

# Elliptical *why not*

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*Abstract.* This paper investigates clausal ellipsis with *why not*; e.g., *Chris didn't come, but I don't know why not*. Elliptical *why not* requires a negative antecedent, involves negative concord, and is subject to a clausemate condition. These empirical traits might be captured by analysing elliptical *why not* as a version of polarity ellipsis. Despite consisting of *not* and *why*, *why not* behaves very differently from both negative stripping and *why*-stripping.

*Keywords:* ellipsis, *why not*, polarity ellipsis, negative stripping, *why*-stripping.

## 1. Introduction

This paper investigates clausal ellipsis with *why not*, as illustrated in (1):

- (1) a. Chris didn't come, but I don't know why not.
- b. S: I don't like beans.     R: Why not?
- c. I suspected Sam wouldn't come, but I can't recall why not.
- d. Either hand in your homework on time, or explain why not.

In outline, section 2 establishes three empirical generalisations. First, elliptical *why not* requires a negative antecedent; second, it involves a concordant rather than a new negation; and third, the reason and negation must come from the same clause. Section 3 considers the extent to which *why not* can be analysed as an instance of polarity ellipsis (Kramer & Rawlins 2009, Hofmann 2018), akin to examples like (2):

- (2) S: Did John not go?     R: No.

Sections 4 and 5 argue against assimilating *why not* to two superficially similar phenomena. Despite consisting of *not* and *why*, *why not* behaves very differently from both negative stripping, as in (3) (Merchant 2003), and *why*-stripping, as in (4) (Yoshida et al. 2015):

- (3) John cooked beans for dinner, not LENTILS.
- (4) John cooked beans for dinner, but I don't know why BEANS.

Section 6 concludes.

In focusing on elliptical *why not* of the sort in (1), this paper sets aside other combinations of *why*, *not*, and ellipsis. Recent work has distinguished the kinds in (5)-(7):

- (5) Free modal *why not* (Anand et al. 2021)  
S: Shall we go out tonight? R: Sure, why not?  
Paraphrase: Why shouldn't we go out tonight? There's no reason not to go out tonight.
- (6) *Why*-VP (Zaitso 2020)  
Why (not) major in Linguistics?
- (7) Metacommunicative-*why* (Woods & Vicente 2021)  
S: Is Sally here? R: Why?  
Paraphrase: Why are you asking me that? There's some reason for your question that I'm not understanding.

Barring historical accident, all of (1) and (5)-(7) should ultimately be accounted for under a unified analysis, at some level of abstraction.

## 2. Empirical Generalisations

This section sets out three empirical generalisations regarding elliptical *why not*.

### 2.1 *The Negative Antecedent Requirement*

Clausal ellipsis requires an antecedent with which it is in some sense identical (Ross 1967, Chung et al. 1995, Merchant 2001, a.m.o.). In the case of *why not*, a negative antecedent supports clausal ellipsis in (8):

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

A positive antecedent, however, fails to support ellipsis in (9):<sup>1</sup>

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

It might be appealing to attribute the ungrammaticality of (9) to contradiction; after all, John's leaving precludes knowing the reason why he didn't leave. The exchange in (10), however, sets contradiction aside. The antecedent is compatible with Mary not having arrived on time (as can be emphasised by further preceding context). It is accordingly felicitous to follow up with *why* and negation in the fully pronounced (a), and elliptically in (b). Yet clausal ellipsis with *why not* remains distinctly ungrammatical in (c):<sup>2</sup>

(10) (I'm very disappointed by Mary.) I thought she would arrive on time.

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

b. Do you know why she didn't?

c. \*Do you know why not?

In sum, elliptical *why not* requires a negative antecedent.

## 2.2 Negative Neutralisation

Consider the meaning of elliptical *why not* in (11):

(11) S: John didn't leave. R: Why not? = Why didn't John leave?

