On elliptical *why*-questions

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Contents

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But, like everything else, this is for Saša.

> "...grammarians should always be wary in admitting ellipses except where they are absolutely necessary."

> Otto Jespersen, The philosophy of grammar
> (Jespersen, 1924: 307)

1 Introduction

This paper examines *why*-questions that appear to have missing elements. Take the following movie scene, in which a director of pornographic movies resists the suggestions of his financier, who wants to switch from film to video to save costs:

(1) Jack: No one's doubting your history or your credentials, Floyd.
Floyd: Then <u>why the resistance</u>? I mean, this industry is going to be turned upside down soon enough...
Jack: Then <u>why help it</u>?
Floyd: <u>Why not be prepared</u>? (Boogie Nights)

One interesting thing to note about the three underlined elliptical *why*-questions is that they express opinions and put forward proposals at least as much as they elicit information. The following rewrite of the scene preserves much, but not all, of the meaning[2]:

(2) Jack: No one's doubting your history or your credentials, Floyd.
Floyd: Then <u>you shouldn't resist</u>. I mean, this industry is going to be turned upside down soon enough...
Jack: Then <u>we shouldn't help the process</u>.
Floyd: <u>We should be prepared for the results</u>.

To put things more explicitly, the elliptical *why*-questions in the original version carry exhortative illocutionary meaning, and are intended to encourage a change of plan in the listener as a perlocutionary effect. Yet it would still be acceptable to answer these questions directly as requests for information ("Why the resistance?" "Because I think video tape looks bad."). Both suggestion and question seem to be present at the same time.

In order to discuss this phenomenon further, I will here divide elliptical *why*-questions into two groups. In some cases, such as (4), the subject and the tense are missing, and all that remains is a VP. I will follow Freeman (1976) and call these tenseless *why*-questions, or TLWQs. In others, such as (5), there is even less (precisely *what* is left will be dealt with in section 3). These sentences will be referred to as *why*-fragments. I compare them both with the fully tensed *why*-question (3).

(3) Why did you paint your house purple?

(4) Why paint your house purple? (Gordon and Lakoff, 1971: 72)

(5) Why purple?

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[2]For instance, "why the resistance" assumes a shared awareness of the futility of resistance, while "you shouldn't resist" makes no such assumption. Further differences are described in section 2.

TLWQs received some attention in the literature in the '70s (Gordon and Lakoff, 1971; Sadock, 1974; Johnson, 1975; Freeman, 1976), while *why*-fragments have only been approached in recent syntactic accounts (Nakao et al., 2012; Weir, 2012), both of which concluded that they are the result of a derivation involving movement and deletion in a manner similar to Merchant's influential treatment of sluicing (2001). I will argue here that these accounts of *why*-fragments are insufficient to explain the naturally-occurring data.

Although this paper will focus primarily on *why*-fragments, it will be necessary to examine tenseless *why*-questions as well, as sentences belonging to these categories have much in common. For instance, they share a presupposition: the event under discussion (in this case, painting the house purple) must be an agentive action. Furthermore, a coherent alternative to the action must be, if not salient, at least possible. These elliptical questions are used in many cases to call the wisdom of at least a part of this action into question. In the next section, I will attempt to determine how this shift arises in TLWQs. We will see that it seems to arise through conversational implicature.

2 Tenseless *why*-questions

Canonical *why*-questions have two functions: they can be used to question both causes and purposes. Take the following sentence:

(6)   Why is there life in the universe?

This question can be reformulated in two ways, using the somewhat casual *how come* and *what for*:

(7)   How come there is life in the universe?

(8)   What is there life in the universe for?

These new sentences have slightly different meanings. Question (7) appeals to science: what series of events led to the emergence of life? Question (8) appeals to mysticism: is there a grander purpose to life? I describe this latter reading as mystical because it presupposes that life in the universe is under the control of a rational agent; this is a standard presupposition of *what for* (Zwicky and Zwicky, 1973: 924). The effect of this presupposition can be seen in the following examples: only (9) – (13) are rational questions, while (14) only makes sense if the door itself somehow made the decision to close.

(9)   Why did you close the door?

(10)   How come you closed the door?

(11)   What did you close the door for?

(12)   Why did the door close?

(13)   How come the door closed?

(14)   #What did the door close for?

Although cultural exposure to questions like (8) may have inured us to their irrationality, they are just as problematic as (14) and perhaps as deserving of the hash sign. In any case, question (3) can have two primary readings:

1. What led to your painting the house purple ("How come you painted the house purple?")

2. What was your purpose in painting the house purple? ("What did you paint the house purple for?")

In certain situations, the speaker can additionally generate the implicature that there may in fact be no good cause for or purpose behind painting a house purple, and therefore express the idea that to do so may be a mistake.

One way to make this implicature clear is to use an elliptical *why*-question, but this is not the only way to express disapproval of the *status quo*. Freeman (1976) identifies the following alternative options: (15) focusing one or more of the constituents through stress, (16) adding a modal auxiliary, and (17) including a "self-explaining element" (Larkin (1976) as cited in Freeman (1976: 214–215)).

(15) Why did you paint the house PURPLE? (focused *why*-question)

(16) Why would you paint the house purple? (modal *why*-question)

(17) Why did you paint the house such a gaudy colour as purple? (self-explanatory *why*-question)

Of course, context, marked prosody or even raised eyebrows might also do the trick; *why*-questions are very easily read as sarcastic.

Note that *how come* and *what for* are not felicitous with TLWQs, despite the fact that these questions can easily be made to express disapproval through other methods:

(18) *How come paint the house purple?

(19) How come you painted the house PURPLE?

(20) *What paint the house purple for?

(21) What did you paint the house PURPLE for?

Several questions occur: what is it about TLWQs and *why*-fragments that encourages the introduction of skepticism, how are these structures different from one another, and are they related in some way to the other ways of expressing disapproval using *why*? To answer these questions, I will next look at previous discussions of TLWQs in the literature. I will add my own observations and relate the discussion to *why*-fragments, which are the main focus of this thesis.

2.1   Deletion-based approaches

We will first look at three deletion-based approaches to TLWQs. The earliest of these was in Gordon and Lakoff's discussion of the so-called conversational postulates[3] (1971). Gordon and Lakoff consider TLWQs to be generated from normal *why*-questions through the

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[3]As Morgan (1977: 277–278) points out, this is a wholly inappropriate name: the term 'postulate' refers to something accepted as a first principle, while the meanings of the phenomena Gordon and Lakoff

deletion of the subject *you* and the tense. TLWQs can only be used to express disapproval according to Gordon and Lakoff. They see the syntactic operation of *you*/tense deletion as dependent on this disapproval; the former is only licensed in the latter's presence. This transderivational constraint is arbitrary; no reason is given for the posited relationship between deletion and disapproval. Gordon and Lakoff do make a concrete prediction: although full *why*-questions may be interpreted as a request for information or as a criticism, it is not possible for both readings to occur at the same time (Gordon and Lakoff, 1971: 87). We will see shortly that this prediction is inaccurate (see (49)).

Sadock (1974) presents a somewhat parallel account. He starts out by looking at negative *why*-questions (Sadock, 1974: 114), and compares TLWQs like (23) with 'fractured' *why*-questions like (24). Both of these structures bring out the suggestive or impositive reading more unambiguously than the full *why*-question (22).

(22) Why don't you paint the house purple? (question or impositive)

(23) Why not paint the house purple? (impositive: TLWQ)

(24) Paint the house purple, why don't you? (impositive: fracture)

He shows just how un-questionlike these impositives are by claiming that they cannot be conjoined with questions (25) (the asterisks are Sadock's), but can be conjoined with declarations (26) (Sadock, 1974: 114–115).

(25) a. (inquiry) Why don't you have some natto, or don't you like it?
      b. (*) (suggestion) Why don't you have some natto, or don't you like it?
      c. (*) (suggestion) Have some natto, why don't you, or don't you like it?
      d. (*) (suggestion) Why not have some natto, or don't you like it?

(26) a. * (inquiry) Why don't you eat the kimchi, and I'll eat the natto.
      b. (suggestion) Why don't you eat the kimchi, and I'll eat the natto.
      c. (suggestion) Why not eat the kimchi, and I'll eat the natto.
      d. (suggestion) Eat the kimchi, why don't you, and I'll eat the natto.

I personally do not find the impositives conjoined with questions in (25) to be problematic, but agree that the impositives conjoined with suggestions in (26) are acceptable, unlike normal inquiries. In other words, I think that both suggestion and question are present in the why-questions about natto in (25)'s b, c and d sentences, while Sadock thinks that each suggestion completely displaces the corresponding question.

The next step of the paper (Sadock, 1974: 115) looks at the positive counterparts of the above negative sentences ((22)–(24)). Sadock notes that fracturing does not work with positive sentences, as seen in (27), and that the positive full *why*-question in (28) does not have precisely the same meaning as the corresponding TLWQ:

(27) *Paint the house purple, why do you?

