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## English *why not* fragment questions: A corpus-based perspective

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The expressions *why not* can be used as a fragment, functioning either as an anaphoric information-seeking question (e.g., *Kim didn't sleep well. Why not?*) or a rhetorical question (e.g., *Let's do this. Sure, why not?*). The central research questions for the uses of *why not* as an FQ (fragment question) concern what licenses the FQ, how we can obtain a sentential meaning from its nonsentential status, and what its syntactic structure is. Existing analyses postulate sentential sources for the FQ and apply deletion operations, as often adopted for other elliptical constructions. After a brief review of the *why not* FQ construction's grammatical properties, the paper discusses challenging issues for the deletion-based sentential approaches. It then presents the results of a corpus investigation of the construction in the COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American English) and sketches an alternative, direct interpretation approach in which the semantic resolution of the *why not* FQ construction is achieved by discourse machinery. This non-elliptical, discourse-based approach shows that once we have a system that represents structured discourse structures, we have straightforward mapping relations from the *why not* FQ construction to a proper propositional meaning.

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## 1 Introduction

*Why not* fragment questions (henceforth, WNFQs), as illustrated by the corpus examples in (1), have two different uses, as first discussed by Hofmann (2018; 2022; 2023) (see also Fernández-Pena & Pérez-Guerra 2024; Stockwell to appear):<sup>1</sup>

- (1) a. A: He didn't read the book to me.  
       B: Why not? (= Why didn't he read the book to you?) (COCA 2017 FIC)
- b. A: Why don't you go first?  
       B: Sure, why not? (= Why shouldn't I go first?) (COCA 2018 MOV)

The interpretations of the WNFQs show that they are used either as anaphoric or rhetorical (or modal) FQs. Anaphoric WNFQs, as in (1a), are used as information-seeking to ask about a reason for the event or state of affairs expressed by the salient negative proposition (Merchant 2006; Hofmann 2018; 2022; Stockwell to appear). This anaphoric type is polarity-sensitive in that its usage is licensed only by a negative antecedent, contrary to non-elliptical *why* questions (Kramer & Rawlins 2009; Hofmann 2018; 2022; Stockwell to appear):

- (2) A: He read the book to me.  
       B1: Why didn't he read the book to Mary?  
       B2: \*Why not?

On the other hand, rhetorical WNFQs, as in (1b), yield a modal reading including *should* or *would* and are mostly used to accept a suggestion or an offer expressed by the addressee's previous utterance, which provides the antecedent (Hofmann 2018; 2022; Stockwell to appear). Unlike the anaphoric use, the rhetorical one does not require a negative antecedent, as seen from the attested examples in (3):

- (3) a. A: Now, let's go play some beer pong.  
       B: Sure, why not? (COCA 2016 MOV)
- b. A: Do you want me to go with you guys?  
       B: Sure, why not? (COCA 2011 TV)
- c. Life goes on, and why not? (COCA 1994 NEWS)

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<sup>1</sup> The negative marker *no* cannot participate in the construction under consideration (Merchant 2006):

- (i) A: I don't like to sleep alone.  
       B: Why {not/\*no}?

Based on cross-linguistic data, Merchant (2006) suggests that if the sentential negative marker 'not' in a given language is a phrasal adverb (XP), it can occur in the 'why not?' collocation; if it is a head (X<sup>0</sup>), it cannot. Merchant further notes that the generalization follows from the assumption that only phrases can adjoin to XPs; only phrasal *not* is allowed to adjoin to the phrasal *why*.

The antecedent clauses in (3) are a suggestive imperative, a polar question, and a declarative, not including an overt negator. However, they all function as the antecedent of the rhetorical WNFQs here.

To account for the anaphoric uses of WNFQs, Hofmann (2018) and Stockwell (to appear) adopt ellipsis-based analyses. Following Merchant (2001: 29), both argue that anaphoric WNFQs have a clausal source which undergoes PF-ellipsis of TP under a mutual entailment relation to the negative antecedent:

- (4) a. Hofmann's analysis:  
       [<sub>CP</sub> Why [<sub>ΣP</sub> not [<sub>uNeg</sub>] [<sub>TP</sub> he didn't [<sub>iNeg</sub>] read the book to you]]]  
       b. Stockwell's analysis:  
       [<sub>CP</sub> [Why not [<sub>uNeg</sub>]] [<sub>TP</sub> he didn't [<sub>iNeg</sub>] read the book to you]]

As sketched here, for the proper semantic resolution of the WNFQ, the two analyses assume that the negative remnant *not* bears an uninterpretable negative feature (uNeg) to yield a single sentential negation reading through a negative concord relation with the interpretable Neg (iNeg) in the ellipsis site within Zeijlstra's (2004) theory.

One crucial property of such ellipsis-based analyses, which is referred to as negative neutralization by Kramer & Rawlins (2009), is that the interpretable lower negation inside the ellipsis site is considered as sentential negation that scopes over the proposition. However, note the following attested examples with constituent negation:

- (5) a. A: I was thinking of not going.  
       B: Why not? (COCA 2018 MOV)  
       b. It turned out, you decided not to run. Why not? (COCA 2007 SPOK)

The negation here does not give rise to sentential negativity. This is supported by Klima's (1964) *neither/so*-tag test that is used to identify sentential negativity: in (5a), for instance, *So was I*, but not *Me neither*, can serve as B's response, instead of the WNFQ.

Another key question that arises from the negative concord approach is whether the remnant *not* in WNFQs is really semantically empty. Consider other environments where the negation *not* is used as a fragment remnant (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 849; Hofmann 2018; Kim 2025):

- (6) a. Has it been 100 percent effective? Unfortunately not. (COCA 1999 SPOK)  
       b. Do we have a great economy? I think not. (COCA 2018 NEWS)  
       c. Would the Kansas City team consider a name change? If not, why not? (COCA 2014 NEWS)

The remnant negation in (6a) forms a fragment with the sentential adverb, while the one in (6b) functions as a fragment sentential complement. In (6c) the first negator in the *if*-clause refers

to the propositional antecedent. All these uses of the fragment negation lead to a propositional meaning. The remnant negation in WNFQs appears not to differ from the one in such examples. This paper thus pursues a uniform account of the fragment negation in WNFQs as well as in examples like (6) by analyzing it as a propositional anaphor that picks out a salient proposition evoked in the context (cf. Hofmann 2022; 2023; Krifka 2013).