In particular, notice that R's utterance is not interpreted with double negation. We might have expected the two negations of *didn't* in the antecedent and *not* in *why not* to cancel out. Instead, the meaning involves a single negation: 'What was the reason for John not leaving?' Thus the

<sup>1</sup>The failure of ellipsis in (9) shows that the requirement for a negative antecedent is different from just having negation precede the ellipsis. Negation is present above the ellipsis site in (9) as part of *I don't know*; yet *why not*'s antecedent negation must be part of its antecedent clause, as in (8). In other words, not all preceding instances of negation qualify as an antecedent. See also discussion of the clausemate condition in section 2.3, below.

<sup>2</sup>The embedded clause *she would arrive on time* in (10) is in principle available as an antecedent for clausal ellipsis, as shown by (i):

(i) S: I thought Mary would arrive on time.  
R: Do you know {who with, when exactly}?

*not* of *why not* is not ‘new’; rather, a negative antecedent licenses a negative sluice, with whose negativity *why not* is concordant. Perhaps surprisingly, that makes *why not* synonymous with *why* and clausal ellipsis, as in (12):

(12) S: John didn’t leave. R: Why? = Why didn’t John leave?

Following [Kramer & Rawlins \(2009\)](#) for polarity ellipsis, we will term this effect ‘negative neutralisation’.<sup>3</sup> The *not* of elliptical *why not* is neutralised, with the result that (11) and (12) are synonymous, sharing a single negation reading.

### 2.3 *The Clausemate Condition*

We saw in the first subsection that a negative antecedent is necessary for elliptical *why not*. Here, we see that a negative antecedent is not sufficient. Rather, *why*’s reason and *not*’s negation must come from the same clause.

The exchange in (13) establishes a baseline. The matrix clause is both negated and questioned by *why*. R and R’ are both good and ask the same thing, questioning the reason for John’s not telling. In this regard, they both have the same meaning as the fully pronounced version of the sentence:<sup>4</sup>

(13) S: John didn’t tell Mary he was going. R: Why? R’: Why not?  
R = R’ = Why didn’t John tell Mary he was going? ✓*why* ~ *tell*

In (14), however, the embedded clause of the antecedent is negated. The context contradicts the lower clause reading of the ellipsis site; i.e., ‘Why didn’t John go to the party?’ This brings out the relevant reading where the ellipsis site includes the matrix *tell*-clause. The R response, *Why?*, is as ambiguous as the fully pronounced version of the sentence – it can be questioning the reason for John’s telling or the reason for his not going. The R’ response, *Why not?*, however, is unambiguous – it can only be questioning the reason for John’s not going:

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<sup>3</sup>Cf. ‘cancellation effect’ ([Anand et al. 2021:e78](#)).

<sup>4</sup>Negative island-hood ([Ross 1984](#)) precludes (13) questioning the reason for going.

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

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

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

R': Why not? ≠ Why did John tell Mary he didn't go? \**why* ~ *tell* ✓*why* ~ *go*

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

The one good reading of *why not* in (14) involves both the reason and the negation associating with the lower clause. As expected, this reading is blocked in (15) by turning the lower clause into an island. The *wh*-island prevents *why* from originating in the lower clause, removing the 'reason for not going' reading. This renders R unambiguous, with the 'reason for telling' reading left intact. R', however, is left with no readings, rendering it ungrammatical:

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

R: Why? = Why did John tell Mary who didn't go? ✓*why* ~ *tell* \**why* ~ *go*

R': \* Why not? ≠ Why did John tell Mary who didn't go? \**why* ~ *tell* \**why* ~ *go*

In sum, the reason questioned by *why* and the negation with which *not* is concordant must come from the same clause.

#### 2.4 Empirical Summary

Elliptical *why not* requires a negative antecedent, exhibits negative neutralisation, and is subject to a clausemate condition. With these empirical generalisations in hand, the next section considers the extent to which elliptical *why not* might be analysed as an instance of polarity ellipsis.

### 3. *Why not* as Polarity Ellipsis?

A pertinent example of polarity ellipsis, involving the response particle *no*, is (16):

(16) S: Is Alfonso not coming to the party? R: No.

