Why not? and ellipsis

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1   Introduction

1. This talk investigates clausal ellipsis with *why not*, as in (1):

(1) a. Chris didn't come, but I don't know why not.

   b. A: I don't like beans. B: Why not?

   c. I suspected Sam wouldn't come, but I can't recall why not.

   d. Either hand in your homework on time, or explain why not.

2. Empirical generalisations:

  – The negative antecedent requirement

  – Negative neutralisation

  – The clausemate condition

3. *Why not* as polarity ellipsis (Kramer & Rawlins 2009; Hofmann 2018):

(3) A: Did John not go? B: No.

4. Cf. negative stripping (Merchant 2003):

(4)   John cooked beans for dinner, not LENTILS.

5. Cf. *why*-stripping (Yoshida et al. 2015):

(5)   John cooked beans for dinner, but I don't know why BEANS.

- Setting aside other *why(,) (not)*:

(6)   Free modal *why not*   (Anand et al. 2021)
       A: Shall we go out tonight?   B: Sure, why not?
       Paraphrase: Why shouldn't we go out tonight? There's no reason not to go out tonight.

(7)   *Why*-VP   (Zaitsu 2020)
       Why (not) major in Linguistics?

(8)   Metacommunicative-*why*   (Woods & Vicente 2021)
       A: Is Sally here?   B: Why?
       Paraphrase: Why are you asking me that? There's some reason for your question that I'm not
       understanding.

2   Empirical generalisations

2.1   The negative antecedent requirement

- Clausal ellipsis requires an identical antecedent (Ross 1967, Chung et al. 1995, Merchant 2001, a.m.o.).

- A negative antecedent supports clausal ellipsis with *why not* in (9):

(9)   John didn't leave, but I don't know why not.

- However, a positive antecedent fails to in (10):

(10)   * John left, but I don't know why not.

⇒ Clausal ellipsis with *why not* requires a negative antecedent.

2.2 Negative neutralisation

- The meaning of clausal ellipsis with *why not* (11):

(11)   A: John didn't leave.   B: Why not?
　　　Why not? = Why didn't John leave? What was the reason for John not leaving?
　　　Why not ~~John didn't leave~~?

- *Why not?* is not interpreted with double negation.

- The *not* of *why not* is not 'new'; rather, a negative antecedent licenses a negative sluice, with whose negativity *why not* is concordant.

- That makes *why not* synonymous with *why* and clausal ellipsis (12):

(12)   A: John didn't leave.   B: Why?
　　　Why = Why didn't John leave? What was the reason for John not leaving?
　　　Why ~~John didn't leave~~?

⇒ Clausal ellipsis with *why not* involves 'negative neutralisation' (Kramer & Rawlins 2009).[1]

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[1]Cf. 'cancellation effect' (Anand et al. 2021: e78).

2.3   The clausemate condition

- A negative antecedent is necessary for clausal ellipsis with *why not*, but not sufficient.

- *Why*'s reason and *not*'s negation must come from the same clause.

- In the baseline (13), the matrix clause is both negated and questioned by *why*. B and B' ask the same thing, questioning the reason for John's not telling:

(13)   A: John didn't tell Mary he was going.   B: Why?   B': Why not?
       B = B' = Why didn't John tell Mary he was going?   ✓*why ∼ tell*[2]

- In (14), however, the embedded clause is negated. The context brings out the relevant reading, where the ellipsis site includes the matrix *tell*-clause:

(14)   (In truth, John went to the party. But. . .)
       A: John told Mary he didn't go to the party.
       B: Why?   = Why did John tell Mary he didn't go?   ✓*why ∼ tell*   ✓*why ∼ go*
       B': Why not? ≠ Why did John tell Mary he didn't go?   * *why ∼ tell*   ✓*why ∼ go*

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[2]Negative island-hood (Ross 1984) precludes (13) questioning the reason for going.

(14)   (In truth, John went to the party. But. . .)

      A: John told Mary he didn't go to the party.

      B: Why?   = Why did John tell Mary he didn't go?   ✓*why ∼ tell*   ✓*why ∼ go*

      B': Why not? ≠ Why did John tell Mary he didn't go?   * *why ∼ tell*   ✓*why ∼ go*

⇒ The reason and negation components of *why not* must be associated with the same clause.

- The one good reading of *why not* in (14) is blocked by island-hood in (15):

(15)   A: John told Mary who didn't go to the party.

