

# 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 are best 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: elliptical *why not* (i) requires a negative antecedent, (ii) involves a concordant rather than a new negation, and (iii) 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 begins by laying 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):

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

It might be appealing to attribute the ungrammaticality of (9) to contradiction. However, as (10) shows, it is grammatically possible – if usually infelicitous – to speak contradictions (a), even elliptically (b). Elliptical *why not* is distinctly ungrammatical by comparison in (c):

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

- a. #why he didn't leave.
- b. #why he didn't leave.
- c. \*why not.

Moreover, the contrast persists – contradiction aside – in (11). Since the antecedent is compatible with Mary not having arrived on time, it is 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>1</sup>

(11) I thought Mary would arrive on time.

- a. Do you know why she didn't arrive on time?
- b. Do you know why she didn't ~~arrive on time~~?
- c. \*Do you know why not?

Overall, elliptical *why not* requires a negative antecedent.

## 2.2 Negative Neutralisation

Consider the meaning of elliptical *why not* in (12):

<sup>1</sup>The contrasts between (b) and (c) in (10) and (11) may be representative of a fundamental difference between clausal ellipsis and verb phrase ellipsis (VPE). Clausal ellipsis requires identity between the elided material and its antecedent (Ross 1967, Chung et al. 1995, Merchant 2001, a.m.o.). VPE, on the other hand, at least tolerates (Rooth 1992, Tancredi 1992), if not requires (Stockwell 2018, 2020, Griffiths 2019), contrast above the ellipsis site. In the (b) examples, this contrast is provided by the opposing polarity.

- (12) a. S: John didn't leave. R: Why not?  
 b. Why not ~~John didn't~~ leave?  
 c. Why not? = Why didn't John leave?

Notice that *why not* is not interpreted with double negation in (a). We might have expected the two negations of pronounced *not* and elided *didn't* to cancel out in (b). Instead, the meaning of R involves a single negation, as in (c): 'What was the reason for John not leaving?' Thus the *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 in (13):

- (13) a. S: John didn't leave. R: Why?  
 b. Why ~~John didn't~~ leave?  
 c. Why = Why didn't John leave?

Following [Kramer & Rawlins \(2009\)](#) for polarity ellipsis, we will term this effect 'negative neutralisation'.<sup>2</sup> The *not* of elliptical *why not* is neutralised, with the result that (12) and (13) 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.

Example (14) 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:<sup>3</sup>

- (14) 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*

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<sup>2</sup>Cf. 'cancellation effect' ([Anand et al. 2021:e78](#)).

<sup>3</sup>Negative island-hood ([Ross 1984](#)) precludes (14) questioning the reason for going.

In (15), 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:

(15) (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 (15) involves both the reason and the negation associating with the lower clause. As expected, this reading is blocked in (16) 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, hence judged ungrammatical:

(16) 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*

#### 2.4 Empirical Summary

Elliptical *why not* requires a negative antecedent, exhibits negative neutralisation, and is subject to a clausemate condition: the reason questioned by *why* and the negation with which *not* is concordant must come from the same clause. With these empirical generalisations in hand, the next section considers the extent to which elliptical *why not* can 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 (17):

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

Kramer & Rawlins (2009) analyse (17) and related examples as involving ellipsis of the complement of the polarity head  $\Sigma$  (Laka 1990), as sketched in (18):

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

Hofmann (2018) explicitly applies this analysis to elliptical *why not* along the lines of (19):

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

In (19), *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 pertinently here, *why* is exceptional as the only *wh*-word to participate in the [*wh not*] frame, as shown in (20) (Hofmann 2018):

(20) \**who/what/when/where/how/which one 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 (19) 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 (17), repeated with a *yes* response for comparison in (21):

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

The *no* response 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. Thus *no*, rather than contributing a new negation, is concordant with *not* in the antecedent. Just as *why not* and *why* were synonymous across (12) and (13), 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:

- (22) a. [ΣP NO<sub>[uNeg]</sub> Σ [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. To get the right meaning in (23), *no* must be interpretably negative:

- (23) S: Is Alfonso coming to the party? R: No. = he isn't coming  
 [ΣP NO<sub>[iNeg]</sub> [TP he is coming to the party]].