Kramer & Rawlins (2009) analyse (16) and related examples as involving ellipsis of the com-

plement of the polarity head  $\Sigma$  (Laka 1990), as sketched in (17):<sup>5</sup>

(17) S: Is Alfonso not coming to the party? R: [ $_{\Sigma P}$  No  $\Sigma$  [ $_{TP}$  he is not coming to the party]].

Hofmann (2018) explicitly applies this analysis to elliptical *why not* along the lines of (18):

(18) S: John didn't go. R: [ $_{CP}$  Why [ $_{\Sigma P}$  not [ $_{TP}$  John didn't go]]]?

In (18), *not* realises the polarity head  $\Sigma$ , while *why* is base-generated high in the left periphery. Such special treatment of *why* is argued for on independent grounds by Bromberger (1992) and Rizzi (2001). Most relevantly here, *why* is exceptional as the only *wh*-word to participate in the [*wh not*] frame, as shown in (19) (Hofmann 2018):

(19) \**who/what/when/where/how/which one not?*

Likewise impossible is *how come not* (20), further reflecting the exceptionality of *why not*:

- (20) a. \*John didn't leave, but I don't know how come not.  
b. S: I don't like beans. R: \*How come not?

The rest of this section evaluates the extent to which elliptical *why not* can be analysed as an instance of polarity ellipsis. The analysis in (18) will be drawn up against the three empirical generalisations from the previous section. While polarity ellipsis provides precedent mechanisms for capturing negative neutralisation, the negative antecedent requirement must be stipulated. Moreover, the clausemate condition suggests that *why not* forms a constituent.

### 3.1 *Accounting for Negative Neutralisation*

Like elliptical *why not*, polarity ellipsis exhibits negative neutralisation (Kramer & Rawlins 2009). Consider the meaning of (16), repeated with a *yes* response for comparison in (21):

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<sup>5</sup>Compare e.g. Krifka (2013) or Roelofsen & Farkas (2015), who treat *yes* and *no* as response particles anaphoric to propositions. I stick to exploring the potential of an elliptical, syntactic account of *why not* in this paper. A discourse level account may be inappropriate, since *why not*, unlike *yes* and *no*, can be embedded – viz. (1).

(21) S: Is Alfonso not coming to the party? R: No. R': Yes. R = R' = he isn't coming

The *no* response here is not interpreted with double negation; instead of *no* and *not* cancelling out, the meaning involves a single negation: Alfonso is not coming to the party.<sup>6</sup> Thus *no*, rather than contributing a new negation, is concordant with *not* in the antecedent. Just as *why not* and *why* were synonymous across (11) and (12), so *no* and *yes* are synonymous in (21) – both responses mean that Alfonso is not coming to the party.

Kramer & Rawlins (2009) and Hofmann (2018) analyse negative neutralisation as a kind of negative concord. For concreteness, they adopt the analysis of Zeijlstra (2004). In a chain of Negative features, exactly one is interpretable, [iNeg]. The rest are uninterpretable, [uNeg], contributing negation morphologically, but not semantically. Example (22) sketches the analysis, which has the same shape across polarity ellipsis (a) and elliptical *why not* (b). In both cases, the negation we hear is uninterpretable, but concordant with a single interpreted negation inside the ellipsis site:

- (22) a. [ΣP NO<sub>[uNeg]</sub> Σ<sub>[uNeg]</sub> [TP ~~he is not<sub>[iNeg]</sub> coming to the party~~ ] ]  
 b. [CP Why [ΣP not<sub>[uNeg]</sub> [TP ~~John didn't<sub>[iNeg]</sub> go~~ ] ] ]

Thus the concord analysis of negative neutralisation in polarity ellipsis can be straightforwardly transposed to elliptical *why not*. In the absence of a deeper explanation, negative concord will also provide the means to capture the negative antecedent requirement, with the stipulation that the *not* of *why not* must be [uNeg].