This paper further proposes to analyze WNFQs as a subtype of *why*-stripping, a phenomenon where a non-sentential focal expression XP occurs after *why*, as shown in (7) (Merchant 2012; Ortega-Santos et al. 2014; Yoshida et al. 2015; Kim & Abeillé 2019).

- (7) a. They want to make inroads here. Why here? (COCA 2015 FIC)  
 b. You can work and be poor in America. If so, why work? (COCA 1990 NEWS)

Like in WNFQs, the remnant in *why*-stripping receives a sentential interpretation: for example, the one in (7a) is interpreted as *Why do they want to make inroads here?* Another similarity is that only *why* but not other *wh*-words can take part in both of the constructions (see Section 5.1) (Hofmann 2018; Yoshida et al. 2015).

Based on the main ideas described above, we suggest an alternative, discourse-based, direct interpretation (DI) approach to WNFQs. Adopting Kim & Abeillé's (2019) DI analysis of *why*-stripping, the approach assumes that the focused propositional anaphor *not* in WNFQs projects into an NSU (non-sentential utterance) whose propositional content is obtained with the help of a QUD (question-under-discussion) model. The propositional content of the NSU then serves as a semantic argument of information-seeking *why*, yielding an anaphoric reading. If the information-seeking *why* is mapped onto a negative quantifier, just like rhetorical *wh*-words (Han 2002), a rhetorical reading is available instead.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 discusses key licensing conditions on the WNFQ construction. Section 3 then reviews the ellipsis-based analyses and discusses their merits and the difficulties they encounter. The subsequent section discusses empirical data extracted from the COCA corpus to see how the WNFQ construction is used in daily life. Based on this empirical investigation, the next section sketches an alternative discourse-based DI approach that can account for both types of WNFQs in a uniform way, and then we conclude in Section 6.

## 2 Key licensing conditions

### 2.1 Negative antecedent for the anaphoric uses

Anaphoric and rhetorical WNFQs are distinguished in terms of their antecedent conditions. As noted in previous studies (e.g., Merchant 2006; Hofmann 2018; Stockwell to appear), anaphoric WNFQs morpho-syntactically require a negative antecedent. This condition holds even when the WNFQ construction occurs in an embedded clause:

- (8) a. He didn't tell Mimi the sad news about climate change, and I don't know why not.  
 b. \*He told Mimi the sad news about climate change, and I don't know why not.

In (8a), the antecedent clause with the sentential negator *not* licenses the anaphoric WNFQ.

Note that the negation in the antecedent clause need not be the sentential negative adverb *not*. As pointed out by Hofmann (2018) and Stockwell (to appear), other negative adverbs, a negative quantifier, or a negative determiner in the antecedent clause can license the anaphoric WNFQ construction:

- (9) A:  $\left. \begin{array}{l} \text{Mimi never sleeps.} \\ \text{Jim barely exercises.} \\ \text{Nobody would buy the house.} \\ \text{I have no car.} \end{array} \right\}$

B1: Why not?

B2: Me neither.

(Hofmann 2018: (68))

These negative expressions make the antecedent clause negative, as evidenced by the *neither*-tag identified by Klima (1964) as a test for sentential negativity. Unlike these negative expressions, neither constituent negation nor lexical negation, as in (10) and (11), allow the anaphoric WNFQ construction. Hofmann (2018) and Stockwell (to appear) note this contrast by testing their sentential negativity with respect to *neither*-tag responses.

- (10) A:  $\left. \begin{array}{l} \text{John insisted on not going to school today.} \\ \text{He found something interesting there not long ago.} \end{array} \right\}$

B1: #Why not?

B2: #Neither did I.

(Hofmann 2018: (69))

- (11) A:  $\left. \begin{array}{l} \text{He refused to read it correctly.} \\ \text{He is unwilling to rent the house.} \\ \text{Writers will unintentionally reject suggestions.} \end{array} \right\}$

B1: #Why not?

B2: #Neither did/am/will I.

(Hofmann 2018: (70))

As seen in (9)–(11), the previous studies take anaphoric WNFQs to be only compatible with the context where the *neither*-tag is available. Therefore, the negative antecedent condition cannot be satisfied by constituent negation or lexical negation, which does not express sentential negation.

Note that the sentential negativity need not be introduced by an explicitly negative expression in the antecedent. It can also be provided implicitly or pragmatically (Horn 1978; Hofmann

2018; Stockwell to appear). Consider the following examples taken from Hofmann (2018: (16a) and (16c)).

- (12) a. I don't think that Trump will comply, but I don't know why not.  
 b. Do you think this was a good idea? Why or why not?

The sentential negation is obtained from the context by means of the Neg-raising (12a) or the disjunction *or* (12b) (Hofmann 2018). Such data show us that licensing conditions of anaphoric WNFQs are not purely syntactic but also dependent upon contextual environments.

## 2.2 Modal antecedent for the rhetorical uses

As Hofmann (2018: 8) notes, rhetorical WNFQs require an antecedent that has modal semantics encoding possibility or necessity:

- (13) a. A: Let's play the game!  
 B: (Sure,) Why not? (= Why shouldn't we play the game?)  
 b. A: We should submit the paper!  
 B: (Sure,) Why not? (= Why shouldn't we submit the paper?)  
 c. A: Can I come in?  
 B: (Sure,) Why not? (= Why shouldn't you come in?)

In (13a), the imperative antecedent is interpreted as a suggestion opening up the possibility of playing the game or not. In (13b), the meaning of the modalized declarative antecedent involves the necessity of submitting the paper. In (13c), the polar interrogative antecedent is used as a request for coming in. The rhetorical WNFQ in each case is used to accept the suggestion/directive/request by the addressee.

Note that the modal antecedent condition for the rhetorical uses can be satisfied by the context. See the following contrast taken from Hofmann (2018: (18)):

- (14) a. A: It is 4:25 right now.  
 B: ?Why not? (= ?Why shouldn't it be 4:25?)  
 b. A: (Damn) Jasmine went to the movies again!  
 B: Why not? (= Why shouldn't Jasmine have gone to the movies?)

In (14a), the positive declarative is an informative assertion that involves no modal semantics required. This is why additional context or discourse reason is required to make the declarative as an appropriate antecedent. In (14b), however, the non-modalized declarative can function as the fragment's antecedent with no additional context since the negative attitude toward the situation of John's going to the movies again is much more saliently presented. This also shows that licensing conditions of rhetorical WNFQs are quite context-dependent.