(28) Why do you paint the house purple? (impositive reading) ≠ Why paint the house purple?

discuss are in a sense fossilized from meanings that arose naturally from mentally processing the sentences. Green (1975: 126–137), Green (2004: 421–423) and the rest of Morgan (1977) present a more complete and general criticism of conversational postulates than can be attempted here.

In summary, his observations are that negative suggestions can take several forms, while positive suggestions are more restricted. Based on these observations, he supposes that all semantic impositives, whether positive or negative, must pass through a stage at which they are fully tensed *why*-questions. Negative *why*-questions may optionally delete subject *you* and tense, while positive ones must undergo this deletion, which explains the strangeness of (27) and (28), assuming that fracturing takes place after deletion.

The final "deletionist" account of TLWQs was Johnson (1975), which took issue with these earlier proposals. First, many of the "suggestions" encoded in TLWQs are not directed at the listener, as the earlier accounts had assumed. A good number of TLWQs are better paraphrased as "Why would anyone. . . ?" or "Why would I. . . ?' rather than "Why would you. . . ?". This can be verified by the observation due to Postal (pc as cited in Johnson, 1975: 484–485) that reflexive pronouns need not be second person ("Why get *myself* arrested?", "Why upset *himself* over something like that?"). I would add the following movie scene, in which the use of non-reflexive *you* reveals that the subject, if present, cannot also be *you*:

(29) Tommy: They pull me in, start asking questions. You know, this and that: "What are you going to tell us?" I said: "My usual. Nothing. Why tell you?" (Goodfellas) *Why do you tell you?

Of course, the alternate ("Why [do I/does anyone] tell you?") is also problematic; the correct reconstruction would be "Why would I/anyone tell you?" instead. It seems that not all TLWQs can be reconstructed as tensed *why*-questions, but require modals such as *would* instead. As another example of this, (30) is better reconstructed as (32) than (31):

(30) Why start a career in show biz?

(31) Why do you start a career in show biz?

(32) Why would you start a career in show biz? (after Johnson (1975: 483))

Furthermore, even when all three varieties of *why*-question (TLWQ, modal and full) are grammatical alternatives, they do not share identical presuppositions. For instance, of the following three sentences, only (34) presupposes that the person in question actually eats natto; the other two questions could be directed at someone who is merely staring longingly at a bowl of natto:

(33) Why eat natto?

(34) Why do you eat natto?

(35) Why would you eat natto?

Johnson therefore concludes that TLWQs like (33) do not share their logical structure with tensed *why*-questions like (34), but with modal *why*-questions like (35) instead. He does not identify a specific modal, such as *would* or *should*, as the missing word in question, but suggests a more flexible approach including more than one variety of modal (Johnson, 1975: 487). As already mentioned, he also leaves the subject unspecified. A key advantage of this approach, aside from its closer match to some of the data, is that the modal

carries with it the illocutionary suggestive force that Gordon and Lakoff needed to invoke transderivational constraints in order to explain.

But modals are not quite a perfect fit for the data either, as Freeman (1976) points out. Modal *why*-questions that appear to meet the requirements for Johnson's explanation do not always have TLWQ equivalents, apparently because modals do not always convey the skeptical viewpoint discussed earlier:

(36) Why would you fail the exam when you're so well-prepared?

(37) *Why fail the exam when you're so well-prepared? (Freeman, 1976: 210)

Freeman says that (36) is admittedly still a suggestion, but I cannot find one aside from the implied "so be confident". In any case, modals cannot take over for Gordon and Lakoff's transderivational constraint because modals are more flexible and can be used in cases where suggestive meaning is clearly absent, and so we cannot rely on them to do the heavy lifting Johnson requires of them. As if this were not enough, Freeman points out that some TLWQs simply do not have a modal equivalent:

(38) Why not finish off the tacos while you're at it?

(39) Why (*shouldn't/*couldn't/*wouldn't/*mustn't/*can't/*won't/don't) you finish off the tacos while you're at it?

Only the last alternative, non-modal *don't*, can make (39) acceptable.

One side note: Johnson points out that some verbs, such as *think*, have TLWQs showing variable acceptability that is not immediately explainable.

(40) Why think that?

(41) (?) Why think that it's nice?

Johnson mentions these without providing an alternate explanation, despite the fact that his theory of underlying subject + modal does not yield fully tensed *why*-questions with a similar disparity:

(42) Why would one think that?

(43) Why would one think that it's nice?

I believe that the distinction is due to perceived agentivity. People tend to hold others responsible for propositional ideas that they believe (40), but not for the impressions that they receive (41). I believe that agentivity or a lack thereof is, more often than not, the reason why a given elliptical *why*-question is felicitous or infelicitous. As we will see later in this essay, a variety of apparently syntactic problems can be explained in this way.

2.2   A pragmatic approach

Freeman (1976) puts forward an account of TLWQs that relies on conversational implicature. She gives a number of reasons to question the syntactic proposals of the previous section more generally. First, TLWQs have different readings depending on whether they are positive or negative: the former does indeed convey a disapproving opinion about the

action in question, but the latter makes a suggestion about an action that has not been considered so far in the discussion. Disapproval of the *status quo* is implied by a negative TLWQ, but the verb introduces a concept completely new to the conversation, as in the following example:

(44)　A second question therefore arises. Why not let diplomacy and sanctions push Hussein out? (Noam Chomsky, www.chomsky.info)

This difference in meaning is present in positive and negative *why*-fragments as well. The phrase *good idea* can be used to agree with a novel proposal, while *good point* can be used to agree with a skeptical viewpoint. By looking at which option is felicitous, the difference in meaning between positive and negative *why*-fragments is brought out:

(45)　A: Let's build a helicopter!
　　　B: Why a helicopter? *or* Why build a helicopter? (positive = skeptical viewpoint)
　　　A: (*Good idea / Good point), let's build a hovercraft instead.

(46)　A: Let's build something.
　　　B: Why not a helicopter? *or* Why not build a helicopter? (negative = novel proposal)
　　　A: (Good idea / *Good point), let's do that.

This poses a problem for deletionist accounts. Skeptical viewpoints such as the one expressed in (45) typically involve modals in their complete form (="Why would we build a helicopter" but not "Why do we build a helicopter?"), while the same is not be true of proposals such as (46) (="Why don't we build a helicopter?" but not "Why wouldn't we build a helicopter?"), as we also saw in the previous section. Tying the entire derivation to either deletion of tense or deletion of modals would therefore be a mistake.

As a small diversion, I would add here that, in certain situations, the event or situation indicated by a negative TLWQ is not new to the conversation. Negative *why*-questions, tenseless or otherwise, receive a new interpretation when prosodic stress is placed on *not*:

(47)　Isaac: Listen, Emily wants to know why we, you know, I never bring Mary around.
　　　Yale: Why DON'T you bring Mary around? (*or* Why NOT bring Mary around?)
　　　Isaac: Well, I don't know, is it awkward for you or what? (Manhattan)

Yale is not introducing a new viewpoint, but rather challenging his listener to provide at least one good reason not to bring Mary around. The stressed *not* has the effect of marking the remaining material in the sentence as common ground (Mark Steedman, pc). Without the stress, the *why not* question serves to make a suggestion, not pose a challenge ("I'm always going to parties by myself, and it's getting embarrassing." "Why don't you bring Mary around? / Why not bring Mary around?").

This can also be seen in the following written example:

(48)　Tamaki Saito was a newly qualified psychiatrist when, in the early 1990s, he was struck by the number of parents who sought his help with children who had quit school and hidden themselves away for months and sometimes years at a time. These young people were often from middle-class families, they were almost always male, and the average age for their withdrawal was 15.

It might sound like straightforward teenage laziness. <u>Why not stay in your room while your parents wait on you?</u> But Saito says sufferers are paralysed by profound social fears. (BBC, July 4 2013 - http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-23182523)

The stress on *not* is not marked in the text. The unstressed alternative is infelicitous, but it is the default reading, and so I suspect that many readers made the same mistake that I did on their first time through and ran into a garden-path effect here.

The second of Freeman's reasons to disregard these syntactic proposals is that even *why*-questions carrying a strongly suggestive meaning still have an underlying question that does not disappear as Gordon and Lakoff (1971: 65) say it should, a point also noted by Green (1975: 126–127). This underlying meaning can be seen because TLWQs, unlike purer forms of suggestion, cannot be used when the reason for the action has already been given. The same observation can apply to *why*-fragments as well:

(49) A: I want to fly to South America because nobody will think to look for me there.
B: I don't think you should fly to South America.
#Why South America?
#Why fly to South America?
#Why will you fly to South America? (impositive)
#Why will you fly to South America? (inquiry)

As can be seen, the acceptability of the impositive *why*-questions patterns with the question, not the suggestion, and so it doesn't make sense to claim that the process of subject/tense deletion has somehow transformed these sentences from questions into suggestions. Instead, the new suggestive meaning seems to be somehow layered on top of the existing question, augmenting it (Freeman, 1976: 212).

I agree with Freeman's criticism. Another way to see how question and suggestion are both present in TLWQs, as well as how positive and negative TLWQs differ, is to look at how to appropriately respond to them: as suggestions or as questions.