### 3.2 Accounting for the Negative Antecedent Requirement

While polarity ellipsis and elliptical *why not* are similar with respect to negative neutralisation, they differ with respect to the requirement placed on the polarity of their antecedent. Unlike with *why not*, there is no negative negative antecedent requirement on polarity ellipsis with *no*. The relevant part of (21) is repeated in (23):

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<sup>6</sup>*No* alone in (21) is not interpreted with double negation. But *no* in response to a negated utterance is ambiguous when accompanied by overt clausal material (with VP ellipsis), as shown in (i):

- (i) S: Is Alfonso not coming to the party? R: No, he isn't (coming). R': No, he is (coming).

(23) S: Is Alfonso coming to the party? R: No. = he isn't coming

The challenge is to derive the right meaning for (23) while respecting semantic identity between the ellipsis site and its antecedent. As sketched in (24), Kramer & Rawlins (2009: ex. 9) achieve this by situating interpretable negation outside the ellipsis site on the polarity head  $\Sigma$ , which is concordant with uninterpretable negations on *no* and inside the ellipsis site on *not*:

(24) [<sub>SP</sub> NO<sub>[uNeg]</sub>  $\Sigma$ <sub>[iNeg]</sub> [TP he is not<sub>[uNeg]</sub> coming to the party]].

Thus the negative antecedent requirement is unique to elliptical *why not*. The rest of this subsection argues against deriving this requirement from the general presupposition properties of *why*, as proposed by Hofmann (2018).

Hofmann's argument builds on the fact that information-seeking *why* is factive (Bromberger 1992). Hence [*why not TP*] presupposes [*not TP*], requiring a background compatible with [*not TP*]. Thus *why not* will follow most naturally from a previous utterance of [*not TP*].

However, *why* in concert with negation does not always require a negative antecedent. In (10), repeated here as (25), the antecedent is compatible with Mary not having arrived on time. Accordingly, a response built out of *why* and negation is grammatical in the fully pronounced (a), and with verb phrase ellipsis in (b). Yet clausal ellipsis with *why not* is distinctly ungrammatical in (c):

- (25) (I'm very disappointed by Mary.) I thought she would arrive on time.
- a. Do you know why she didn't arrive on time?
  - b. Do you know why she didn't?
  - c. \*Do you know why not?

The scenario in (26) makes the same point. The context establishes an expectation for reasons why balanced against reasons why not, as fulfilled in the fully pronounced (a). The same interpretation is available with verb phrase ellipsis in (b). Clausal ellipsis with *why not*, however, is ungrammatical in (c):<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>As for (25) in note 2, the first conjunct in (26) in principle makes *Mary wants to move to LA* available for

- (26) Mary is undecided about moving to LA. She's drawn up a list of pros and cons. I've seen her pros list, but not her cons list. As such...
- a. I know why Mary wants to move to LA, but I don't know why she doesn't want to move to LA.
  - b. I know why Mary wants to move to LA, but I don't know why she doesn't.
  - c. \*I know why Mary wants to move to LA, but I don't know why not.

Thus *why* and negation can be felicitous in the absence of a negative antecedent; the negative antecedent requirement is peculiar to elliptical *why not*. This peculiarity undermines any attempt to derive the negative antecedent requirement from the general presupposition properties of *why*.

Instead, we can stipulate that the *not* of *why not* must be [uNeg]. The mechanics of negative concord will force there to be an [iNeg] inside the ellipsis site; otherwise *not*'s [uNeg] will cause a crash at the interfaces. The [iNeg] in the ellipsis site in turn requires a negative antecedent.

This stipulation ought ultimately to be derived from something deeper. For now, it is possible at least to capture the negative antecedent requirement in the general realm of polarity ellipsis. However, the clausemate condition motivates a departure from the syntax of polarity ellipsis, since it seems that *why not* behaves as a constituent.

### 3.3 Accounting for the Clausemate Condition

We have seen that the reason and negation components of *why not* must come from the same clause.<sup>8</sup> The central example was (14), repeated here as (27):

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clausal ellipsis, as shown in (i):

- (i) I know why Mary wants to move to LA, but I don't know {when, who with, for how long}.