Before we move to the next licensing condition, it is worth to note that rhetorical WNFQs have two different usages. One is that they are used to accept the addressee's directive/suggestion/offer, as in (13a) and (13b), or to accede to the addressee's request, as in (13c). The other usage is that they function as canonical rhetorical questions to convey an assertion of the opposite polarity from their surface form, as in (14b) (Han 2002). As pointed out by a reviewer, rhetorical WNFQs conveying acceptance are differentiated from those conveying an assertion: unlike the latter, the former are restricted to dialogue, and the non-elliptical variants of the former, unlike those of the latter, cannot be used as responses like the following:

- (15) a. A: Let's play the game!  
       B: (Sure,) #Why shouldn't we play the game?  
       b. A: (Damn) Jasmine went to the movies again!  
       B: Why shouldn't Jasmine have gone to the movies?

In what follows, we distinguish between the two usages of rhetorical WNFQs when necessary.

### 2.3 Anaphoric or cataphoric antecedent

Hofmann (2018: 9–10) notes that anaphoric WNFQs can have a cataphoric (or backward anaphoric) antecedent, but rhetorical ones cannot. The following Hofmann's examples illustrate this difference:

- (16) a. John isn't going to school today, and I'm not sure why not.  
       b. I'm not sure why not, but John isn't going to school today.  
       (17) a. Heather suggested we should go to the movies, and I don't see why not.  
       b. \*I don't see why not, (but/and) Heather suggested we should go to the movies.

In (16b), the anaphoric WNFQ is licensed by the negative cataphoric antecedent *John isn't going to school today*. As seen from (17b), this kind of cataphoric relationship is disallowed for the rhetorical WNFQ.

### 2.4 (Non-)linguistic antecedent

Both types of matrix WNFQs can be licensed not just by an overt linguistic antecedent, but also by a non-linguistic antecedent, as seen in the following (a)-examples (Hofmann 2018):

- (18) [Context: A offers B a cookie by handing it to them, but B silently refuses by shaking their head.]  
       a. Why not? (= Why don't you want a cookie?)  
       b. ?I don't understand why not. (Hofmann 2018: (20))

- (19) [context: A guy walks in with a flashy hat in neon-colors on his head.]  
 a. Why not? (= Why shouldn't one/he wear something like that?)  
 b. ?I don't see why not. (Hofmann 2018: (21))

However, as indicated in the (b)-examples, when the WNFQ is embedded, the non-linguistic antecedent makes it sound slightly odd. The availability of non-linguistic antecedent shows that the semantic resolution of WNFQs is dependent upon contextual environments.

## 2.5 Distributional conditions

Hofmann (2018) points out that the two types of WNFQs differ in their factive embeddings. For instance, consider the following examples taken from Hofmann (2018: 6):

- (20) a. Mary didn't leave and I (don't) know why not.  
 b. John suggested dancing and I \*(don't) know why not.

As observed in (20a), anaphoric *why not* can be embedded under factive predicates like *know*, regardless of whether the verbs are negated or not. On the other hand, (20b) shows that rhetorical *why not* is disallowed to be embedded under non-negated factive verbs.<sup>2</sup>

The embedding behavior of anaphoric WNFQs is also restricted. Observe the following examples drawn from Hofmann (2018: 37):

- (21) A: It is a possibility that John didn't sleep last night.  
 B: #Why not?  
 (22) A: I wonder if John didn't sleep last night.  
 B: #Why not?

The anaphoric WNFQ is not licensed in the embedded context of *possibility* or *wonder* where its complement proposition is not an assertion (or a presupposition) (Hofmann 2018).

According to Sadock (1974), Han (2002) and others, canonical rhetorical questions are taken as assertions in that they can occur with the introductory item *after all* and can be followed by a *yet*-clause:

- (23) a. After all, who helped Mary? (Han 2002: (6))  
 b. Who helped Mary? Yet she managed everything by herself. (Han 2002: (7))

In this connection, note that rhetorical WNFQs conveying an assertion can appear in the same embedded environments, as attested by the following corpus examples:

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<sup>2</sup> Note, however, that as in *John suggested dancing, but I know why not*, the conjunction *but* allows the rhetorical WNFQ to be embedded under a non-negated factive verb like *know*.



- (24) a. They have some one million pages of documents that they have compiled from other declarations that the Iraqi government has made since 1991. And after all, why not? (COCA 2002 SPOK)
- b. Today Ken Price can get the color and the texture he wants from a can of paint. So why not? Yet without artists like Lukens who perfected glaze calculation, Price's painted clay statements would lose some of their conceptual edge. (COCA 2000 MAG)

In (24a), the WNFQ occurs with *after all*, and in (24b), it is followed by the *yet*-clause. In these examples, the rhetorical WNFQs are not interpreted as conveying acceptance. The above data, therefore, show that such uses of rhetorical WNFQs can be viewed as assertions, just like canonical rhetorical *wh*-questions.

### 3 Review of the ellipsis-based analyses

One intriguing property worth noting is that with a negative antecedent clause, *why* FQs as well as *why not* FQs are interpreted as full-fledged *why*-questions with a single sentential negation reading (Hofmann 2018; Stockwell to appear):

- (25) A: Mary didn't sleep well yesterday.  
 B1: Why? (= Why didn't Mary sleep well yesterday?)  
 B2: Why not? (= Why didn't Mary sleep well yesterday?)

As observed, the negative antecedent leads both the positive FQ and the negative FQ to have the same propositional meaning.

Within the move-and-delete analyses proposed by Hofmann (2018) and Stockwell (to appear), the putative source of the WNFQ in (25) would be something like the following:

- (26) Why not ~~{Mary didn't sleep well yesterday}~~

The propositional content of the WNFQ is derived from the elliptical clausal source. The issue for such a clausal source of the WNFQ is how the single sentential negation reading is obtained from the two apparent negators.<sup>3</sup> As a solution, both Hofmann (2018) and Stockwell (to appear), with move-and-delete operations, refer to the so-called negative neutralization phenomenon noted by Kramer & Rawlins (2009):

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<sup>3</sup> Note that an in-situ ellipsis analysis could avoid such an issue by postulating its putative source with one negator, as illustrated in (i).

(i) Why ~~did Mary not sleep well yesterday~~

- (27) A: Is Alfonso not coming to the party?  
 B1: Yes. (= he isn't coming.)<sup>4</sup>  
 B2: No. (= he isn't coming.) (Kramer & Rawlins 2009: (4))

With the negative antecedent, the positive response particle *yes* does not mean a positive proposition, but a negative statement, as given in the parentheses; the negator in the lower position neutralizes the negation reading. To explain this negative neutralization effect, Kramer & Rawlins analyze the response particles as involving the ellipsis of the complement of the polarity head  $\Sigma$  under semantic identity to its antecedent, as sketched in (28).