(50) Why fly to Iceland? / Why Iceland? (i.e., you shouldn't)
Agreement:
You're right.
#The weather is awful.
Disagreement:
#You're wrong.
The weather is pleasant.

(51) Why not fly to Iceland? / Why not Iceland? (i.e., you should)
Agreement:
Good idea.
#The weather is pleasant.
Disagreement:
Bad idea.
The weather is awful.

Additionally, sometimes *why*-fragments do not convey exhortative meaning at all, but rather surprise. Take the following invented example:

(52) Host: I'd like to welcome our next guest, John Smith, who has spent the last year riding his bike around Australia. I'm very glad to have him on our show. So tell me, John: why Australia?

The normal implicature, that John should not have gone to Australia, does not arise here because the situation makes it clear why this question is being asked. The talk show John is on seems to be a friendly one, which means that it is the host's job to provide him with reasons to talk about his experiences, not to criticise him. The implicature generated is that Australia is simply a surprising or uncommon choice; the host cannot think of a reason to choose that country himself, but that doesn't imply that John's choice was a poor one. Of course, one need not be on a talk show for this change in implicature to arise; if the question is put in an amicable enough way, the feeling of disapproval vanishes. It strikes me as a mistake to suppose that the more critical reading is hard-coded into the language as a postulate as Gordon and Lakoff suggest, because it can be dissolved, like any conversational implicature, in the right circumstances (Grice, 1975: 57).

And so, there are a variety of reasons to suppose that the syntactic proposals for tenseless *why*-questions are problematic: first, positive elliptical *why*-questions express an opinion while negative ones convey a proposal, and neither tensed nor modal *why*-questions conform to this pattern; second, elliptical *why*-questions seem to function simultaneously as suggestions and questions, not one or the other; and finally, the suggestive function is absent in some contexts.

Freeman makes the following alternate proposal: TLWQs are not the product of deletion at all, and it is not necessary to include a specific indication of suggestion as part of their underlying structure. Instead, TLWQs are generated without a subject or tense-marker of any kind, and any indication of suggestion or surprise arises from the ensuing implicature: the questioner is not just curious about what caused a specific act, but rather why anyone would consider performing such an act at any time.

After all, consider the appropriate responses to the question "Why paint the house purple?". One could talk about the impact purple paint would make, or perhaps how fashionable painting houses that colour has been lately. A story specific to a particular house, such as the desires of its occupants or how a particular can of purple paint fell into the owner's hands, would not answer the question directly.

Compare the Gordon and Lakoff account. They state that, in response to the suggestion not to use purple paint derived from "Why are you painting your house purple?", an appropriate response might be "I don't have much money and there was a sale on purple paint at the hardware store" (Gordon and Lakoff, 1971: 70). This far, I agree with them. However, something changes when this excuse is provided in answer to "Why paint your house purple?", the TLWQ. I would not go so far as to label such a response as infelicitous, but it seems to rely on the listener to fill in at least a few gaps: "Well, normally you're right, there wouldn't be a reason to paint your house purple, but in my situation there were some extraneous factors."

2.3   Parallels between TLWQs and other structures

The longer TLWQs may seem to consist of *why* in the prenucleus position of an imperative clause, but this initial resemblance does not hold up. First, the negative versions of each

sentence do not correspond:

(53) Why not paint your house purple?

(54) Don't paint your house purple!

Second, TLWQs fail to demonstrate *do*-retention (Geoff Pullum, pc):

(55) Do go and see grandma.

(56) *Why do go and see grandma?

Third, sentential adverbs are compatible with imperatives, but not with TLWQs unless they are interpreted metalinguistically (see section 3.1):

(57) Carefully brown the meat on both sides.

(58) *Why carefully brown the meat on both sides? (unless understood as: [*reading out of a cookbook*] "Why 'carefully brown the meat on both sides'?")

Finally, there is an implicit *you* in imperatives that is not compatible with all TLWQs, as we saw in section 2.1.

Instead, I would suggest that the phenomenon is more closely linked with the "Mad Magazine sentences" (MMs) of Akmajian (1984):

(59) Me, paint the house purple?

The negative forms and the acceptability of *do*-retention and sentential adverbs all pattern with TLWQs:

(60) Me, not paint the house purple?

(61) *Me, do paint the house purple?

(62) *Me, carefully brown the meat on both sides?

Also, a variety of subjects are acceptable:

(63) Him, get funding?

Akmajian himself did not actually see imperatives and MMs as distinct forms, instead attributing the various inconsistencies mentioned to pragmatic sources (Akmajian, 1984: 2), but a later analysis by Lambrecht (1990) showed further inconsistencies between imperatives and MMs, such as reversibility, that could not be motivated in such a way.

There is also a distinct parallel between the discourse functions of TLWQs and MMs. Both serve to isolate the action from a specific time and question the possibility of such an action in general:

(64) A: I heard you went out clubbing last Saturday.
    B: Me, go out clubbing? You've got to be joking.

Although he does not make the point for this reason, Akmajian does observe that MMs cannot receive a time adjunct and remain felicitous (Akmajian, 1984: 13):

(65) Me, go out clubbing (*last Saturday)?

The same is true of TLWQs:

(66) Why go out clubbing (*last Saturday)?

The difference is that MMs allow subjects, while TLWQs do not. Thus, TLWQs often generalize the action even more, isolating it not only from time but even from subject.

It is interesting to note that MMs can be even more fragmentary, resembling *why*-fragments:

(67) (AdjP) What! Bronsky *clever*?! Ha.

(68) (NP) Larry *a doctor*!? What a laugh.

(69) (PP) What! Mary *in the army*?! It can't be. (Akmajian, 1984: 5)

The parallel has its limits, however, as we will see in the next section.

3 Varieties of *why*-fragment

We will now start to put together an approach to *why*-fragments, which are compatible with a seemingly limitless assortment of even smaller phrases. An initially bewildering variety becomes more manageable if we parcel off certain ways of using these *why*-fragments. Aside from normal, garden-variety *why*-fragments, there are also *metalinguistic* and *metaphysical why*-fragments. I will define normal *why*-fragments later, after having subtracted the other groups from the definition.

3.1 Metalinguistic

A wide variety of material can be found following the *why*: it seems as though any word or phrase at all can appear.

(70) A: I put the keys on the table.
B: Why *on*? Why not *in*? [*B demonstrates that there is a small drawer*] They'll be safer that way.

(71) A: Greetings, Earthlings. I am the Martian.
B: *The* Martian? Why *the*? Why not *a*?
A: I am the only one of my kind that is left. (example suggested by Geoff Pullum, pc)[4]

(72) There's a bill to collect some of the sales taxes currently lost to Internet purchases. My question is why *some*? Why not *all*? These are legitimate sales taxes that are uncollected. Collect them. (Minnesota Network for Progressive Action: http://www.mnpact.org/sblog/blog.php?id=3626)

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[4]This example was inspired by the climactic revelation in a BBC Radio science fiction serial from the 1950s, "Journey into Space".

(73) Mother Abbess: I understand he has had a most difficult time managing to keep a governess there.

Maria: Why *difficult*, Reverend Mother?

Mother Abbess: The Lord will show you in His own good time. (The Sound of Music)

(74) Doctor: Do we have anybody from Picton?

Hana: Why *Picton*?

Doctor: He's from there. (The English Patient)

What these examples have in common is that they isolate a section of the preceding discourse and call attention to it. The questioner wants to know the reason the person used that word or phrase. By calling out a particular section of speech, the questioner can generate implicature: there might not have been a good reason to put things in those terms, or the phrase might be unexpected in some way, or the implications arising from the statement might be odd, etc.

Extracts from the catechistic second-last chapter of Ulysses demonstrate how virtually any linguistic term from prior discourse may be isolated and questioned. I will refer to this use of *why*-fragments as *metalinguistic*.

(75) What second departure was contemporaneously perceived by him similarly, if differently?

A temporary departure of his cat.

Why similarly, why differently?

Similarly, because actuated by a secret purpose the quest of a new male (Mullingar student) or of a healing herb (valerian). Differently, because of different possible returns to the inhabitants or to the habitation.

(76) What composite asymmetrical image in the mirror then attracted his attention?

The image of a solitary (ipsorelative) mutable (aliorelative) man.

Why solitary (ipsorelative)?

Brothers and sisters had he none. Yet that man's father was his grandfather's son.

Why mutable (aliorelative)?

From infancy to maturity he had resembled his maternal procreatrix. From maturity to senility he would increasingly resemble his paternal procreator.

(77) Bloom... took off his right sock, placed his unclothed right foot on the margin of the seat of his chair, picked at and gently lacerated the protruding part of the great toenail, raised the part lacerated to his nostrils and inhaled the odour of the quick, then, with satisfaction, threw away the lacerated ungual fragment.

Why with satisfaction?

