‘Why not?’ – Polarity ellipsis in \textit{why}-questions

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1. Introduction
Reduced interrogatives with \textit{why} and a negative remnant can have (at least) two kinds of readings. 

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textbf{Anaphoric reading:}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textit{Jasmine didn’t sleep.} \textit{A:}  
\item \textit{(Really?) Why not?} \textit{B:}
\end{enumerate}
\item \textbf{Modal reading:}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textit{Let’s sleep.} \textit{A:}
\item \textit{(Sure,) Why not?} \textit{B:}
\end{enumerate}
\end{enumerate}

1.1. By what criteria are they distinguished?

1.1.1. Interpretation

\begin{itemize}
\item \textbf{Anaphoric reading}
\begin{itemize}
\item Matrix contexts: \textit{information-seeking question (ISQ)}
\item Inquires about the reason for the truth of a negative proposition
\end{itemize}
\item \textbf{Modal reading}
\begin{itemize}
\item Matrix contexts: \textit{rhetorical question (RQ)}
\item Modal interpretation
\end{itemize}
\end{itemize}

1.1.2. Appropriate context of use

\begin{itemize}
\item \textbf{Anaphoric reading}
\begin{itemize}
\item Felicitous only with salient negative antecedent
\item Similar anaphoric behaviour as clausal ellipsis in sluicing
\item Cross-linguistically less available than the modal reading
\end{itemize}
\item \textbf{Modal reading}
\begin{itemize}
\item Felicitous after polar questions, suggestions, offers, evaluative judgements
\item Different anaphoric behaviour from clausal ellipsis in sluicing
\end{itemize}
\end{itemize}

1.1.3. Morphosyntactic differences

\textbf{German stress disambiguates}

\begin{itemize}
\item Stress on ‘\textit{warum}’: anaphoric interpretation
\item Stress on ‘\textit{nicht}’: a modal interpretation
\end{itemize}

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textit{A: Sie schläft nicht.}
she sleeps not
\item \textit{She isn’t sleeping.}
a. \textit{B: \textit{warum nicht}?}
why not
\item \textit{‘Why not?’}
\Rightarrow \textit{Why isn’t she sleeping?}
b. \textit{B: \textit{warum NICHT}?}
\Rightarrow \textit{Why shouldn’t she not be sleeping?}
\end{enumerate}

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In context of a positive antecedent: only stress on negation (modal reading)

(4) A: Lass uns ins Kino gehen.
   let us into the cinema go
   ‘Let’s go to the movies!’
   a. B: warum NICHT?  
      why not
      ‘Why not?’
      ⇒ Why shouldn’t we go to the movies?
      ⇒ There is no reason we shouldn’t go to the movies.
   b. B: # warum NICHT?

1.1.4. Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anaphoric</th>
<th>Matrix questions</th>
<th>Positive antecedent</th>
<th>German stress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Modal</td>
<td>ISQ</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>warum nicht</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.2. Theoretical challenges

1.2.1. The big picture

• How might the two interpretations emerge?
• To what extent might the two forms be different or unifiable?
• What is the extent and kind of cross-linguistic uniformity and variation?
• For this talk, I focus on the anaphoric case – which turns out to be rich and complex enough on its own.

1.2.2. The anaphoric reading

• What is the syntax of the anaphoric reading?
• How does the interpretation relate to the syntax?
• How can the negative antecedent requirement be accounted for?

1.3. Roadmap

• Propose an analysis of the anaphoric reading in terms of polarity ellipsis of a CP-level polarity head
• Propose an analysis of the negative antecedent requirement as a presupposition
• Present a puzzle about how negation is interpreted, and argue for a negative dependency formalized in terms of Agree
• …and then conclude.

2. The anaphoric reading as polarity ellipsis

The question: How does the fragment ‘Why not’, ‘Warum nicht?’ come to be well-formed?

Analysis:

(5) \[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{CP} \\
\text{why} \\
\Sigma P \\
\Sigma \\
\langle TP \rangle \\
not
\end{array}
\]

• The negative remnant as CP-level polarity head (Σ).
• Assumption: The high polarity head can be expressed overtly only in negative clauses with clausal ellipsis.
• why is merged in the far-left periphery
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A CP-level polarity head has been assumed by e.g. Lakoff (1990), Ladusaw (1992), Zanuttini (1997), McCloskey (2017), Merchant (2004), Vicente (2009) to account for various kinds of phenomena.

- Other kinds of polarity ellipsis in English (cf. e.g. Kramer and Rawlind (2009), Pasquereau (to appear)).

(6) Did Jasmine sleep?
   a. Probably/certainly/ of course (not).
   b. Maybe so/not.
   c. I believe/hope/think so/not.
   d. If so/not, she will be rested/tired.

- why is higher than other wh-words because it’s externally merged in the far-left periphery (K&G (2005), Bromberger (1992), Yoshida et al. (2015), Rizzi (2001)).

(7) a. Why not?
   b. *Who/what/when/where/how/which one not?

- Evidence for this being the right analysis for anaphoric ‘Why not’ (data in appendix):
  - Anaphoric behaviour similar to sluicing:
    - Same locality conditions for antecedents in islands
    - Allows for cataphors
    - Argument for clausal ellipsis by analogy
  - Negative remnants of clausal ellipsis are high in the left periphery cross-linguistically

- [XP neg] remnant orders in clausal ellipsis are only available if the XP is topicalized, or merged in the far left in some other way
- The XP cannot appear to the left of negation in clausal ellipsis if it is merely focalized
- Therefore, negation in clausal ellipsis can be located between Topic and Focus positions:

(8) Relevant parts in the CP-domain:

3. The negative antecedent requirement

Anaphoric ‘Why not’ requires a negative antecedent.