- (28) a. [ $\Sigma_P$  Yes  $\Sigma_{[E]}$  [~~he is not~~<sub>[iNeg]</sub> coming]]  
 b. [ $\Sigma_P$  No<sub>[uNeg]</sub>  $\Sigma_{[uNeg, E]}$  [~~he is not~~<sub>[iNeg]</sub> coming]]

In (28a), the putative clausal source is a negative one, thus yielding the single negation reading. In (28b), the negative response particle has the uninterpretable negative feature (uNeg) that forms a negative concord relationship with the interpretable negative feature (iNeg) inside the ellipsis site. This negative concord results in the negative neutralization.

Adopting this polarity-based ellipsis, Hofmann (2018) and Stockwell (to appear) posit the following clausal sources for the WNFQ in (25), respectively:

- (29) a. Hofmann's analysis:  
 [ $CP$  Why [ $\Sigma_P$  not<sub>[uNeg]</sub> [ $TP$  ~~Mary didn't~~<sub>[iNeg]</sub> sleep well yesterday]]]  
 b. Stockwell's analysis:  
 [ $CP$  [Why not<sub>[uNeg]</sub>] [ $TP$  ~~Mary didn't~~<sub>[iNeg]</sub> sleep well yesterday]]

These analyses differ only in the constituency of *why not*. In both, the PF-ellipsis of TP takes place under a mutual entailment relation to the negative antecedent in the sense of Merchant (2001: 29) and Merchant (2004). In addition, in order to capture the negative neutralization effect, both analyses argue that the remnant *not* with [uNeg] is semantically empty and is licensed by the interpretable negative element inside the ellipsis site via negative concord, resulting in the sentential negativity.

This agreement-based ellipsis analysis has some advantages including the account of the negative antecedent requirement for anaphoric WNFQs (Stockwell to appear). Observe (30).

- (30) \*Mary slept well yesterday, but I don't know why not.

The ellipsis site must contain a negative expression with [iNeg] in order to license the remnant negation with [uNeg] through a negative concord agreement. This in turn requires the antecedent to be a negative one.

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<sup>4</sup> A reviewer points out that some speakers find the B1 response highly infelicitous.



The agreement-based move-and-delete analyses also meet several empirical as well as analytical issues.<sup>5</sup> For one thing, as attested by the corpus examples in (36) and noted earlier, there are cases where anaphoric *why not* is licensed by the antecedent with constituent negation which does not make the sentence negative.

- (36) a. A: I was thinking of not going.  
       B: Why not? (COCA 2018 MOV)  
       b. It turned out, you decided not to run. Why not? (COCA 2007 SPOK)

Under the movement-based deletion approaches discussed above, the putative sources of the WNFQs in (36) would be those like the following:

- (37) a. Why were you thinking of not going?  
       b. Why did you decide not to run?

Here the negation is clearly a constituent one. This is supported by the fact that *neither*-tags are not licensed in the same contexts as (36), as shown in (38).

- (38) a. A: I was thinking of not going.  
       B: #Neither was Kim. / So was Kim.  
       b. It turned out, you decided not to run. #Neither did Kim. / So did Kim.

The licensing of anaphoric WNFQs in the non-sentential negativity context strongly argues against the negative concord-based analyses discussed above.

As noted before, both Hofmann (2018) and Stockwell (to appear) argue that sentential negativity of anaphoric *why not*'s antecedent cannot be satisfied by lexical negation. Consider the following examples taken from Stockwell (to appear: fn.12):

- (39) a. A: Sarah is unhappy.  
       B: \*Why not? / \*Neither is Sam.  
       b. A: Elliot lacks an excuse.  
       B: \*Why not? / \*Neither does Sam.

Based on the failed *neither*-tag test here, Stockwell suggests that lexical negation does not have [iNeg], and therefore anaphoric *why not* is not licensed via the negative concord agreement.

Note, however, that we could find corpus examples where the negative antecedent requirement is met by lexical negation:

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<sup>5</sup> The arguments we present here are primarily against move-and-delete analyses. The in-situ ellipsis analysis would not meet the issues discussed here by having only one negator for the putative clausal source for WNFQs.

- (40) a. Computer, bring the subspace transmitter on line. Unable to comply. Why not?  
Insufficient power. (COCA 2001 TV)
- b. Computer, lock in Voyager's last known coordinates and activate differential induction drive. Unable to execute command. Why not? (COCA 1998 TV)
- c. I'm unavailable, Bella. I apologize. Why not? (COCA 2007 TV)

Here our particular interest lies in (40c), where the antecedent clause does not mark the sentential negativity, as evidenced by the *neither*-tag test given in (41).

- (41) a. A: I'm unable to comply.  
B: Neither is Kim.
- b. A: I'm unavailable.  
B: #Neither is Kim.

Under Stockwell's view, the negative concord analysis wrongly predicts the WNFQ in (40c) to be unacceptable, since the remnant *not* cannot be licensed without an interpretable Neg feature inside the ellipsis site, as sketched in (42).

- (42) \* $[_{CP} \text{ Why not}_{[uNeg]} [_{TP} \dots \text{unavailable} \dots]]$

To avoid the issues that the negative concord analyses encounter, one could adopt an in-situ ellipsis approach to anaphoric WNFQs. It would suggest that the remnant *not* is analyzed as remaining in its base-generated position, with non-constituent ellipsis taking place around it, as sketched in (43) (see Griffiths 2019 and Griffiths et al. 2023 for details of an in-situ approach to clause ellipsis).

- (43)  $[_{CP} \text{ Why } [_{TP} \text{ did Mary not sleep well yesterday}]]$

One merit of the in-situ ellipsis analysis is that it can simply account for the neutralization effect of anaphoric WNFQs with no recourse to the negative concord mechanism; as seen in (43), the sentential negativity is introduced by the remnant *not* itself as sentential negation.

Another advantage of the in situ ellipsis analysis may come from the island insensitivity of anaphoric WNFQs. See the following attested examples:

- (44) a. A: That's [the one part I could never buy into].  
B: Why not? (COCA 2017 TV)
- b. It's about [a young soldier who doesn't want to be in the army anymore]. I can't imagine why not. (COCA 1991 TV)

Since the ellipsis site involves no remnant movement, we would expect the anaphoric WNFQ to be not subject to strong island effects like complex NP island effects (cf. Stockwell to appear).