      B: Why?   = Why did John tell Mary who didn't go?   ✓*why ∼ tell*   * *why ∼ go*

      B': * Why not? ≠ Why did John tell Mary who didn't go?   * *why ∼ tell*   * *why ∼ go*

2.4   Empirical summary

- The negative antecedent requirement

- Negative neutralisation

- The clausemate condition

3   *Why not* as polarity ellipsis

- Polarity ellipsis (16) (Kramer & Rawlins 2009) – ellipsis of the complement of the polarity head Σ (Laka 1990):

(16)   A: Is Alfonso not coming to the party?   B: [$_{\Sigma P}$ No ~~[$_{TP}$ he is not coming to the party]~~]]

- Applied explicitly to *why not* (17) (Hofmann 2018) – *why* base-generated high (Bromberger 1992, Rizzi 2001) (cf. **who/what/when/where/how/which one not?*):

(17)   A: John didn't go.   B: [$_{CP}$ Why [$_{\Sigma P}$ not ~~[$_{TP}$ John didn't go]~~]]

3.1   Accounting for negative neutralisation

- Polarity ellipsis exhibits negative neutralisation (Kramer & Rawlins 2009):

(18)   A: Is Alfonso not coming to the party?   B: No.   B': Yes.   B = B' = he isn't coming

- Negative concord (19), e.g. Zeijlstra (2004):

(19)   a.   [$_{\Sigma P}$ No$_{[uNeg]}$ Σ ~~[$_{TP}$ he is not$_{[iNeg]}$ coming to the party]~~]]

       b.   [$_{CP}$ Why [$_{\Sigma P}$ not$_{[uNeg]}$ ~~[$_{TP}$ John didn't$_{[iNeg]}$ go]~~]]

3.2   Accounting for the negative antecedent requirement

- There is no negative antecedent requirement on polarity ellipsis (20):

(20)   A: Is Alfonso coming to the party?   B: No.   = he isn't coming

   [$_{\Sigma P}$ No$_{[iNeg]}$ [~~$_{TP}$ he is coming to the party~~]]]

- Why does *why not* uniquely require a negative antecedent?

- Hofmann (2018): information-seeking *why* is factive (Bromberger 1992); so *why not* presupposes [*not TP*], requiring a background compatible with [*not TP*].

- However, *why* + negation does not elsewhere (21) require a negative antecedent with full pronunciation (a) or verb phrase ellipsis (VPE) (b):

(21)   I thought Mary would arrive on time.

   a.   Do you know why she didn't arrive on time?

   b.   Do you know why she didn't ~~arrive on time~~?

   c.   * Do you know why not?

- The negative antecedent requirement is specific to clausal ellipsis with *why not* (c).

(21)   I thought Mary would arrive on time.

      a.   Do you know why she didn't arrive on time?

      b.   Do you know why she didn't ~~arrive on time~~?

      c.   * Do you know why not?

- Clausal ellipsis requires identity between the elided material and its antecedent (Ross 1967, Chung et al. 1995, Merchant 2001, a.m.o.).

- VPE at least tolerates (Rooth 1992, Tancredi 1992), if not requires (Stockwell 2018, 2020, Griffiths 2019), contrast: *leave* vs. *didn't leave*.

- The negative antecedent requirement cannot be derived from the general presupposition properties of *why*.

- Placeholding stipulation: the *not* of *why not* must be [uNeg].

3.3 Accounting for the clausemate condition

- The reason and negation components of *why not* must come from the same clause.[3]

- With the structure so far (22), CP-fronting and two applications of clausal ellipsis:

(22) a. [CP Why [ΣP not$_{[uNeg]}$ [TP ~~John didn't$_{[iNeg]}$ go~~]]]   (Hofmann 2018)

  b. [CP Why [ΣP not$_{[uNeg]}$ ~~[he didn't$_{[iNeg]}$ go]~~]]$_i$ ~~[TP John told Mary t_i]~~

  c. * [CP Why [ΣP not$_{[uNeg]}$ ~~[who didn't$_{[iNeg]}$ go]~~]]$_i$ ~~[TP John told Mary t_i]~~

- Perhaps easier to explain if [*why not*] is a constituent (23) (Merchant 2006):

(23) a. [CP [Why not$_{[uNeg]}$]] ~~[TP John didn't$_{[iNeg]}$ go]~~

  b. [CP [Why not$_{[uNeg]}$]]$_i$ ~~[TP John told Mary [CP t_i he didn't$_{[iNeg]}$ go]]~~

  c. * [CP [Why not$_{[uNeg]}$]]$_i$ ~~[TP John told Mary [CP-island who$_j$ t_i t_j didn't$_{[iNeg]}$ go]]~~

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[3]We can't ask whether polarity ellipsis has a clausemate condition, since there's only one thing. However, polarity ellipsis can associate with an embedded negation:

(i) A: John said Mary wasn't coming.   B: No ~~John said Mary wasn't coming~~. But he was lying, she is coming.

3.4 Analysis summary

- Attempting to account for negative neutralisation, the negative antecedent requirement and the clausemate condition results in an analysis along the lines of (39):

(24) a. [$_{CP}$ [Why not$_{[uNeg]}$] ~~[$_{TP}$ . . . [iNeg] . . .]~~]

b. [$_{CP}$ [Why not$_{[uNeg]}$]$_j$ ~~[$_{TP}$ . . . [$_{CP}$ t_j . . . [iNeg] . . .]]~~]

- The next two sections compare *why not* with superficially similar phenomena: negative stripping and *why*-stripping.