Because the odour inhaled corresponded to other odours inhaled of other ungual fragments, picked and lacerated by Master Bloom, pupil of Mrs Ellis's juvenile school, patiently each night in the act of brief genuflection and nocturnal prayer and ambitious meditation. (Ulysses, James Joyce)

These metalinguistic *why*-fragments are perhaps the closest match to the deletionists' ideal: they are, by definition, linked to linguistic antecedents, and so it is clear how they

arise in each case. That said, there is difficulty in seeing how determiners could be selected for movement to a focus position in a sentence like (71). Also, even non-linguistic sounds or actions can be queried[5].

Even if we suppose that determiners and so on *can* move to a focus position, there are some *why*-fragments whose reconstruction involves more than the simple restoration of supposedly omitted material:

(78) A: Would you like a glass of scotch?
B: Why scotch? (≠Why would I like a glass of scotch?; =Why are you offering me scotch?)
A: It's all I have in the house.

3.2   Metaphysical

There is another category of *why*-fragment we must separate that recalls the mystical reading of (8).

(79) A: Did you know that Bill was kissing Sally?
B: Oh God. Why Bill?

(80) [*wakes up to a throbbing headache*]
Why on my first day of work?

(81) It's not that I think our small-state senators are less deserving, but why them? I don't get it. (COCA)

In (79), B seems to be taking issue with a deity who chose Bill, of all people, for the honour of getting to kiss Sally. The question scarcely makes sense if someone did not actually select Bill. The man with the throbbing headache in (80) thinks that someone must be responsible for it happening on that day. The speaker in (81) is not questioning why senators are deserving or not, but why they have been selected for some honour, possibly by fate. I will dub all such questions as *metaphysical why*-fragments.

3.3   Normal

And so, we come to 'normal' *why*-fragments. These are *why*-fragments in which a rational agent is salient within the discourse, and the speaker picks something under that agent's control to question.

(82) [*watching someone make an omelette*]
Why carbonated water?

The rational agent is the chef, and the question is why carbonated water is being used as an ingredient. An alternate description for these *why*-fragments might be 'contextual', although that would imply that they could not build on linguistic context, which they can:

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[5]The criticism might be made that 'metalinguistic' is not the best term. After all, a violinist correcting a student's poor intonation could say "Why [*sour note*]? Why not [*in-tune note*]?" I would argue, however, that non-linguistic material is easily incorporated into a variety of sentences ("I heard you play [*sour note*], but I should have heard [*in-tune note*]").

(83)   A: Let's clean the house.

B: I'm in the middle of something. <u>Why now</u>?

The rational agent here is A, who was the one to decide to start cleaning. I would argue that exophoric examples of *why*-fragments like (82) that can build on context form a subset of the normal *why*-fragments, one which we will return to later in section 5.

For the time being, I will define *normal why*-fragments merely in terms of having an obvious rational agent. The two alternate readings (*metalinguistic* and *metaphysical*) are available to rescue *why*-fragments that would otherwise be incoherent because of a missing rational agent. In *metalinguistic why*-fragments, the rational agent is the other person in the conversation, and the question is about why a particular phrase was used. The visitors asked the Martian why he used the word *the* to describe himself in (71), and Joyce conjures up the image of a priest patiently explaining the wording of a religious text in (75)–(77). In *metaphysical why*-fragments, the rational agent is an omnipotent deity who has control over the way of the world, and can control things like who gets to kiss Sally and who gets headaches.

3.4   Parallels between *why*-fragments and other structures

We have already seen how elliptical *why*-questions seem to share much in common with Mad Magazine sentences in section 2.3. We also looked at *why*-fragments, but now that we have seen some of the types of *why*-fragment that are possible, we can draw limits on this comparison.

We can now see that the parallel only holds for some examples of metalinguistic *why*-fragments, namely those that consist of full phrases. There are no corresponding MMs for, say, the *why*-fragment (71), which contains a lone determiner:

(84)   Marvin, *the*?

Lambrecht (1990: 220) claims that all MM fragments must refer metalinguistically to prior discourse, which would separate them from elliptical *why*-questions. I am not sure that I agree with this; exophoric MMs seem acceptable to me:

(85)   [*watching an old classmate walk out of the hospital in a white coat*]

Him, a doctor? I don't believe it.

Nevertheless, MMs run into problems with the non-reconstructable *why*-fragments that we will later deal with in section 5.

(86)   Why the grin?

(87)   *You, the grin?

Another parallel could be drawn between *why*-fragments and Bare Argument Ellipsis (BAE)[6]. Still, the non-reconstructable *why*-fragments do pose a problem here as well:

(88)   The grin!

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[6]This construction, also known as stripping, allows an NP, PP or so on to appear by itself as a complete utterance (e.g. "Out of there!", "My leg!")

I suppose one could imagine someone picking out a suspect from a line, identifying the culprit by his knowing smirk. Nevertheless, it is completely unacceptable as a way to refer to the listener's expression, a function which the *why*-fragment has no trouble with.

3.5 Differences between *why*-fragments and TLWQs

Why-fragments can question the wisdom of an action in a particular situation or in general, while TLWQs can only do the latter. This can be seen in the varying felicity of responses:

(89) Onda ate a fried egg and some natto.
Why natto? (= ambiguous between in this situation or in general)
Because his grandparents recommended it to him.
Because it is supposed to be healthy[7].

(90) Onda ate a fried egg and some natto.
Why eat natto? (= in general)
(#)Because his grandparents recommended it to him.
Because it is supposed to be healthy.

With the TLWQ, the questionable response with his grandparents is not exactly infelicitous, but it does not seem to be answering the question as directly as the response concerning natto's purported health benefits. This effect is not present with the responses to the *why*-fragment. TLWQs and *why*-fragments thus appear to have subtly different meanings. With TLWQs, tense is obviously missing since the verb is present, while *why*-fragments are less obvious: perhaps tense is present, and perhaps it is not. This is not due to an underlyingly present or missing TP, in my opinion, but rather ambiguity based on the surface string.

4 Deletionist accounts of *why*-fragments

The following accounts of *why*-fragments (Nakao et al., 2012; Weir, 2012) assume that the effect must be syntactic; an alternate interpretation is not mentioned in either paper. This is reflected in the terminology they use: *why*-fragments are referred to as examples of '*why*-stripping'. I have retained my own terms in this paper, and hope that the results are not too confusing. My reason for this is that words like 'strip' and 'remnant' presuppose syntactic deletion. I retain the use of the word '*why*-stripping' to refer to Nakao et al.'s deletion process.

4.1 Deletion of TP

Nakao et al. (2012) set out to explain *why*-stripping as follows. *Why*-questions, unlike many other types of question, can be differently interpreted based on where the stress falls in the sentence. If someone asks "Why did John eat the apple AT THE PARTY?", a proper response would explain why John chose to bring an apple to the party and eat it

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[7]This could be specific to Onda's decision, but this possibility is irrelevant to the point being made.
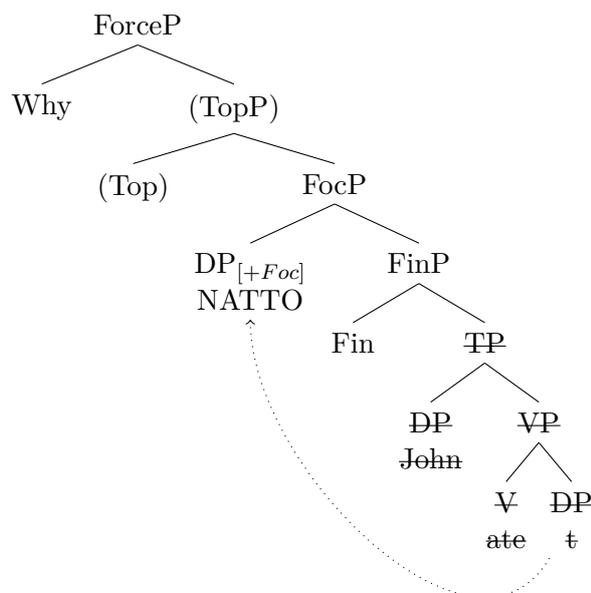
Figure 1: Nakao et al.'s derivation for "Why natto?"

there. The question "Why did John eat THE APPLE at the party?" would be answered by an explanation of why, of all the foods available at the party, John chose the apple.[8]

Nakao et al. then consider what would happen to a stressed *why*-question undergoing ellipsis. If stress is necessary in order to interpret the *why*-question, then it would make sense that the stressed word or phrase could not vanish with the rest of the TP. Their hypothesis is that the stressed constituent moves to a Focus position (after Rizzi (1997)) before the TP is deleted (see Figure 1).

They give several reasons to suppose this:

1. Connectivity effects (binding, case and voice) point towards something pulling on the grammatical strings of the 'remnant'. They believe that this hidden element is the ellipted clause.

2. The acceptability of prepositions in certain positions patterns after Merchant's P-stranding generalization, which would indicate movement.

3. Nakao et al. claim that Romanian moves the focus of *why*-questions to before the TP even in cases not involving ellipsis. In their view, this Romanian construction is identical to English *why*-stripping except that the ellipsis is optional. Normal English *why*-questions with stress *in situ* would thus involve covert movement after spell-out, while Romanian movement would be overt.