However, the in-situ ellipsis approach seems to have an issue regarding the negative antecedent requirement for anaphoric WNFQs. Consider (45) and (46) for illustration.

- (45) (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? (Stockwell to appear: (10))
- (46) [context: 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. (Stockwell to appear: (26))

Unlike the *why*-question, which occurs either with no ellipsis or with VP ellipsis, the WNFQ is not licensed in the context where the antecedent clause is a positive one. Under the in-situ analysis, it is questionable what blocks the generation of the anaphoric WNFQs in (45c) and (46c) from their putative sources in (45a) and (46a), respectively (e.g., Do you know [<sub>CP</sub> why she ~~did~~ not arrive on time]).

## 4 A corpus investigation

In order to investigate authentic uses and grammatical properties of WNFQs, we performed both qualitative and quantitative analyses of the construction, making use of the COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American English). The corpus, the largest genre-balanced corpus of American English, contains more than one billion words of text in eight genres (spoken, fiction, magazines, newspapers, academic, TV and Movie subtitles, blogs, and web pages) (Davies 2008). We used the following simple string searches to extract examples of matrix and embedded WNFQs:

- (47) a. ( . | ? | ! ) why not ?  
 b. VERB why not .

The first string search yields 6,543 instances of matrix WNFQs, and the second one 365 instances of embedded WNFQs. With this total of 6,908 instances, we conducted the qualitative study of the construction to investigate its real-life uses in various grammatical contexts. For the quantitative study, as shown in **Table 1**, we obtained 2,522 instances from the dataset after manual pruning,<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For matrix WNFQs, we looked into a total of 1,137 instances from the five major registers (spoken, fiction, magazines, newspapers, and academic) and further randomly selected 1,300 instances from TV/MOV. For embedded WNFQs, we investigated a total of 150 instances from the major registers.

and set the following key variables to identify distinct licensing conditions for anaphoric and rhetorical WNFQs: polarity of the antecedent, types of negation of the antecedent, and clause types of the antecedent.

Type	Freq. (%)
anaphoric <i>why not</i>	1,571 (62%) (matrix: 1,497, embedded: 74)
rhetorical <i>why not</i>	951 (38%) (matrix: 879, embedded: 72)
Total	2,522 (100%)

**Table 1:** Frequency of identified WNFQs for the quantitative study.

The first variable examined the polarity value of the antecedent clause for both types of WNFQs, i.e., whether the antecedent is positive or negative, and **Table 2** shows the result.

Type	Polarity	Freq. (%)
anaphoric <i>why not</i>	positive	0 (0%)
	negative	1,571 (100%) (matrix: 1,497, embedded: 74)
rhetorical <i>why not</i>	positive	943 (99.2%) (matrix: 872, embedded: 71)
	negative	8 (0.8%) (matrix: 7, embedded: 1)
Total		2,522 (100%)

**Table 2:** Polarity values of the antecedent clause for WNFQs.

As seen here, both of the matrix and embedded anaphoric WNFQs in our dataset have only a negative antecedent, confirming the negative antecedent condition on the anaphoric uses. Consider the relevant corpus examples given in (48):

- (48) a. A: I couldn't just turn her away.  
       B: Why not? (COCA 2019 FIC)
- b. And our relationship isn't like that. I don't know why not. (COCA 2017 FIC)
- c. Do you think Rat deserved to win? Why or why not? (COCA 2011 FIC)

In (48a) and (48b), the antecedent clause involves the explicit negation introduced by the sentential negator *not*. In (48c), following Hofmann (2022; 2023), the antecedent clause is viewed as a discourse-negative utterance whose propositional content is (possibly implicitly) construed as counterfactual. The discourse negativity is evidenced by its compatibility with *neither*-tags:

- (49) A: Do you think Rat deserved to win?  
       B: Well, neither do I.

On the other hand, as noted earlier, the rhetorical WNFQs can have either a positive or negative antecedent clause, but the positive one is quite predominant in both matrix and embedded cases. This indicates that the rhetorical uses, unlike the anaphoric ones, are not polarity-sensitive. The following are some representative examples we found from the corpus:

- (50) a. A: Can I be the commander of the starship?  
 B: Sure, why not ? (COCA 2010 MOV)
- b. I could run for Congress. Why not? (COCA 2005 NEWS)
- c. A: Alissa, why don't you go first ?  
 B: Sure, why not? (COCA 2018 MOV)

In (50a), the antecedent clause is interpreted as a suggestion or request and the WNFQ is used to take up on it. In (50b), the WNFQ is construed as a negative rhetorical question, as in *Why couldn't I run for Congress?*, expressing that there is no reason that the speaker couldn't run for Congress.<sup>7</sup> In (50c), the negative *why*-question construed as a suggestion functions as the antecedent of the rhetorical WNFQ.

The second variable for which we coded the data concerns the types of negation in the antecedent clause if present. The following table shows the types of negation in the anaphoric uses of WNFQs:

Explicitness	Negation Type	Word	Freq. (%)
explicit negation	sentential negativity	<i>not</i>	1,381 (88%)
		<i>never</i>	76 (4.8%)
		<i>no</i>	43 (2.7%)
		<i>hardly, neither, few, nowhere, nobody, none, nor, nothing, seldom, no longer</i>	35 (2.2%)
	constituent negation	<i>not</i>	12 (0.8%)
	lexical negation	<i>unable</i>	2 (0.1%)
<i>unavailable</i>		1 (0.1%)	
implicit negation			21 (1.3%)
Total			1,571 (100%)

**Table 3:** Negation types of the antecedent in the anaphoric uses of WNFQs.

<sup>7</sup> The antecedent of rhetorical WNFQs like (50a) (and possibly (50b)) might be taken to be a negative one by assuming that the polar question (PQ) is derived from an alternative PQ. For instance, Guerzoni & Sharvit (2014) suggest that a PQ like *Can I be a commander of any starship?* is derived from the following alternative PQ:

- (i) whether [[I can be a commander of a starship] or [not [I can be a commander of any starship]]]

The claimed motivation for this comes from the possibility of having an NPI item like *any* in PQs as in the PQ.



As shown in **Table 3**, the negative antecedent condition on anaphoric WNFQs is satisfied not only by sentential negativity, but also by constituent or lexical negation, contrary to what the agreement-based analyses predict. As noted by Hofmann (2018), we could observe that not only the sentential negator *not* but also a negative adverb, a negative quantifier, and a negative nominal could induce the sentential negativity according to Klima's negativity tests. Some of the relevant corpus examples are given in (51).

