can explain to students such pragmatic uses of “I + CNFV and EA” collocations in communication as *decreasing complaining/ admonishing, giving counseling, and reducing boasting*.

Another solution to the problem is that teachers need to emphasize to students the fact that one aspect of “I + CNFV and EA” collocation is that commitment to degrees of certainty concerning the truth of what is said

also affects the choice of cognitive non-factive verb (CNFV) and epistemic adverb (EA) that might appropriately be employed to express what needs to be conveyed in specific contexts.

As mentioned above (item 6.1.), lack of real situations for students to practice using “I + CNFV and EA” collocations is one of the problems encountered by students. For the time being, as a tentative solution, teachers should give assignments in which students are encouraged to practice using this type of collocation, especially those that are designed to help students better comprehend the aforementioned pragmatic uses (as mentioned in item 4.4.2. above) of “I + CNFV and EA” collocations.

As stated in 6.1., up till now, the use of “I + CNFV and EA” collocations has not been paid due attention to; so with a view to attracting teachers’ and students’ due attention to this collocation type, it is hereby proposed that “I + CNFV and EA” collocations should be designed as constituting a separate grammar teaching point in English textbooks. Besides, it is advisable that the English “I + CNFV and EA” collocation type ought to be taught at an early stage of learning.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A

#### Main questions used in the semi-structured interview for two lecturers

1. What do you think about English-majored students' knowledge on the English pattern "I+ CNFV and EA collocations"?
2. What problems do students often encounter when using the English pattern "I + CNFV and EA collocations"?
3. What suggestions should you give to improve the problems?

### Appendix B

#### Questions for students' survey questionnaire

1. What is your age?
 

- 21	<input type="checkbox"/>
- 22	<input type="checkbox"/>
- 23	<input type="checkbox"/>
- over 23	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. What is your sex?
 

- Male	<input type="checkbox"/>
- Female	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Do you know how to use the English pattern "I + CNFV and EA collocations" in communication?
 

- No	<input type="checkbox"/>
- A little	<input type="checkbox"/>
- Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. How often do you use the English pattern "I + CNFV and EA collocations" in communication?
 

- Never	<input type="checkbox"/>
- Sometimes	<input type="checkbox"/>
- Often	<input type="checkbox"/>