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[8]Nakao et al. attribute this to Bromberger (1992: 160–165), but this account was in reply to Van Fraassen (1980: 128)'s earlier formulation, which in turn made reference to a paper by Bengt Hannson called "Explanations-of-what?", an unpublished mimeograph circulating around Stanford University in 1974. In any case, I'd like to add a fairly intuitive reason why *why*-questions can have such different readings: other wh-words like *who*, *what*, *where*, *when* and *how* all refer to individual arguments and adjuncts, but each of these parts in a predicate may have an individual reason *why* it is involved.

They then proceed to examine the characteristics of this phenomenon, and determine that it is not subject to island constraints and does not demonstrate scopal ambiguity. Based on this, they posit a new *why* that is base-generated in the specifier of ForceP.

I believe that hidden linguistic material is not necessarily present, and that there are simpler, more plausible explanations of the effects that rely on discourse conditions and indirect licensing of grammatical features. Nakao et al.'s explanation only works for a narrow subset of the *why*-fragments that appear in the wild, while discourse conditions and indirect licensing are flexible enough to be able to handle them all.

4.1.1 Connectivity effects

My primary objection to the move-and-delete approach is that it relies on the presence of linguistic antecedents which can be deleted in the *why*-question. The problem is that *why*-fragments can and do appear discourse-initially, where linguistic antecedents are not available. A more extensive examination of the variety of discourse-initial *why*-fragments is available later in section 5.

In this section I would like to concentrate on the connectivity effects that Nakao et al. observe. Some of the examples that they present to motivate underlying clauses are not entirely convincing. To illustrate binding effects, for instance, they provide the following:

(91)   A: John sold a lot of pictures.
       B: Why pictures of himself?

The argument is that John must be present in an underlying clause in the question to license the anaphor *himself*. This underlying clause is constructed from the linguistic content of the prior sentence according to the standard view of ellipsis. And yet, the following discourse-initial question is also possible:

(92)   [*exploring John's house and looking at his walls*]
       That's weird. Why only pictures of himself?

In other words, John does not need to be linguistically present to supply the supposed ellipsis with an antecedent; non-linguistic context is enough to do the trick. Culicover and Jackendoff (2005: 260–261) demonstrate the possibility of context playing such a role with an example involving a pair of scissors. If two people are working silently in a room, and one needs a pair of scissors from the other, only one of the following requests is acceptable:

(93)   Give me those.

(94)   *Give me that.

Scissors are not inherently plural; there is only one object. It is plausible that the requester, as she considers the scissors, psychologically primes not only the physical object but also the linguistic term *scissors*.

Moreover, a native speaker of French who is impressed with a chair could point to it and produce either (95) or (96):

(95)   Regardez-le! (fauteuil = armchair)

(96)   Regardez-la! (chaise = chair) (example suggested by Geoff Pullum, pc).

Now granted, these two words (*fauteuil* and *chaise*) are not precise synonyms, but they could conceivably be used to refer to the same physical item. That is, the gender of the pronoun is not necessarily a matter of French speakers thinking of that type of physical object as stereotypically masculine or feminine. Rather, the gender of the pronoun comes directly from a lexical item which is not present; gender is, after all, a syntactic feature. The point of all this is that grammatical effects need not point to the syntactic presence of a linguistic item, but could merely refer to a word that is mutually understood to be appropriate given the situation.

Nakao et al. also discuss the problematic nature of switching voices in a *why*-fragment:

(97) A: John kissed Mary.
B: Why (*by) John? (Nakao et al., 2012: 272)

It's true enough that the passive doesn't work here, but I also find the active *why*-strip they identify as acceptable ("Why John?") to be restricted to a metaphysical reading. This doesn't affect their argument, however, as more felicitous examples can be found:

(98) A: John won the singing competition.
B: Why (*by) John?

But there is a more important objection: the *why*-fragment they reject ("Why by John?") is often strange even when a passive linguistic antecedent is immediately available:

(99) Mary was kissed by John. *Why by John?

(100) Mary chose to be kissed by John. Why by John?

(101) The singing competition was won by John. (?) Why by John?

The reason that (100) and (101) are more felicitous, I propose, is an increased emphasis on the agentivity of Mary and the understood presence of the jury panel, respectively.

Of course, a few exceptions taken with the examples provided does not negate the fact that grammatical effects can be seen in many cases. Merchant's P-stranding generalization and the other effects cannot simply be brushed away.

The beginnings of a working-out of how these effects could arise without movement is given in Culicover and Jackendoff (2005, 2012: 336–338) through a mechanism they call *indirect licensing*, which replaces the traditional move-and-delete operation. This change of machinery is motivated by the many situations in which move-and-delete does not work. Later in this paper, I will discuss several of these, including phrases that do not have a corresponding tensed *why*-question.

Culicover and Jackendoff's approach can handle a much wider variety of material. While syntactic material is normally licensed within a sentence, indirect licensing proposes that phrases can be licensed by linguistic material further back in the conversation given strict semantic conditions. For instance, if a fragmental YP functions in the same way as an XP in an earlier sentence, it may receive grammatical features matching those found on the XP. The same happens if a fragmental YP functions as a phrase either implicit in or missing from a previous sentence. They provide examples of these kinds of situation:

(102) John drinks bourbon. — No, scotch. (Contrast)

(103) John drinks. — Yeah, scotch. (Implicit argument)

(104) John drinks scotch. — Yeah, every day. (Elaboration) (Culicover and Jackendoff, 2012: 336)

By adding this function, which they see as based in a domain-general Same-Except relation that is external to the language faculty, Culicover and Jackendoff can reproduce the effects which motivate the Move-and-Delete operation. Again, the traditional approach must be called into question if it underproduces, and we will see in section 5 that it does. For further reasons to question the coverage of syntactic deletion, see Culicover and Jackendoff (2005, 2012).

4.1.2 An alternate *why?* — Island sensitivity and scope

Nakao et al. claim that *why*-fragments are not sensitive to island violations (Nakao et al., 2012: 276). My issue this time is not a quibble with their example, but rather a problem with their argument in support of this claim. Nakao et al. present the following interchange as grammatical :

(105) A: John is happy because Bill ate natto.
       B: Why natto?

I agree with them that this is grammatical, but would remark that this grammaticality holds in one condition: that B is asking the question because he wants to know why John cares whether Bill eats natto or not, and not why Bill decided to eat natto in the first place. The reason is tied to the matrix clause.

This point is important because they present the following sluiced sentence as ungrammatical by tying the meaning to the relative clause through indexing:

(106) He wants to interview [someone who works at the soup kitchen *for a certain reason$_i$*], but he won't reveal *why$_i$*.

It is true that the *why* in sluice (106) cannot refer to the subordinate clause (i.e., it cannot be the reason that person works at the soup kitchen), but that is also true of the *why* in *why*-fragment (105), which cannot refer to the reason Bill ate natto. The reason must be tied to the matrix clause, and refer to a reason for wanting to interview that certain person. I do not know why Nakao et al. chose not to place the same restriction on the reading of the *why*-fragment.

Nakao et al.'s second example is strange indeed:

(107) A: John denied that Mary ate natto.
       B: Why natto?

With effort, I can imagine some sort of investigative team going over John's testimony, trying to find out why he was so eager to deny Mary's choice of natto in particular. Again, there is no way to understand B's question as referring to Mary's reason for choosing natto.

Looking at BAE, *why*-fragments and normal what-questions side-by-side, I find little evidence that BAE shows sensitivity to island constraints:

(108) Janet hired a man who speaks Spanish.

No, French. (BAE)

Why Spanish? (*why*-fragment)

*What did Janet hire a man who speaks. (relative clauses)

(109) Adam took a deep breath and fired Bob.

No, Carl. (BAE)

Why Bob? (*why*-fragment)

*Who did Adam take a deep breath and fire? (coordinate structures)

The sensitivity of BAE to islands is a long-standing point of debate (Merchant (2001); Culicover and Jackendoff (2005); Stainton (2006)). Merchant's argument for island sensitivity employed the following examples. The asterisks are all his.

(110) Does Abby speak the same Balkan language that *Ben* speaks?

(*)No, *Charlie.*

(111) Did Ben leave the party because *Abby* wouldn't dance with him?

(*)No, *Beth.*

(112) Did Abby vote for a *Green Party* candidate?

(*)No, *Reform Party.*

Culicover and Jackendoff (2005: 245) indicate that they find these instances of ellipsis to be grammatical, and do not know why their judgments differ. I side with them; the above sentences seem felicitous with the correct stress patterns. True island violations cannot be ameliorated with any amount of stress shifting (compare (108) and (109)).

Another problem is that when Nakao et al. look at the scope effects of *why*, they only compare the *why*-fragment to a normal *why*-question and a focused *why*-question; the *why*-sluice is strangely absent. The scope effect in question is whether we are discussing a collective reason to hate John (*why > every*), or the individual reasons to hate John (*every > why*).