<sup>8</sup>We can't ask whether polarity ellipsis has a clausemate condition when there's only one word involved; e.g., *no*. We can, however, confirm that polarity ellipsis is able to associate with an embedded negation:

- (i) S: John said Mary wasn't coming.  
 R: No ~~John said Mary wasn't coming~~. But he was lying – she is coming.

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

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

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

R': Why not? ≠ Why did John tell Mary he didn't go? \**why* ~ *tell* ✓*why* ~ *go*

This clausemate condition would be difficult to capture based on the syntax presented thus far. In (28), (a) repeats the analysis of *why not* with monoclausal ellipsis according to Hofmann (2018). Importantly, *why* and *not* are independent pieces. It is far from straightforward to apply this analysis to elliptical *why not* when it associates with an embedded clause, as on the good reading of R' in (27). The derivation in (b) achieves this, but involves fronting the embedded clause, along with two independent applications of clausal ellipsis. In order to capture the island-boundedness of (c), clausal ellipsis in the embedded clause must fail, or negative concord be blocked across an island boundary:

- (28) a. [CP Why [ΣP not<sub>[uNeg]</sub> [TP John didn't<sub>[iNeg]</sub> go]]] (Hofmann 2018)  
 b. [CP Why [ΣP not<sub>[uNeg]</sub> [he didn't<sub>[iNeg]</sub> go]]]; [TP John told Mary t<sub>j</sub>]  
 c. \*[CP Why [ΣP not<sub>[uNeg]</sub> [CP-island who<sub>k</sub> t<sub>k</sub> didn't<sub>[iNeg]</sub> go]]]; [TP John told Mary t<sub>j</sub>]

The clausemate condition is captured more straightforwardly under the analysis in (29). Rather than treating *why* and *not* as independent pieces, [*why not*] is a constituent in (a), following Merchant (2006).<sup>9</sup> With multiclausal ellipsis in (b), this constituent can move from the embedded clause, followed by a single application of clausal ellipsis. In (c), movement is blocked by island-hood:

- (29) a. [CP [Why not<sub>[uNeg]</sub>] [TP John didn't<sub>[iNeg]</sub> go]] (Merchant 2006)  
 b. [CP [Why not<sub>[uNeg]</sub>]<sub>j</sub> [TP John told Mary [CP t<sub>j</sub> he didn't<sub>[iNeg]</sub> go]]]  
 c. \*[CP [Why not<sub>[uNeg]</sub>]<sub>j</sub> [TP John told Mary [CP-island who<sub>k</sub> t<sub>j</sub> t<sub>k</sub> didn't<sub>[iNeg]</sub> go]]]

<sup>9</sup>Merchant (2006) presents cross-linguistic evidence for the following generalisation: if the sentential negative marker in a given language is phrasal, it will occur in the collocation *why not?*; if instead it is a head, it will not. He argues that this follows from the standard assumption that *why* is a phrasal adverb, to which only other phrases can adjoin. On this view, [*why not*] forms a constituent.

### 3.4 Analysis Summary

Attempting to account for negative neutralisation, the negative antecedent requirement, and the clausemate condition results in an analysis along the lines of (30) for monoclausal (a) and multiclausal (b) ellipsis with *why not*. [*Why not*] is a moveable constituent whose negation is always uninterpretable:

- (30) a. [CP [*Why not*<sub>[uNeg]]] [TP ... [*iNeg*] ...]]  
 b. [CP [*Why not*<sub>[uNeg]]<sub>j</sub>] [TP ... [CP *t<sub>j</sub>* ... [*iNeg*] ... ]]]</sub></sub>

The next two sections compare *why not* with two superficially similar phenomena. We will see that despite consisting of *not* and *why*, elliptical *why not* behaves very differently from both negative stripping and *why*-stripping.

