

## English Grammar: "Negative Raising"

This is a subject that many linguists have been studying for a long time and are still studying. A sentence that contains two clauses linked by the word "that" can be negated in two ways – by negating the first clause or the second. For example:

1. Mary didn't say that it would snow.  
Mary said that it wouldn't snow.
2. I don't think that he will come.  
I think that he won't come.

In each case, which do you think is better to use and why?

In the first example, there is a clear difference between the two phrases. But, in the second example, the meaning is similar, and native English speakers prefer to use the first way. This phenomenon is called "**negative raising**" because the first clause is negated. The verbs which cause this phenomenon are called "**negative-raising verbs**". Examples include: 'think', 'expect' and 'suppose'.

### Natives prefer to use

"I don't think that he will come."

"I don't expect that he will come."

"I don't suppose that he will come."

### Natives rarely use

"I think that he won't come."

"I expect that he won't come."

"I suppose that he won't come."

Why do native speakers prefer negative raising? Some linguists say it's because negating the second clause sounds too direct and is less polite.

### **Value-judgement verbs**

The verb "**hope**" is a little different. When you say "I think/expect/suppose ....", you are talking about something that might happen, but when you say "I **hope** ....", you are expressing your desire that something will happen. It is called a "**value-judgement verb**". With this type of verb, we don't use negative raising. For example:

**"We hope that the terrorists will not strike again".**  
(Our desire is that something will not happen.)

**"We don't hope that the terrorists will strike again."** (negative raising)

This is strange, because it implies no action – we are not hoping for anything, we are not saying anything and we are not doing anything!

Usually, you hope for something. If you don't hope for anything, then you are doing and saying nothing.

But we can say (using other verbs):

"We don't think that terrorists will strike again."

"We don't expect that terrorists will strike again."

"We don't suppose that terrorists will strike again."

2. Sometimes both ways are possible, but they have different meanings:

a. **"We can't hope that the president will change his policies."**

This means that there isn't any chance that the president will change his policies. So there is nothing that we can do. This is a pessimistic view.

b. **"We hope that the president will not change his policies."**

This means that there is a chance that the president will not change his policies. This is an optimistic view.

## Short responses

It's common to use a short phrase using "so" when the second clause is implicit. For example:

Question: Do you think that it will rain tomorrow?

Possible responses:

I think that it will rain tomorrow.

I think that it won't rain tomorrow.

I don't think that it will rain tomorrow. (negative raising – this is preferred by natives)

Short responses:

Natives prefer

"I think so" / "I don't think so."

"I expect so" / "I don't expect so."

"I suppose so" / "I don't suppose so."

More formal

"I think not."

"I expect not."

"I suppose not".

The formal versions are often used in music, poetry and literature.

If we want to use a value-judgement verb in the response, then it is used differently:

"I hope so" / "I hope not." ("~~I don't hope so.~~")

## Exercise.

a) Do you think that the following verbs are "value-judgement" verbs?

b) Which do you think is better: "I **don't** \_\_\_ **so**" or "I \_\_\_ **not**"?

a) Value-Judgement? (Y/N)

b) "I don't ---- so" or "I ---- not"?

1. "believe" \_\_\_\_\_

2. "prefer" \_\_\_\_\_

3. "imagine" \_\_\_\_\_

4. "guess" \_\_\_\_\_

5. "reckon" \_\_\_\_\_

6. "I'm afraid" \_\_\_\_\_

7. "assume" \_\_\_\_\_

8. "presume" \_\_\_\_\_

Suggested videos: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MSY\\_FXeLuPg&t=258s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MSY_FXeLuPg&t=258s) (04:18 – 05:08)

<https://english.insl.com.br/files/videos/Negative-raising.mp4> (short)