(113) Why does everyone hate John? (*why > every, every > why*)

(114) Why does everyone hate JOHN (not Bill)? (*why > every, *every > why*)

(115) A: Everyone hates John. B: Why JOHN? (*why > every, *every > why*) (Nakao et al. (2012: 276) after Collins (1991))

Nakao et al. have just claimed that the *why* in sluicing is different from the *why* in *why*-stripping, so why haven't they included a *why*-sluice like (116) for comparison?

(116) Everyone hates John, but I don't know why. (*why > every, *every > why*).

Most *why*-sluices, like (116), are unambiguous. It is possible to force an *every > why* reading on a *why*-sluice, but then it is not clear how the sluice could be reconstructed from the previous clause:

(117) Everyone in John's class failed the exam, and they all have individual reasons why.

#. . . they all have individual reasons why [everyone in John's class failed the exam]. (example suggested by Caroline Heycock, pc)

If we are categorizing varieties of *why* according to scope effects, then *why*-sluice (116) seems to belong together with *why*-fragment (115) as unambiguous. But we have seen that Nakao et al. claim that *why*-sluicing shows sensitivity to island effects while *why*-fragments do not. There are three possible solutions: first, one of these observations is irrelevant to the argument, or second, one of these observations is incorrect, or third, the argument is wrong.

4.1.3 Focus: identification or information?

Finally, there are issues with moving the 'remnant' to a Focus position. To start, we have the problem of multiple foci in the *why*-fragment. When the foci represent several distinct questions, it is true that usually several *why*-fragments are utilized:

(118) Why me? Why now?

The above example represents two separate thoughts: 1) "Why, of all people, is this happening to me?", and 2) "Why, of all times, is this happening now?". However, when the constituents must be presented in conjunction, *why*-fragments can accommodate multiple items:

(119) And guess who one of the lawmakers who supported that change was?
       Then-Congressman Jim DeMint. Same law, similar changes, so <u>why now the difference</u>? (Anderson Cooper - Dec 15, 2010, COCA)

(120) King: Any male actor you'd really love to –
       Moore: Daniel Day Lewis [. . .]
       King: <u>Why him so much</u>?
       Moore: Oh, he's a brilliant actor. (Larry King Live, COCA)

(121) I know that she wanted to send her relatives gifts, but <u>why an encyclopedia to someone who can't read any more</u>? (example suggested by Caroline Heycock, pc)

These would have to be moved together if the "escape the deleted constituent" story were true, but this sort of movement is impossible. Rizzi, who is cited specifically by Nakao et al. (2012: 270), rules out double Focus positions (Rizzi, 1997: 296–297). Focus's specifier must be new and its complement must be old. A double-focus structure would need to contain a position that is both new and old at the same time.

Further insight into the focus situation comes from É. Kiss (1998: 247–248), who distinguished two forms of focus: identificational focus, which seems to move and exhaustively identify an item, and information focus, which involves no movement or quantification at all, and merely highlights information *in situ*. But the neat alignment between overt focus movement in Romanian and covert focus movement in English that Nakao et al. propose relies on underlying similarity. É. Kiss's Hungarian examples follow:

(122) *Tegnap este **Marinak** mutattam be Pétert.*
       last   night Mary.DAT introduced.I PERF Peter.ACC
       'It was **to Mary** that I introduced Peter last night.'

(123) *Tegnap este be mutattam Pétert* MARINAK.
      Last   night PERF introduced.I Peter Mary.DAT
      'Last night I introduced Peter TO MARY.'

The identificational focus in (122) exhaustively identifies while the information focus in (123) merely marks presupposedness. *Why*-fragments are not necessarily exhaustive, which makes it pattern with information focus (É. Kiss, 1998: 251):

(124) A: I took syntax, semantics and statistics.
      B: <u>Why statistics</u>?

Furthermore, identificational focus is always coextensive with an XP available for operator movement, but informational focus can be either smaller or larger. As we saw earlier in (70) and (71), *why*-fragments can accept terms smaller than an XP such as determiners and prepositions. It is also possible for a *why*-fragment to contain multiple constituents, as seen in (119) and (120).

    The similarities between the focus involved in *why*-fragments and informational focus throw the movement analysis into question: as has been pointed out, informational foci stay put.

4.1.4 Romanian *why*-focus?

There is one final issue: the Romanian example they cite in support of *why*-focus with overt movement is of questionable grammaticality[9].

(125) **De ce* NATTO *manc-a?*
      Why   NATTO eating-was?
      Lit. 'Why NATTO was he eating?'

      (Nakao et al., 2012: ex. 25a (syntactic apparatus removed))

This does not injure their original argument; the question of whether English has covert movement or not does not rely on the existence of overt movement in Romanian. Nevertheless, this example cannot be used to support their argument, either. I am not sure if there is a language that does allow for similar structures.

4.2 Deletion of VoiceP

Weir (2012) also sees *why*-stripping as the result of movement and deletion with a base-generated *why*, but differs from Nakao et al. in where he thinks the merger is located. Hence, all my previous objections to syntactic deletion and movement still stand. Nevertheless, Weir makes some interesting observations about the acceptability of various *why*-strips that must be incorporated into any account of the phenomenon.

    Weir's proposal differs from Nakao et al.'s in that they place an entire tensed clause in the ellipsis site, whereas he believes that the site consists of some but not all of the functional categories attached to vP. Specifically, Weir thinks that VoiceP must be included to account for voice mismatch effects, but that subject/object asymmetries and mismatches in negation and tense indicate that tense is not present (see Figure 2).

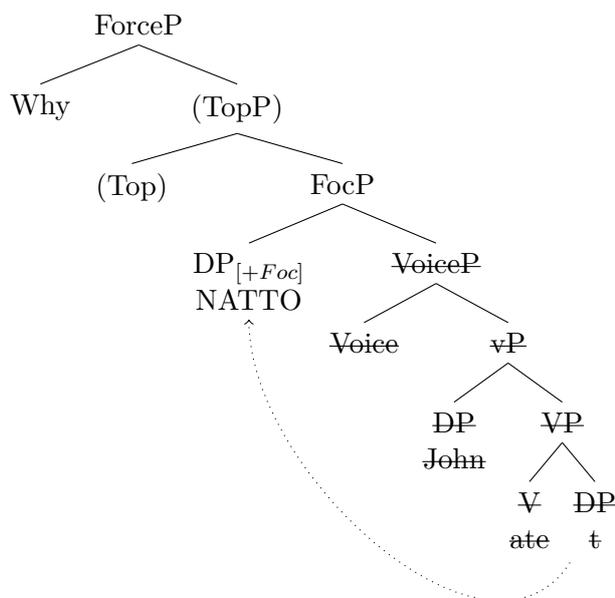[9]Thanks to Laura-Andreea Sterian for the help with Romanian.

Figure 2: Weir's derivation for "Why natto?"

This view pushes at the seams of what is possible in a syntactic account. Mainstream generative grammar demands an underlying uniformity of its components, and CP is generally agreed to take a TP underneath it. Weir (2012: 6) admits that it is problematic that his account demands that CPs be acceptable even without TPs. He supposes that *why*-strips involve CPs, for only CPs can be embedded under verbs like *wonder*:

(126) I know they needed to hire someone, but I wonder why him.

If one argues that *wonder* is here selecting a non-CP, then one commits oneself to the view that simple *why*-fragments are truly elliptical fragments, for the *why*-fragment would also be acceptable on its own. Mainstream generative grammar is not compatible with the results: either CPs do not need to have TPs, or they are not necessary to form propositions. Let us turn to Weir's observations of the behaviour of *why*-strips.

4.2.1 Variable acceptability

First, we have an apparent distinction between perfect and passive participles: Weir says that the former can be *why*-stripped while the latter cannot.

(127) John was fired, but I don't know why fired (rather than fêted).

(128) #John has resigned, but I don't know why resigned (rather than applied for promotion).

I confess to finding (127) odd at best, and I suspect the reason is that it is metalinguistic. This diagnosis is motivated by how it improves in acceptability when two speakers are involved; people do not usually metalinguistically question their own speech outside

of particular situations, such as a lecturer providing skeptical questions as in the earlier Joycean examples, or an advertiser setting up a sales pitch ("Why Windex?", "Why syntax?"). Adding a second speaker makes the passive example more felicitous, although the perfect now seems to veer towards acceptability as well.

(129) A: John was fired. B: Why fired?

(130) A: John has resigned. B: (#) Why resigned? (Weir, 2012: 6)

I believe that any remaining unacceptability in (130) is due to the choice of verb. Consider the following:

(131) A: John has fired Bill. B: Why fired?

This example with the perfect seems to me to be at least as acceptable as the passive (129). In other words, whatever is causing the problems with (128) seems not to reside in the position of merger, but rather with which verb is being used.

Next, Weir observes that negation is not preserved in *why*-stripping, and tensed verbs cannot be in the ellipsis site if the question is not metalinguistic. This differs from the behaviour of other forms of ellipsis, such as sluicing. These are valuable observations, and point to something less than a full clause being present. Where I differ from Weir is that I think these observations show that elliptical fragments can be interpreted even without an underlying clause, whereas Weir wants to preserve as much of the clause as possible and argue for minimal alterations. Of course, the fewer alterations the better, but we have seen and will continue to see that the elliptical account falls short in other ways.