- (51) a. A: He never got on the plane.  
B: Why not? (COCA 2019 TV)
- b. A: I could hardly hear his low words.  
B: Why not? (COCA 1990 FIC)
- c. A: I have no idea.  
B: Why not? (COCA 2000 TV)
- d. A: None of us do.  
B: Why not? (COCA 2013 TV)
- e. A: Dr. Kyo did nothing.  
B: Why not? (COCA 2007 TV)
- f. A: Very seldom do instructors propose building a whole new pattern of movements, dramatically changing the way you ski.  
B: Why not? (COCA 1993 MAG)

In each of the examples above, the WNFQ can be replaced by a *neither*-tag (e.g., *Me neither*).

As discussed, the antecedent clause with constituent or lexical negation, as attested by the corpus examples in (52) and (53), challenges the negative concord analyses.

- (52) a. A: Actually, I'm thinking about not going.  
B: Why not? (COCA 2001 MOV)
- b. It turned out, you decided not to run. Why not? (COCA 2007 SPOK)
- (53) a. Computer, bring the subspace transmitter on line. Unable to comply. Why not? Insufficient power. (COCA 2001 TV)
- b. Computer, lock in Voyager's last known coordinates and activate differential induction drive. Unable to execute command. Why not? (COCA 1998 TV)
- c. I'm unavailable, Bella. I apologize. Why not? (COCA 2007 TV)

The putative sources of the WNFQs in (52) would be those like the following:

- (54) a. Why are you thinking about not going?  
b. Why did you decide not to run?

As discussed in Section 3, it is quite clear that the negation in such examples is not a sentential one, but a constituent one. This challenges the analysis that posits sentential negation for putative clausal sources of anaphoric WNFQs. In addition, consider the possible clausal sources for (53) given in (55).

- (55) a. Why are you not able to comply?  
 b. Why are you not able to execute the command?  
 c. Why are you not available?

The antecedent clause in (53) includes the lexical negation (*unable, unavailable*) but the putative source here has the sentential negation to serve as the WNFQ's antecedent. This kind of mismatch could not be resolved unless we resort to the framework of Distributed Morphology which could allow the explicit negation to be integrated into another lexical entry like *unable* (Halle & Marantz 1993).

As we can also identify in **Table 3**, the data for anaphoric WNFQs, especially matrix ones, include examples where the negation is implicitly or pragmatically provided. Consider the following examples:

- (56) a. Is this true? Why or why not? (COCA 2009 ACAD)  
 b. A: Everybody has a name. Everybody but me.  
 B: Why not? (COCA 2005 MOV)  
 c. A: I was able to do other things and it is too late to try again.  
 B: Why not? (COCA 2003 MOV)

In (56a), the negativity requirement is pragmatically satisfied by accommodation under the disjunction *or* (Hofmann 2018). Similarly, in (56b), the sentential negativity seems to be introduced from the context by means of the preposition *but*.<sup>8</sup> In (56c), the negativity condition is met by the negative meaning evoked from the *too ... to* construction. All these uses of rhetorical WNFQs would be expected by Hofmann's (2023) discourse-negativity: they are all uttered in the counterfactual or non-veridical contexts. These examples imply that the semantic resolution of anaphoric WNFQs cannot be purely syntactic, but dependent on the context.

Among 951 tokens of the rhetorical WNFQs in our dataset, only eight instances have an overt negative antecedent clause expressing the sentential negativity evoked by sentential negator *not*, as indicated in **Table 4**.

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<sup>8</sup> We may assume that the antecedent *Everybody but me* in (56b) is derived from an in-situ ellipsis as shown in (i).

(i) Everybody ~~has a name~~ but I ~~do not have a name~~.

In the *but*-clause, the deletion of the case licenser (i.e., the finite VP) would lead the subject's pronominal form *I* to be realized as the accusative form *me*. On this view, the negativity requirement is then satisfied by the explicit negation in the clausal source.

Polarity	Explicitness	Negation Type	Word	Freq. (%)
positive				943 (99.2%)
negative	explicit negation	sentential negativity	<i>not</i>	8 (0.8%)
Total				951 (100%)

**Table 4:** Negation types of the antecedent in the rhetorical uses of WNFQs.

One thing to note here is that all the antecedent clauses with sentential negation are used as what Francez (2015) calls ‘suggesterogatives’ to express a positive suggestion for action or state, despite their negative form. Consider the following relevant examples:

- (57) a. A: Won’t you care to join me?  
 B: Sure, Why not? (COCA 2014 TV)
- b. A: Why don’t you ask them?  
 B: Why not, indeed? (COCA 2015 TV)

The antecedent clauses in (57a) and (57b) are paraphrasable roughly as *You should join me* and *You should ask them*, respectively. The rhetorical WNFQ, then, is used to accept the suggestion expressed by the antecedent clause.

Note that positive rhetorical questions express a deontic judgment according to which an ongoing situation should not be the case. Consider the following:

- (58) a. Why is this happening to me? (RQ: This should not happen to me.)  
 b. Why do they confuse us? (RQ: They should not confuse us.)

This contrast implies that the remnant *not* in rhetorical WNFQs like (57) is not semantically empty and plays a certain semantic or pragmatic role.

The third variable we set for the quantitative analysis is the clause type of the antecedent clause. The following table shows the clause types of the antecedent for the anaphoric WNFQs:

Polarity	Clause Type	Freq. (%)
positive		0 (0%)
negative	declarative	1,503 (95.7%) (matrix: 1,431, embedded: 72)
	imperative	41 (2.6%) (matrix: 41)
	interrogative	27 (1.7%) (matrix: 25, embedded: 2)
Total		1,571 (100%)

**Table 5:** Clause types of the antecedent in the anaphoric uses of WNFQs.

As seen in **Table 5**, both of matrix and embedded anaphoric WNFQs are predominantly associated with a declarative antecedent clause, but also less frequently with an imperative or interrogative antecedent one. See the following declarative cases we found from the corpus:

- (59) a. A: I didn't tell her what Chia said.  
       B: Why not? (COCA 1999 TV)  
       b. A: He just wouldn't give it to them.  
       B: Why not? (COCA 2002 TV)

The predominant uses of anaphoric WNFQs with a declarative antecedent clause is expected when considering that the anaphoric uses are information-seeking: they inquire about reasons for the negative situation asserted by the antecedent clause.