Thus the negative antecedent requirement is unique to elliptical *why not*. The rest of this sub-

section 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* 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 (11), repeated here as (24), the antecedent is compatible with Mary not having arrived on time. Hence *why* and negation in the fully pronounced (a) and with verb phrase ellipsis in (b) are grammatical. Yet clausal ellipsis with *why not* is distinctly ungrammatical in (c):

- (24) I thought Mary would arrive on time.
- a. Do you know why she didn't arrive on time?
  - b. Do you know why she didn't ~~arrive on time~~?
  - c. \*Do you know why not?

Thus the negative antecedent requirement is specific to clausal ellipsis with *why not* (c). 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 [iNeg] inside the ellipsis site, based on [iNeg] in the antecedent; otherwise *not*'s [uNeg] will cause a crash at the interfaces.

Ultimately, we would hope to derive this stipulation from something deeper. For now, we are at least able to capture the negative antecedent requirement in the general realm of polarity ellipsis. However, the clausemate condition motivates a slight 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>4</sup> The central example was (15), repeated here as (25):

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<sup>4</sup>We can't ask whether polarity ellipsis has a clausemate condition when there's only one word involved. However, we can confirm that polarity ellipsis is able to associate with an embedded negation:



(25) (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 restriction would be difficult to capture based on our structure so far. In (26), (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 (25). 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:

- (26) 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]]]<sub>i</sub> [~~TP John told Mary~~ *t<sub>i</sub>*]  
 c. \*[CP Why [ΣP not<sub>[uNeg]</sub> [~~who didn't~~<sub>[iNeg]</sub> go]]]<sub>i</sub> [~~TP John told Mary~~ *t<sub>i</sub>*]

The clausemate condition is captured more straightforwardly under the analysis in (27). Rather than treating *why* and *not* as independent pieces, [*why not*] is a constituent in (a), following Merchant (2006). With multiclausal ellipsis in (b), this constituent can move from the embedded clause, followed by a single application of clausal ellipsis. Finally, movement is blocked by island-hood in (c):

- (27) 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>i</sub> [~~TP John told Mary~~ [~~CP t<sub>i</sub> he didn't~~<sub>[iNeg]</sub> go]]]  
 c. \*[CP [Why not<sub>[uNeg]</sub>]<sub>i</sub> [~~TP John told Mary~~ [~~CP-island who<sub>j</sub> t<sub>i</sub> t<sub>j</sub> didn't~~<sub>[iNeg]</sub> go]]]

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

### 3.4 Analysis Summary

Overall, attempting to account for negative neutralisation, the negative antecedent requirement, and the clausemate condition results in an analysis along the lines of (28) for monoclausal (a) and multiclausal (b) ellipsis with *why not*:

- (28) 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] ...]]]

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 (29). Following Merchant (2003), negative stripping is derived by focus movement of the remnant out of the ellipsis site:

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

There is an immediate difference between *why not* and negative stripping (*not XP*) regarding word order. Moreover, negative stripping does not conform to any of the three empirical generalisations regarding elliptical *why not*.

To begin, negative stripping is not subject to a negative antecedent requirement. Already in (29), the antecedent is not negative. In fact, negative stripping cannot have a negative antecedent, as shown in (30):

- (30) \*John didn't cook beans for dinner, not LENTILS! (int. He didn't cook lentils either.)  
 \*not<sub>[uNeg]</sub> LENTILS ~~John didn't<sub>[iNeg]</sub> cook *t* for dinner!~~ (cf. *nor*)

Example (30) is ungrammatical; it is unable to mean 'John didn't cook lentils either.' That is, there is no neutralisation effect. Where the *not* of negative stripping introduces a new negation,

[iNeg], in (29), it is impossible for it to be [uNeg], as would be needed for (30).<sup>5</sup>

Finally, negative stripping is not subject to the clausemate condition. In (31), *not* can negate the higher clause, while the remnant is sourced from the lower clause:

(31) 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 remarkably different from elliptical *why not*. The next section shows that the same is true of *why*-stripping.