4.2.2 Subject/object asymmetries

Weir notes that even though subjects and objects can both be referred to by *why*-fragments, this only seems to happen to subjects quite rarely. Even rare subject *why*-stripping is unexpected: Weir's account proposes that T is missing and thus not able to hand out Case, and yet subject *why*-strips do occur, seemingly evading the Case Filter in the process. Weir's explanation for this is that *why*-fragments that appear to refer to a subject actually refer to the complement of a cleft construction. By occurring in a cleft, the subjects can receive Case and thus pass through the Case Filter intact. The only sign that this has occurred is a presupposition of uniqueness: the complements of *it*-clefts must be unique, and Weir claims that the same is true of subject *why*-fragments.

He next observes that this presupposition of uniqueness does not seem to be a requirement when the linguistic antecedent is a passive. This is supposed to be due to the structure of the tenseless, subjectless *why*-fragment allowing vP-internal case assignment.

(132) Bill was fired. John was fired too. Why John? (Weir, 2012: 11)

Before accepting this, it is useful to return to the linguistic data to be explained: 1) subject *why*-fragments are less frequently acceptable than object *why*-fragments, and 2) passives alleviate this completely. This behaviour could be explained by our discourse constraint that only allows *why*-fragments to question those elements of the sentence that are under the control of a rational agent. If there is no rational agent, one must be invented or the sentence will not be acceptable.

Here we can see that the presupposition of uniqueness that goes along with Weir's hidden clefts is irrelevant to felicity:

(133) #Bob is the tallest person in the room. Why Bob?

(134) I understand why Bill received a warning, but why John?

Bob is the single tallest person in the room, and yet *why*-fragment (133) is infelicitous. John was one of many warned individuals, and yet (134) is felicitous. The following sentences form an even more dramatic example: they are distinct only in terms of our knowledge of the differences between a foot race and a singing competition:

(135) (?) Bob won the race. Why Bob?

(136) Bob won the singing competition. Why Bob?

For me, the first sentence can only receive a metaphysical interpretation ("Why, God!?! Why did you let Bob win!?!"). The second sentence is more felicitous because the winners of singing competitions, unlike the winners of races, are selected by a panel of judges, rational agents whose judgments can be questioned.

This discourse constraint is sufficient in itself to explain the varying felicity of subject *why*-fragments and also explains why passives ameliorate the effect: the subjects must be seen to be selected by another rational agent, and passives make this reading easier. Both of the following *why*-fragments refer to subjects, and neither one presupposes uniqueness, as can be seen by how problematic the *it*-clefts are:

(137) The gay rights movement has had many focal points over the years, including workplace discrimination and visitation rights. But marriage has also been a focal point of the gay rights movement. Why marriage?
*Why was it marriage that has also been a focal point of the gay rights movement.

(138) Bill seemed to get away with everything, even stealing from his classmates. Sam received a suspension just for being late to class. Why not Bill?
*Why wasn't it Bill?

Although (137) could arguably be brushed aside as metalinguistic, (138) could not.

5 Discourse-initial *why*-fragments

> No more such wives; therefore, no wife: one worse,
> And better used, would make her sainted spirit
> Again possess her corpse, and on this stage,
> Where we're offenders now, appear soul-vex'd,
> And begin, 'Why to me?'
>
> The Winter's Tale

5.1 Against 'innocent' reconstruction

We have already seen that, even if all that *why*-fragments did was reproduce earlier linguistic material or sprout from it, the case for the *why*-stripping deletion account is problematic. But *why*-fragments are far more diverse than has been suggested so far; they can build fresh structure on nonlinguistic context, and demand a more flexible explanation.

In order for the deletionist account to work, there must be an appropriate linguistic antecedent for each instance of ellipsis. One cannot simply conjure up words that have not previously appeared in the discourse and delete them; to do so would be to construct a syntax of convenience.

Consider the *why*-questions in (139), all of which could function as the opening line in a conversation:

(139) Why me?

Why today?

Why so serious?

Weir acknowledges discourse-initial *why*-stripping as one of the "remaining mysteries" about *why*-stripping. He then expresses hope that Merchant (2004)'s account of 'innocent'[10] reconstruction can alleviate the problem (Weir, 2012: 13). However, it is not clear that Merchant's reconstructions can successfully explain even those phenomena that Merchant intends them to explain, verb-phrase ellipsis (VPE) and bare-argument ellipsis (BAE). It will be shown that 'innocent' reconstruction often changes the meaning of these sentences, in some cases substantially. These difficulties are exacerbated with *why*-fragments.

Verb-phrase ellipsis (VPE) involves the apparent deletion of all material following an auxiliary.

(140) Chomsky likes deletion-based accounts, and Merchant does __ too.

The phrase *like them* seems to be missing from the indicated position above. In the late 1970s there was a dispute over whether VPE could appear discourse-initially by drawing from non-linguistic context. Hankamer and Sag (1976) argued that this was not possible, and used contrasts like (141) to demonstrate this:

(141) [*Sag produces a cleaver and prepares to hack off his left hand*]
Hankamer: #Don't be alarmed, ladies and gentlemen, we've rehearsed this act several times and he never actually does *(it). (Hankamer and Sag, 1976: 392)

They made an exception for non-declarative speech acts, although they did not articulate why this exception should be made:

(142) [*Hankamer brandishes cleaver, advances on Sag*]
Sag: Don't! My God, please don't! (Hankamer and Sag, 1976: 409)

Schachter (1977) argued that this categorization was too neat, and that discourse-initial VPE not ungrammatical, but simply rare. This rarity was supposed to be due to the

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[10]This term is Weir's, not Merchant's.

difficulty involved in retrieving the appropriate cues from context; a fully anaphoric VP (e.g., *do it*, *do so*, etc.) is acceptable in more situations because it narrows the choice of possible predicates more than a lone auxiliary does. The examples he gave of acceptable discourse-initial VPE included:

(143) John, you mustn't.

(144) [*John points to an empty chair*]
  John: May I?
  Mary: Please do.

Hankamer then responded that these examples still conformed to the earlier observation that only non-declarative VPE can be discourse-initial; Schachter's examples all involved questions or other illocutionary meanings. At this point the argument went dormant until Pullum (2000) briefly revisited the issue, judging in favour of Hankamer because of the additional observation that there did not seem to be a productive rule adding to Schachter's collection of acceptable examples, which were far less numerous than would be expected if they could be generated as freely as Schachter suggested.

This much was the background to Merchant (2004), which is an attempt to explain the existence of discourse-initial ellipsis from a deletionist perspective. Merchant puts a fresh coat of paint on Schachter (1977) and claims that all such examples of felicitous discourse-initial VPE are reductions of *do it*, the so-called 'innocent' insertion material. The idea is that this VP and this VP alone can be recovered from non-linguistic context and then subsequently deleted like other VPs undergoing ellipsis. This *do it* VPE cannot appear in as many places as the original *do it*, Merchant suggests, because of presupposition accommodation: *do it* requires only the accommodation of *it*, while *do it* VPE adds the additional presupposition of the e-givenness (see Merchant (2001)) of the now-deleted VP. In other words, VPE requires one additional mental calculation before the references are sorted out, and so the situations in which it is acceptable form a subset of the situations in which *do it* is acceptable.

Merchant's explanation makes a strong prediction: the form with explicit *do it* should be acceptable in every place where VPE is acceptable. This prediction is demonstrably false. Miller (2011) is a survey of the situations in which verbal anaphora, including *do it* and VPE, are acceptable. There are, of course, situations in which either are acceptable, but there are a variety of contextual factors which affect the acceptability of these two forms of anaphor differently. One such factor is the presence of a choice between two states of affairs that jointly exhaust the universe of possibilities. For instance, in (145) the two possible outcomes are that the speaker will win the competition or won't win the competition. VPE of the verb in this situation is possible, while *do it* is inappropriate provided that it refers to the same action anaphorically (*does it* is only acceptable in (145) if the anaphor means something like "enters the competition", not "wins the competition").

(145) She might not win the competition, but I hope she does (*it).

Of course, we are still speaking about VPE with a linguistic antecedent at this point. We can look to the extension of this examination in Miller and Pullum (2013), where Pullum (2000)'s judgment against productive exophoric VPE was rescinded. The reason

that exophoric VPE is so rare is not that it is a fossilized category, but rather that the conditions that favor VPE over *do it* tend not to occur in discourse-initial position. There are, however, exceptions, such as permission ("May I?") and directives ("No, don't!"), and these are productive (Miller and Pullum, 2013: 10–13).

There is also the problem that, even when both forms are grammatical, there is a meaning difference between VPE and the corresponding *do it* sentence (Hankamer, 1978: 71).

(146) [*accepting a gift*]
You shouldn't have!
#You shouldn't have done it!

(147) [*reprimanding someone*]
#You shouldn't have!
You shouldn't have done it!