Note that even interrogative or imperative antecedent clauses of the anaphoric WNFQs in our dataset have functions of an assertion. Consider the attested examples:

- (60) a. Did you not talk to anybody? Why not? (COCA 2008 SPOK)  
       b. Didn't her parents know that she had written? Why not? (COCA 1993 FIC)  
       c. You didn't go see the urologist, did you, Mr. Ekabo? Why not? (COCA 1999 TV)
- (61) a. A: Don't do that.  
       B: Why not?  
       A: Because it's over and we both know it. (COCA 2012 MOV)  
       b. A: Don't look.  
       B: Why not?  
       A: Because you won't like it. (COCA 2007 MOV)

In (60), the negative interrogative antecedents are interpreted as negatively biased questions which are often treated as performing an assertive speech act (Quirk et al. 1985; Han 2002). As to imperative cases like (61), adopting Kaufmann's (2011) view that imperatives are modal assertions (e.g., *Don't do that!* = *You shouldn't do that*), the WNFQs are taken to be licensed by the negative assertion made by the imperative antecedent, and they are used as requests for the addressee to provide a reason to comply. These corpus data imply that anaphoric WNFQs are licensed in the context where their antecedent clause expresses a negative assertion, regardless of the clause type.

The clause type of the antecedent for rhetorical WNFQs can vary, as shown in **Table 6**.

One key difference from the anaphoric uses is that the antecedent clause of the rhetorical WNFQ is often an interrogative. Considering that the key function of the rhetorical WNFQs is to accept the suggestion or offer expressed by the antecedent, this is as expected. Even when the antecedent clause is a declarative, it is typically understood as expressing a suggestion or offer, as shown in (62).

Polarity	Clause Type	Freq. (%)
positive	declarative	776 (53.1%) (matrix: 737, embedded: 39)
	imperative	54 (5.8%) (matrix: 54)
	interrogative	113 (37.5%) (matrix: 81, embedded: 32)
negative	interrogative	8 (3.6%) (matrix: 7, embedded: 1)
Total		951 (100%)

**Table 6:** Clause types of the antecedent in the rhetorical uses of WNFQs.

- (62) a. A: Maybe one day you could fly me to Australia.  
 B: Sure, why not? (COCA 2017 TV)
- b. A: Come on. I'll walk you out.  
 B: Sure, why not? (COCA 1998 MOV)

As noted, the eight instances of the rhetorical WNFQs in the dataset have a negative antecedent, and they all contain the sentential negator *not* evoking sentential negativity. See the following corpus examples:

- (63) a. Will, why don't you go talk to her? I mean, why not? (COCA 2007 MOV)
- b. A: Couldn't someone take me to his grave?  
 B: Why not? (COCA 2014 FIC)
- c. ... so why don't you sell me somewhere I want to go. I promise to sell myself. Balram, persuaded by the dexterous liar, nodded and couldn't see why not. (COCA 2005 FIC)

This is expected given that interrogatives with sentential negation like (63) and (57) can be used as a suggestion or an offer. This observation is in favor of Hofmann (2018) claiming that rhetorical WNFQs are licensed by an antecedent introducing modal semantics.

## 5 A construction-based view

### 5.1 WNFQs as a subtype of *why*-stripping

English employs so-called *why*-stripping, which consists of the interrogative word *why* and a non-*wh* remnant, as exemplified in (64) (see Merchant 2012; Ortega-Santos et al. 2014; Yoshida et al. 2015; Kim & Abeillé 2019; Kim 2024; among others).

- (64) a. A: John ate kimchi.  
 B: Why kimchi?
- b. A: Will you buy me a guitar?  
 B: Why a guitar?

*Why*-stripping has a propositional meaning. For instance, the occurrence in (64a) is interpreted as *Why did John eat kimchi (and not another food)?*

A remnant in *why*-stripping can be realized as various syntactic categories, as long as it gets a focal stress (Ginzburg & Sag 2000; Yoshida et al. 2015; Kim & Abeillé 2019):

- (65) I think that John should cook for Mary.  
 a. Why [<sub>NP</sub> Mary]?  
 b. Why [<sub>PP</sub> for Mary]?  
 c. Why [<sub>VP</sub> cook for Mary]?
- (66) A: John believes many strange things. One day he said that ghosts exist. Another day he said that trolls exist.  
 B: Why [<sub>CP</sub> that trolls exist]? (Yoshida et al. 2015: (10b))
- (67) A: You should do it slowly.  
 B: Why [<sub>AdvP</sub> slowly]?
- (68) A: All she wanted to do was sit alone in her closet.  
 B: Why [<sub>AP</sub> so gloomy]?

We propose that WNFQs should be analyzed as a subtype of *why*-stripping where the negative adverb *not* serves as a focused remnant (cf. Stockwell to appear). This view can be supported by parallels between WNFQs and *why*-stripping in many grammatical respects. For one thing, both of the constructions do not allow other *wh*-words to take part in them. This is illustrated in (69) for *why*-stripping (Yoshida et al. 2015) and in (70) for WNFQs (Hofmann 2018; Stockwell to appear).

- (69) a. A: John was eating kimchi.  
 B: \*{When/How/When} kimchi?  
 b. A: Someone was eating kimchi.  
 B: \*Who kimchi?  
 c. A: Something made John eat kimchi.  
 B: \*What kimchi.
- (70) {Why/\*Who/\*What/\*When/\*Where/\*How} not?

Another similarity between the two constructions is that the fragment XP following *why* receives focal stress (Quirk et al. 1985; Yoshida et al. 2015; Alves-Castro 2020):<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> German also uses *warum nicht* ‘why not’ FQs which can have either an anaphoric or rhetorical reading. German WNFQs behave differently from English counterparts in terms of prosodic features: in German, the anaphoric reading arises if *warum* receives a focal stress, and the modal reading is available if the negative fragment is stressed (Hofmann 2018):

- (71) A: John was eating kimchi.  
B: Why KIMCHI?
- (72) a. A: John does not like to eat kimchi.  
B: Why NOT?  
b. A: Let's go to the movies.  
B: Sure, why NOT!

Next, the two constructions pattern alike in that the ellipsis operation is obligatory; that is, the rest of the clause except for the remnant should be elided (Yoshida et al. 2015; Hofmann 2018):

- (73) a. A: John was eating kimchi.  
B: Why kimchi?  
b. A: John was eating kimchi.  
B: \*Why kimchi {was he/he was} eating?
- (74) a. A: John was not eating kimchi.  
B: Why not?  
b. A: John was not eating kimchi.  
B: \*Why not {was he/he was} eating?
- (75) a. A: Can you help me out?  
B: (Sure,) Why not?  
b. A: Can you help me out?  
B: (Sure,) \*Why not {should I/I should} help you out?