## 4. Cf. Negative Stripping

The example of negative stripping from (3) is repeated in (31). Following Merchant (2003), negative stripping is derived by focus movement of the remnant out of a clausal ellipsis site:

- (31) John cooked beans for dinner, not LENTILS!  
 [ not LENTILS [TP ~~John cooked *t* for dinner~~]]

Elliptical *why not* behaves very differently from negative stripping. There is an immediate difference between *why not* and negative stripping (*not XP*) in terms of word order. Moreover, negative stripping does not conform to any of the three empirical generalisations regarding elliptical *why not*. Foremost, negative stripping is not subject to a negative antecedent requirement – already in (31), the antecedent is not negative.

Furthermore, negative stripping does not exhibit negative neutralisation. In a rich context like (32), it is possible for negative stripping to take a negative antecedent:

(32) Context: John almost always cooks both chicken and lentils for dinner. But last night he was feeling lazy, and only cooked one.

S: John didn't cook lentils for dinner.

R: No, John didn't cook CHICKEN for dinner, not LENTILS!

[not<sub>[iNeg]</sub> LENTILS [<sub>TP</sub> John didn't<sub>[iNeg]</sub> cook *t* for dinner]]

Crucially, (32) means that John did cook lentils for dinner. That is, the two negations – *not* in the antecedent and stripping *not* – cancel out to yield a positive interpretation; there is no neutralisation effect. Formally, the *not* of negative stripping introduces a new [iNeg], even when there is already [iNeg] in the antecedent.

Finally, negative stripping is not subject to the clausemate condition. In (33), *not* can negate the higher clause while the remnant is sourced from the lower clause:

(33) You said John cooked beans for dinner, (but) not LENTILS.

Available interpretation: You didn't say John cooked lentils for dinner.

(cf. Vicente 2006:ex.24b)

Thus negative stripping is starkly different from elliptical *why not*. The next section shows the same is true of *why*-stripping.

## 5. Cf. *Why*-Stripping

The example of *why*-stripping from (4) is repeated in (34). The analysis follows Yoshida et al. (2015). *Why* is base-generated high in the left periphery (Bromberger 1992, Rizzi 2001), with focus movement of the remnant out of a clausal ellipsis site (Merchant 2004):<sup>10</sup>

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

[<sub>CP1</sub> Why [<sub>CP2</sub> BEANS [<sub>TP</sub> John cooked *t* for dinner]]]

Yoshida et al. (2015) argue that this focus movement is an overt manifestation of focus-association with *why* in non-ellipsis contexts (Bromberger 1992), as in (35):

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<sup>10</sup>*Why*-stripping allows the remnant to bear focus despite its mention in the first clause, *contra* Rosen's Generalisation (Rosen 1976).

(35) I don't know why John cooked BEANS for dinner.

At first blush, it might be appealing to analyse *why not* as an instance of *why*-stripping. The analysis in (36), paralleling (34), would involve focus movement of *not* out of the ellipsis site:

(36) John didn't cook beans for dinner, but I don't know why NOT.

[CP<sub>1</sub> Why [CP<sub>2</sub> NOT [<sub>TP</sub> ~~John did t cook beans for dinner~~]]]

On the contrary, this section gives three arguments against analysing elliptical *why not* as *why*-stripping. First, they differ in island sensitivity. Second, elliptical *why not* can be acceptable in circumstances where there is no *not* to move. Third, *why*-stripping is generally possible only with lexical and not functional material.<sup>11</sup>

### 5.1 Island Sensitivity

To begin, *why*-stripping and *why not* differ in island sensitivity. *Why*-stripping is island insensitive (Yoshida et al. 2015). In (37), the remnant is successfully sourced from inside a complex NP island (Ross 1967):

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

Elliptical *why not*, by contrast, is island sensitive. Example (38) – recall also (15) – attempts to source both *why*'s reason and *not*'s negation from the relative clause, respecting the clausemate condition. However, the attempt fails due to island-hood:

(38) (John's cooking makes heavy use of beans. Surprisingly...)

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

Thus *why*-stripping and elliptical *why not* differ in island sensitivity.