Finally, Merchant's *do it* reconstruction is simply inappropriate in many instances. There are often more suitable verbs:

(148) [*a child expressing desire to join other children in the park*]
May I? Please? (ellipsis)
#May I do it? Please? (anaphoric reconstruction)
May I join them? Please? (actual reconstruction)

(149) [*a child coughs and then sees his mother get out the cough medicine*]
Ugh, do I have to? (ellipsis)
#Ugh, do I have to do it? (anaphoric reconstruction)
Ugh, do I have to take that? (actual reconstruction)

Merchant has a similar explanation ready for discourse-initial BAE. This time, he claims that a pronoun and a copula may be inserted for free (Merchant, 2004: 725). But none of the following instances of BAE are acceptable with *it is* inserted.

(150) [*seeing someone wearing muddy shoes*]
Quickly, off the rug!
*It is off the rug!

(151) [*spotting some egg*]
Your tie. . .
*It is your tie.

Now let us consider *why*-fragments:

(152) [*watching someone trying to stuff a ball through the smaller of two hoops*]
Why through the small hoop? Why not through the big one?

(153) [*watching his friend make omelettes*]
Why chicken eggs? Why not duck eggs? We have some in the fridge.

I do not think that these can be reconstructed as innocently as Weir hopes. For instance, (153) is not asking "Why <u>are</u> they chicken eggs? Why <u>aren't</u> they duck eggs?", but rather "Why are you <u>using</u> chicken eggs? Why aren't you <u>using</u> duck eggs?". In other words, successful communication using *why*-fragments relies heavily on context to fill in the appropriate verb, and we can't get away with simply assuming that a generic verb like *do* or *be* will take care of all possibilities. I would guess that *why*-fragments are probably even more difficult to reconstruct through Merchant's gerund+copula approach than bare argument ellipsis is; the specific verb seems to be required far too often.

5.2 A bestiary of discourse-initial *why*-fragments

There are several *why*-fragment patterns in English that are distinctly non-metalinguistic. This can be said of these patterns because they can all exist in discourse-initial position, which is a sufficient but not necessary condition. Some of these patterns will go beyond that: they can *only* exist in discourse-initial position, and some cannot even be reconstructed into full sentences. If we have the pragmatic devices necessary to make sense of these sentences, then it is more difficult to justify the elaborate proposals necessary to explain connectivity effects in other areas.

At this point in the essay, I would like to present a collection of some of the discourse-initial *why*-fragments I have noticed in use. I will not attempt to provide a formal explanation, but merely to list some of their properties.

5.2.1 Why (such/the) NP?: Why such confusion? Why the big fuss?

So far we have dealt with *why*-fragments that have conceivable reconstructions. Already these pose problems for the syntactic account, as we have seen. But, as I have hinted throughout this essay, there are also phrases that cannot receive a conceivable reconstruction, one example of which is the common phrase "Why the NP?". Sentences such as "Why the rush?", "Why the delay?" and "Why the long face?" occur frequently in English, but there is no verb that can successfully fill out the *why*-fragment:

(154) Why the big fuss?

(155) *Why are you making the big fuss?

(156) *Why is there the big fuss?

(157) *Why did you do the big fuss?

The only possible reconstructions change the definite article:

(158) Why are you making a big fuss?

Discourse initial *why*+NP questions typically pick out an item that is non-linguistic but mutually salient, or at least assumed to be so; the wearer of the long face is treated as though he knows why he has it on, even if he is unaware of his expression in reality. This category of expression is productive, and can accommodate NPs of great length and variety:

(159) Why the glowing job performance reviews for Newt? (COCA)

(160) Worf: He knows nothing of our ways!

K'ehleyr: Our ways? You mean Klingon ways, don't you?

Worf: He is Klingon!

K'ehleyr: He is also my son and I am half-human. He will find his own ways. <u>Why the sudden concern?</u> You won't even acknowledge that he's yours. (Star Trek: the Next Generation, "Reunion")

The "remnant" here is not part of the prior discourse, and Worf might not even have been aware that he was exhibiting concern. Nevertheless, K'ehleyr's speech treats the concern as shared knowledge, presupposing its existence.

Note the difference that the indefinite determiner *a* makes in the following example.

(161) Mitchell: You have an ultrasuccessful Las Vegas show. You do 500 performances ...

Siegfried: A year, yes.

Mitchell: ... a year, 15,000 people a week come to see you.

Siegfried: That's right.

Mitchell: Siegfried, <u>why a movie?</u> *(CBS Morning 1999, COCA)*

I would suggest that Mitchell is not expressing surprise that this particular movie was created; to do so might call the qualities of the movie (such as the script or the cinematography) into question. Rather, he expresses surprise that any movie at all was created.

Such is also frequently seen with discourse-initial *why*+NP questions.

(162) Why (such/the) secrecy?

(163) Why (such/the) popularity?

(164) Why (such a/the) rush?

5.2.2 Negative NPs: Why not chickens? Why no chickens?

The pattern "Why no NP?" questions the absence of an object in nonlinguistic context that was expected to be present. "Why not NP" can be used more flexibly with a variety of predicates filled in from context:

(165) Why (are there) no chickens? vs. Why not (keep/eat/etc.) chickens?

(166) [*watching someone make an omelette*]
Why not duck eggs? = Why don't you use duck eggs?
Why no duck eggs? = Why are there no duck eggs in this omelette?

"Why no NP" is more amenable to a treatment like Merchant's; in most cases a simple *is there* or *are there* could satisfactorily reconstruct the sentence. That said, "Why is there no smile?" would be odd for (167), and note (168), which demands that the perfect be included ("Why has there been no arrest?").

(167) Why no smile?

(168) If it is known the killer is not a student, do we know who is the killer? And if so, why no arrest? (COCA)

The construction is fully productive:

(169) Why no compassion for celebs in rehab?

(170) Why no overhead rail beneath the hardtop? (COCA)

5.2.3 PPs: Why in the middle of the road?

PPs can also be used in discourse-initial *why*-fragments. Usually this PP will refer to a time or place, although Shakespeare provided an exception in the quote that opened this section.

(171) They were caught with Simon Moonan and Tusker Boyle in the square one night. ... What did that mean about the smugging in the square? Why did the five fellows out of the higher line run away for that? ... But why in the square? You went there when you wanted to do something. (A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, James Joyce)

Despite the apparent linguistic antecedents, the PP in (171) is discourse-initial: the narrator is not asking "Why were the boys caught in the square?" or anything that could be reconstructed from previous linguistic material, but instead "Why were the boys smugging in the square?". This is made clear by the narrator's next sentence.

5.2.4 AdjPs/AdvPs: Why so serious?

Non-linguistic actions and attitudes can be exophorically referred to through the pattern "Why so Adj/Adv?":

(172) He turns to me, and he says "Why so serious?" (The Dark Knight)
     *"Why serious?"

Adjectives and adverbs are generally infelicitous in discourse-initial *why*-fragments unless accompanied by *so*. Weir notes this pattern, and observes that non-gradable adjectives need to have their degrees specified (Weir, 2012: 13). This seems to hold for adverbs and PPs as well — the non-gradable ones do not require either *so* or *such*:

(173) [*sees truck barrelling towards him*]
     Why today?

(174) Why *(so) gently?

(175) [*stops car due to a protest blockading the road*]
     What a pain! Why in the middle of the street? It's completely inconsiderate of others.

(176) [*watching someone stroke a hamster*]
     Why with *(such) great care?

6 Conclusion

Why-fragments are patterned after focused *why*-questions. They allow the speaker to emphasize what is puzzling about a sentence and thus generate the implicature that the speaker either disagrees with this puzzling section or finds it novel. They are therefore slightly different from tenseless *why*-questions, which allow the speaker to question the act in general by specifically omitting the tense while retaining the verb. *Why*-fragments can do this, but they can also question the wisdom of specific acts in time. Perhaps they can accomplish this because the verb is absent.

Elliptical *why*-questions presuppose a rational agent in control of the action. If no such agent is present, the question is either incoherent, or a rational agent is invented to take control of the action. This can either be an omnipotent deity who is in charge of apparently agentless actions and can be questioned metaphysically ("Why did you allow this to happen, God?"), or a previous speaker who has produced a sentence that can be questioned metalinguistically ("Why did you use the term X?").

Finally, some normal *why*-fragments can refer to elements of non-linguistic context which are named in the *why*-fragment. This last extension can take a variety of forms, and are limited to mutually salient entities. For instance, at the beginning of a phone conversation, one might be limited to "Why so late in the evening, Bob?" or "Why the sudden urge to call me?" simply because nothing else is known to be salient to both parties. Even those entities that are not mutually salient are treated as though they were ("Why the glum look?"). Truly discourse-initial *why*-fragments are subject to further restrictions on form; the categories are productive, but the grammatical form is tightly constrained.

My original contributions are the classification of *why*-fragments into three categories (normal, metalinguistic and metaphysical) and the identification of unreconstructable discourse-initial *why*-fragments such as "Why the big grin?". To my knowledge, the parallel between elliptical *why*-questions and Mad Magazine sentences has not been previously identified.

This paper does not attempt a formal explanation of the phenomena in question. It is in the hope of assisting such an explanation that I have written this descriptive account.

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