4 Cf. negative stripping

- Negative stripping (25) (Merchant 2003):

(25) John cooked beans for dinner, not LENTILS!
       [not LENTILS$_j$ [~~$_{TP}$ John cooked t_j for dinner~~]]]

- Further to word order – *why not* vs. *not XP* – negative stripping does not conform to the three empirical generalisations of *why not*:

- No negative antecedent requirement (25); in fact negative stripping cannot have one (26):

(26) * John didn't cook beans for dinner, not LENTILS!   (int. He didn't cook lentils either.)
       * not$_{[uNeg]}$ LENTILS$_i$ ~~John didn't$_{iNeg}$ cook t_i for dinner~~!   (cf. *nor*)

- I.e., no neutralisation effect – the *not* of negative stripping introduces a new negation; it is always [iNeg], never [uNeg].

- No clausemate condition – *not* from higher clause, remnant from lower clause in (27):

(27) You said John cooked beans for dinner, (but) not LENTILS.   (cf. Vicente 2006: ex. 24b)
       Available interpretation: You didn't say John cooked lentils for dinner.

5   Cf. *why*-stripping

- *Why*-stripping (28) (Yoshida et al. 2015):

(28)   John cooked beans for dinner, but I don't know why BEANS.
          [$_{CP1}$ Why [$_{CP2}$ BEANS$_F$ [$_{TP}$ ~~John cooked *t* for dinner~~]]]

- Three points against (✗) analysing *why not* as *why*-stripping, with movement of *NOT* as in (29):

(29)   ✗ John didn't cook beans for dinner, but I don't know why NOT.
          [$_{CP1}$ Why [$_{CP2}$ NOT$_F$ [$_{TP}$ ~~John did *t* cook beans for dinner~~]]]

5.1   Island sensitivity

- *Why*-stripping is island <u>in</u>sensitive (Yoshida et al. 2015):

(30)   John cooked [a dish that was made of beans] for dinner, but I don't know why BEANS.

- *Why not* <u>is</u> island sensitive (cf. 15):

(31)   * John cooked [a dish that wasn't made of beans] for dinner, but I don't know why NOT.

5.2   Non-*not* negations

- *Why not*'s negative antecedent can be provided by things other than sentential *not*.

1. Expressions that pass Klima (1964) tests for sentential negativity (32) (Hofmann 2018):

(32)   A: { Nobody, No students, Chris never } left.   B: Why not?   B': Neither/*So did Sam.

- No *not* to move in (32); *nobody*, *never*, etc. bear [iNeg] (Hofmann 2018)

- Cf. other downward entailing operators (33):

(33)   A: { At most two, Few } students left.   B: *Why not?   B': So/*Neither did Sam.

2. Pragmatically by exclusive disjunction (34) (Kroll 2019) – consider the second disjunct under the assumption that the first was false (Karttunen 1974):

(34)   Either the Board grants the license by December 15 or it explains . . .
       a) why ~~the Board~~ **didn't** ~~grant the license by December 15~~.   b) why not.

- The pragmatically negative first disjunct matches the syntactically negative elliptical second disjunct in polarity (a); the negative ellipsis site in turn permits pronouncing *not* in (b).

5.3   Lexical vs. functional

- *Why*-stripping is possible with many categories of remnants (Yoshida et al. 2015):

(35)   A: I think that John should cook for Mary.
       B: Why [$_{DP}$ Mary] / [$_{PP}$ for Mary] / [$_{CP}$ that John should cook for Mary] / [$_V$ cook] / [$_P$ for] ?

- *Why*-stripping is not possible with functional material:

(36)   a.   * A: You should take their advice.   B: Why THEIR?
       b.   * John said that Mary left, but I don't know why THAT.   (cf. *if*, *when*, etc.)

- If (sentential) negation is functional, it should not be compatible with *why*-stripping.

P.S. Constituent negation may be able to participate in *why*-stripping:

(37)   ? John likes not having a boss, but I don't know why NOT.

(38)   ? John likes [the idea of not having a boss], but I don't know why NOT.

6 Conclusion

- *Why not* as polarity ellipsis (cf. Kramer & Rawlins 2009; Hofmann 2018)

- Negative neutralisation: negative concord

- The negative antecedent requirement:

  - specific to clausal ellipsis with *why not*

  - (clausal ellipsis wants sameness; VPE wants contrast)

  - stipulation that the *not* of *why not* is [uNeg]

- The clausemate condition: easier with [*why not*] than [*why* [*not*]]

(39)   a.   [$_{CP}$ [Why not$_{[uNeg]}$] ~~[$_{TP}$ ... [iNeg] ...]~~]

   b.   [$_{CP}$ [Why not$_{[uNeg]}$]$_j$ ~~[$_{TP}$ ... [$_{CP}$ t_j ... [iNeg] ...]]~~]

- *Why not* is different from negative stripping and *why*-stripping.

Acknowledgements

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