<sup>11</sup>It wouldn't make sense to draw *why*-stripping up against the three empirical generalisations for elliptical *why not*, since they all have to do with negation.

## 5.2 *Non-Not Negations*

Barring (1d), in all of our examples so far the negativity of *why not*'s antecedent has been provided by sentential *not*. However, it can also be provided by other negations, syntactic and pragmatic.

Syntactically, negation can be provided by expressions that pass Klima (1964) tests for sentential negativity (Hofmann 2018). In (39), a negative quantifier, negatively quantified DP, and negative adverb all successfully antecede elliptical *why not*, just as they pass the Klima test of continuing with *neither* rather than *so*:

- (39) S: {Nobody, No students, Chris never} left.  
R: Why not? R': Neither/\*So did Sam.

Pragmatically, the negativity of *why not*'s antecedent can be provided by exclusive disjunction, as in (40):

- (40) Either the Board grants the license by December 15 or it explains . . .  
a. ~~why the Board doesn't grant the license by December 15.~~  
b. why not.

Kroll (2019) successfully accounts for the polarity switch between antecedent and ellipsis in cases like (a) in terms of local contextual entailment. With exclusive disjunction, we consider the second disjunct under the assumption that the first disjunct was false (Karttunen 1974). Thus the pragmatically negative first disjunct matches the syntactically negative second disjunct in polarity. The negative ellipsis site in (a) in turn permits pronouncing *not* in (b).

The import of (39) and (40) is that there is no *not* to move (Hofmann 2018). Since focus movement is central to the *why*-stripping-like analysis under consideration in (36), the success of elliptical *why not* in (39) and (40) severely limits the viability of assimilating *why not* to *why*-stripping.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>On the analysis considered in section 3, (39) can be straightforwardly accounted for if *nobody*, *never*, etc. bear [iNeg] (Hofmann 2018). Other downward entailing operators that fail Klima tests, such as in (i), do not support elliptical *why not*, since they do not bear [Neg] features. It is interesting that while the negativity of *why not*'s antecedent can be provided pragmatically in (40), it cannot be provided semantically here:

5.3 *Lexical vs. Functional*

*Why*-stripping is possible with many categories of remnants, both phrasal and lexical (Yoshida et al. 2015). A representative sample is given in (41):

- (41) I think that John should cook for Mary.
- a. Why [<sub>DP</sub> Mary]?
  - b. Why [<sub>PP</sub> for Mary]?
  - c. Why [<sub>CP</sub> that John should cook for Mary]?
  - d. Why [<sub>V</sub> cook]?
  - e. Why [<sub>P</sub> for]? (cf. *with*)

However, it seems that *why*-stripping is not possible with functional heads. Examples (42)-(44) demonstrate for complementizers, modals, and possessive pronouns, respectively. In each case, the context is one where focus-association of negation with *why* is felicitous (a) – recall (35) (Bromberger 1992). Yet *why*-stripping (b) is ungrammatical:<sup>13</sup>

- (i) S: { At most two, Few } students left. R: \*Why not? R': So/\*Neither did Sam.

Furthermore, the negativity of *why not*'s antecedent cannot be provided by lexical negation, as shown in (ii) (Gary Thoms, p.c.). The failed Klima tests with R' suggest that lexical negations do not bear [iNeg]:

- (ii) a. S: Sarah is unhappy. R: \*Why not? R': So/\*Neither is Sam.  
b. S: Elliot lacks an excuse. R: \*Why not? R': So/\*Neither does Sam.

<sup>13</sup>With THEIRS in place of THEIR, (42b) becomes good; though rather than an attempt at *why*-stripping with functional material, we then have *why*-stripping of a DP with NP ellipsis, as indicated in (i):

- (i) Why [<sub>DP</sub> THEIRS [<sub>NP</sub> advice] ]?

*Theirs* rather than *their* independently licenses NP ellipsis, as shown in (ii):

- (ii) We did our job; they haven't done theirs/\*their.