A presupposition

- In information-seeking questions why presupposes its prejacent (following Bromberger (1992))
- Here: [not (TP)] is presupposed.
3.1. The restriction

1. Anaphoric reading only with negative antecedent

A: Mary didn’t go to the movies.
B: (Really?) Why not?
⇒ Why didn’t Mary go to the movies?

2. Only modal reading with positive antecedent

A: She went to the movies.
B: Why not?
⇒ Why didn’t she go to the movies?
⇒ Why shouldn’t she have gone to the movies?
⇒ There is no reason she shouldn’t have gone to the movies.

• The requirement is satisfied by a range of negative expressions of varying strength.
• Same set of expressions that introduce sentential negativity in the sense of Klima (1964)

3.2. Arguments that it’s presuppositional

• Other kinds of polarity ellipsis (cf. Kramer and Rawlins (2009)) don’t have the same requirement:

11. Maybe Jasmine is sleeping.

12. a. No.
b. Maybe/certainly/probably/of course not.
c. If not, she will be tired.
d. #(Really?) Why not?

– If the cases in [12] are in fact cases of polarity ellipsis, the negative antecedent requirement can’t come from the ellipsis.
– It’s a idiosyncrasy of why.

• No negative antecedent condition for the modal reading:
– Accounted for by assumption that it is presuppositional
– because it’s not expected to appear in RQ interpretations

• Can be accommodated, contributed pragmatically in polarity reversal contexts [13], cf. Kroll (2014).

13. Polarity reversal contexts [after Kroll (2014)]

a. Neg-raising contexts:
    I don’t think that Trump will comply, but I don’t know why not.

b. Embeddings under remember:
    I don’t know why not, but I don’t remember being scared.

b. Accommodation in disjunction (COCA Davies (2008)):
    Do you think this was a good idea? Why or why not?

• Negative antecedent requirement specific to why
• Can be accommodated
• Presupposition of why in ISQs (Bromberger 1992)
4. Too many negations

- Negative antecedent requirement: The antecedent clause will always include sentential negation.
- Syntactic analysis as clausal ellipsis
- Anaphoric ‘Why not’ is always interpreted as including a sentential negation.
- Now we have a dilemma:

\[(14) \quad \text{Too many negations}
\]

\[\text{Why } [\Sigma P \not= \{\text{Jasmine didn’t sleep}\}]\]

\[\Rightarrow \text{Why didn’t Jasmine sleep?}\]

\[\not\Rightarrow \text{Why did Jasmine sleep?}\]

- Two syntactic instances of negation in ‘Why not’: The negative remnant and the instance in the ellipsis site.
- Only one instance is entered into the semantic interpretation.

4.1. A negative dependency

The problem outlined above is very familiar:

- Similar to Negative Concord (NC, Ladusaw (1992)), where multiple syntactic instances of negation contribute one semantic instance of negation.
- The most successful analyses of the ‘too many negations dilemma’ (Zeijlstra (2010), Kramer and Rawlins (2009), Ladusaw (1992)) appeal to purely formal (i.e. uninterpretable) expressions of polarity.
- One or the other instance of negation in ‘Why not’ must be uninterpretable.

A syntactic dependency is needed to ensure that only one of the two negations in the syntax is entered into the semantics [15].
4.1.1. Move or Agree?

Antecedents with negative expressions other than not speak against a movement analysis.

![Diagram](17)

- Implausible: Movement-operation changes the overt expression of moved element
- Therefore, the negative dependency should be formalized as Agree.
  - Assuming that negative expressions (e.g. never, nobody, barely, negative quantified DPs) may bear interpretable negative features.
  - This has been suggested for negative concord (Zeijlstra (2008)).

4.1.2. High or low interpretation?

One possibility: Negation is interpreted low

- In that case, overt negation in 'Why not' is uninterpretable and licensed by covert interpretable negation in ellipsis site.

Other possibility: Negation is interpreted high

- In that case, overt negation in 'Why not' is interpretable and licenses the semantically vacuous negation in the ellipsis site.

3 In that case, we would have to assume a negative dependency in the antecedent site (and by analogy all English negative declaratives).
• If negation were interpreted high in the ellipsis: also high in antecedent.

• This possibility can be ruled out if we consider the scope of negation in quantifier float constructions...

Evidence from scope

• Consider quantified pronouns where the scope of the quantifier is fixed:

  (20)  
  a.  
  We all didn’t sleep.  
  \( (\forall > \neg) \)  
  Why not?  
  ⇒ Why did you all not sleep?  
  \( (\forall > \neg) \)  
  b.  
  We didn’t all sleep.  
  \( (\neg > \forall) \)  
  Why not?  
  ⇒ Why didn’t you all sleep?  
  \( (\neg > \forall) \)  

• If negation were interpreted high, the fixed scope would have to be accounted for by
  – obligatory quantifier raising (QR) for subject cases
  – prohibition of QR in object cases

• High interpretation of negation cannot account for scope w/o ad hoc assumptions.

• If negation is interpreted low, the fixed scope could be captured by the generalization that the quantifier is interpreted in situ.

(22)

5. Conclusion

• Clausal ellipsis of a CP-level high polarity head

• The negative remnant is uninterpretable and enters into a NC-like licensing relation with an interpretable instance of negation in the ellipsis site.

• Negative antecedent requirement due to the factivity-presupposition of why in canonical questions.

• Presupposition only in ISQs: Explains why modal reading doesn’t have this restriction.

• Many questions remain open, but progress has been made.
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References


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