## 5. Cf. *Why*-Stripping

The example of *why*-stripping from (4) is repeated in (32). 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 the ellipsis site (Merchant 2004):

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

[CP<sub>1</sub> Why [CP<sub>2</sub> BEANS<sub>F</sub> [<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 (33):

(33) I don't know why John cooked BEANS<sub>F</sub> for dinner.

At first blush, it might be appealing to analyse *why not* as an instance of *why*-stripping. The analysis in (34), paralleling (32), would involve focus movement of *not* out of the ellipsis site:

(34) 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>F</sub> [<sub>TP</sub> John did *t* cook beans for dinner]]]

<sup>5</sup>From this perspective it is mysterious why (30) lacks a double negation reading. We might have expected the two [iNeg]s of *not* and *didn't* to cancel out; yet the parse in (i) is also apparently unavailable:

(i) \* not<sub>[iNeg]</sub> LENTILS<sub>i</sub> John didn't<sub>[iNeg]</sub> cook *t*<sub>i</sub> for dinner! (int. John did cook lentils for dinner.)

However, 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>6</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 (35), the remnant is successfully sourced from inside a complex NP island (Ross 1967):

(35) 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 (36) – cf. also (16) – 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:

(36) (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.

### 5.2 *Non-Not Negations*

In almost all of our examples so far,<sup>7</sup> 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. In (37), 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* (Hofmann 2018):

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<sup>6</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.

<sup>7</sup>Cf. (1d).

- (37) 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 (38):

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

Kroll (2019) successfully accounts for the polarity switch between antecedent and ellipsis in (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 elliptical second disjunct in polarity in (a). In (b), the negative ellipsis site in turn permits pronouncing *not*.

The import of (37) and (38) is that there is no *not* to move (Hofmann 2018). Since focus movement is central to the analysis under consideration in (34), the success of elliptical *why not* in (37) and (38) severely limits the viability of assimilating *why not* to *why*-stripping.<sup>8</sup>

### 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 (39):

<sup>8</sup>Under the analysis of *why not* as akin to polarity ellipsis, (37) 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:

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

It is interesting that, while the negativity of *why not*'s antecedent can be provided pragmatically in (38), it cannot be provided semantically in (i). 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 test with R' in (b) suggests that lexical negations do not bear [iNeg]:

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

- (39) 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 (40)-(42) 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), cf. (33); yet *why*-stripping (b) is ungrammatical:

- (40) (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?
- (41) 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?
- (42) (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, when, etc.*)

If sentential negation is functional rather than lexical, we would expect *why not* – were it an instance of *why*-stripping to pattern with (40)-(42). Instead, the fact that elliptical *why not* is possible argues that it should be analysed separately from *why*-stripping.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Constituent negation, however, may be able to participate in *why*-stripping. In (i), the idea that (a) is instance of *why*-stripping finds support in the island-insensitivity of (b):

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

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.

## 6. Conclusion

The previous two sections argued against assimilating elliptical *why not* to either negative stripping or *why*-stripping. That leaves standing the analysis arrived at in (28) at the end of section 3, repeated here:

- (43) 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] ...]]]

The analysis in (43) treats elliptical *why not* as an instance of polarity ellipsis, following Kramer & Rawlins (2009) and Hofmann (2018). Negative neutralisation is effected by negative concord. The negative antecedent requirement is specific to elliptical *why not*, so cannot be derived from the general presupposition properties of *why*; 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, 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).

## References

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