Along similar lines, *why*-stripping of a VP can combine with constituent negation and VP ellipsis to give examples like (iii). The idea that (a) is instance of *why*-stripping finds support in the island-insensitivity of (b):

- (iii) a. ?John likes not having a boss, but I don't know why [<sub>VP</sub> NOT [<sub>VP</sub> having a boss] ].  
b. ?John likes [the idea of not having a boss], but I don't know why NOT.

- (42) (Questionable lawyers are advising Sam to plead guilty.)
- a. S: Sam should take their advice. R: Why should Sam take THEIR advice?  
b. S: Sam should take their advice. R: \*Why THEIR?
- (43) a. S: I think that John should cook for Mary.  
R: Why do you think John SHOULD cook for Mary?  
b. S: I think that John should cook for Mary. R: \*Why SHOULD?
- (44) (R. is not ready to concede that Mary left.)
- a. S: John said that Mary left. R: Why did he say THAT Mary left?  
b. S: John said that Mary left. R: \*Why THAT? (cf. *if, whether*)

If sentential negation is functional rather than lexical, then we would expect *why not* – were it an instance of *why*-stripping – to pattern with (42)-(44). Instead, the fact that elliptical *why not* is possible argues that it should be analysed separately from *why*-stripping.

In sum, elliptical *why not* behaves differently from *why*-stripping in terms of island sensitivity, the source of negation, and lexical vs. functional heads. As such, elliptical *why not* should not be analysed as an instance of *why*-stripping.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>It is however possible to combine negative stripping and *why*-stripping, as in (i) (cf. Yoshida et al. 2015: 362, fn. 45):

- (i) a. Even an ordinary worker must be respected. So why not MARY?  
b. John cooked vegetables for dinner. I don't know why not BEANS.  
c. S: I want to interview Susan. R: Sure, but why not MARY?

Such 'negative *why*-stripping' is best thought of as a combination of negative stripping and *why*-stripping. From the applicable diagnostics of sections 4 and 5, it is clear that negative *why*-stripping does not involve elliptical *why not*. First, as (i) attests, negative *why*-stripping does not require a negative antecedent. Second, like *why*-stripping (recall section 5.1), negative *why*-stripping is island-insensitive (ii):

- (ii) John cooked [a dish that was made of vegetables] for dinner. I don't know why not BEANS.

An additional difference between negative *why*-stripping and elliptical *why not* comes with respect to *how come*. Further to negative *why*-stripping, there exists negative *how come* stripping, as in (iii) (Yoshida et al. 2015: 326, fn. 2):

- (iii) S: The boss decided to promote Mary. R: How come not ME?

However, as we saw with (20), repeated here, there is no *how come not* correlate of elliptical *why not*:

## 6. Conclusion

The previous two sections argued against assimilating elliptical *why not* to either negative stripping or *why*-stripping. Instead, we are left with the analysis suggested in (30) at the end of section 3, repeated here:

- (45) a. [CP [Why not<sub>[uNeg]</sub>] [TP ... [iNeg] ...]]  
 b. [CP [Why not<sub>[uNeg]</sub>]<sub>j</sub> [TP ... [CP *t<sub>j</sub>* ... [iNeg] ...]]]

Inspired by polarity ellipsis (Kramer & Rawlins 2009), negative neutralisation is effected by negative concord (Hofmann 2018). The negative antecedent requirement is specific to elliptical *why not*, so cannot be derived from the general presupposition properties of *why* (pace Hofmann 2018); for now, it can be captured by the stipulation that the *not* of *why not* is always [uNeg]. Finally, the clausemate condition is easier to account for when treating [*why not*] as a constituent (Merchant 2006), rather than separate pieces in the CP layer.

It remains for future work to uncover the source of the negative antecedent requirement and to integrate elliptical *why not* with other combinations of *why*, *not*, and ellipsis, as set aside at the outset in (5)-(7).

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- (iv) a. \*John didn't leave, but I don't know how come not.  
 b. S: I don't like beans. R: \*How come not?

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