Further, note that like *why*-stripping, the two types of WNFQs can occur in embedded contexts, as discussed (Yoshida et al. 2015; Hofmann 2018; Stockwell to appear):

- (76) Kim was eating kimchi, but I'm wondering why kimchi (and not other things).
- (77) a. It doesn't seem to have worked. I'm wondering why not. (anaphoric)  
b. A: Do you think I can do it?  
B: I don't see why not. (rhetorical, conveying an assertion)

- 
- (i) a. Sie ist nicht ins Kino gegangen.  
she is not into.the cinema gone  
'She didn't go to the movies.'  
b. WARUM nicht?  
why not  
'Why not? (= Why didn't she go to the movies?)'  
c. WARUM NICHT? (= Why shouldn't she have not gone to the movies?) (Hofmann 2018: (26))

See Hofmann (2018) for other grammatical properties of German WNFQs.

- c. A: Can we come?  
 B: I don't see why not. (rhetorical, conveying acceptance)

In addition, both *why*-stripping and WNFQs can be licensed by a non-linguistic antecedent, but not when they are embedded (Yoshida et al. 2015; Hofmann 2018):<sup>10</sup>

- (78) [Context: John, eating sushi, miso-soup, and also kimchi.]  
 a. Why kimchi? (= Why are you eating kimchi?)  
 b. \*I don't understand why kimchi.
- (79) [Context: A offers B a cookie by handling it to them, but B silently refuses by shaking their head.]  
 a. A: Why not? (= Why don't you want a cookie?)  
 b. A: ?I don't understand why not. (Hofmann 2018: (20))
- (80) [Context: A guy walks in with a flashy hat in neon-colors on his head.]  
 a. A: Why not? (= Why shouldn't one/he wear something like that?)  
 b. A: ?I don't see why not. (Hofmann 2018: (21))

*Why*-stripping is known as being insensitive to strong islands like complex NP islands, as in (81) (Yoshida et al. 2015). Such island insensitivity is also observed in WNFQs, as attested by the corpus examples in (82) (cf. Stockwell to appear).<sup>11</sup>

- (81) a. A: No linguist<sub>1</sub> recommended [a book that contains his<sub>1</sub> own article].  
 B: Why his<sub>1</sub> own article?  
 b. No linguist<sub>1</sub> recommended [a book that contains his<sub>1</sub> own article], but I don't understand why his<sub>1</sub> own article. (Yoshida et al. 2015: (66)–(67))
- (82) a. A: That's [the one part I could never buy into].  
 B: Why not? (COCA 2017 TV)  
 b. It's about [a young soldier who doesn't want to be in the army anymore]. I can't imagine why not. (COCA 1991 TV)  
 c. [Something that a gentlewoman must not do to a gentleman]. Why not? (COCA 2004 MOV)

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<sup>10</sup> Some speakers find acceptable the examples of embedded WNFQs with non-linguistic antecedents.

<sup>11</sup> (Negative) stripping is sensitive to islands (Reinhart 1991; Yoshida et al. 2015):

- (i) a. \*John loves [a girl who is learning Italian], but not Spanish.  
 b. \*John left [because Mary invited David], but not Bill. (Yoshida et al. 2015: (69))



In (81), the correlate in the antecedent clause that is linked to the remnant NP occurs inside the complex NP island. The same holds for the WNFQ in (82) where the remnant *not* is associated with its correlate buried inside the island.<sup>12</sup>

Last but not least, *why*-stripping, like WNFQs, can be interpreted either as an information-seeking question, as in (83a), or a rhetorical question with assertive force, as in (83b):

- (83) a. A: He danced with Mary.  
       B: Why Mary? (= Why did he dance with Mary?)  
       b. The man rarely bothered using his radio. After all, why bother? (COCA 2011 FIC)

Based on these syntactic and semantic parallels we have observed so far, we suggest that WNFQs can be subsumed under *why*-stripping, while carrying their own constructional constraints. That is, the WNFQ serves as a subtype of the *why*-stripping construction.

## 5.2 Anaphoric *not*

As noted by Needham (2012) and Meijer (2022), English uses propositional anaphors that refer to a proposition introduced in the context. Consider the following:

- (84) A: Is Kim coming to the party?  
       B1: I think so. (= I think [Kim is coming to the party].)  
       B2: I doubt it. (= I doubt [Kim is coming to the party].)  
       B3: I hope not. (= I hope [Kim is not coming to the party].)

Here the propositional anaphors refer to the contextually provided salient proposition ‘Kim is coming to the party’. But anaphoric *not* differs from the other two in that it negates the salient proposition, yielding the negative one.

Anaphoric *so* can occur with *why*, forming a *why so* fragment question, as illustrated by the following corpus examples:

- (85) a. All right, professor, I guess you don’t think we were real fair to professor al-Arian. Why so? (COCA 2001 SPOK)

<sup>12</sup> To explain the island insensitivity of *why*-stripping, Yoshida et al. (2015) follow Merchant (2004) in arguing that ellipsis repairs island violations by eliminating all intermediate traces of island-escaping movement that are marked with a PF-uninterpretable feature ‘\*’; if \*-traces remain undeleted at PF, they lead to ungrammaticality. Under Yoshida et al.’s analysis, where the remnant undergoes focus movement to FocP followed by deletion of the rest parts of the clause, (81a) is assumed to have the structure in (i).

(i) [<sub>IntP</sub> Why [<sub>FocP</sub> [<sub>+F</sub> his own article]<sub>1</sub> [<sub>TP</sub> \*t<sub>1</sub> [<sub>TP</sub> no linguist [<sub>VP</sub> \*t<sub>1</sub> [<sub>VP</sub> recommended [<sub>CP</sub> a book that contains t<sub>1</sub>]]]]]]].

The remnant moves to Spec-FocP, configured below CP, and the subsequent TP-ellipsis removes all the \*-marked intermediate traces at PF and thus the island violation is ameliorated.

- b. A: I'm a little concerned about David, sir.  
B: Why so? (COCA 2005 MOV)
- c. And we must not allow our shadows to lie on any surface for more than the swiftest of moments. "Why so?" asked Torronio. (COCA 2009 FIC)

Unlike WNFQs, this fragment question is used to inquire about an event expressed by a salient positive proposition.

As noted by Huddleston & Pullum (2002: 849) and earlier in the paper, anaphoric *not* is typically used as a pro-form for a negative clausal complement:

- (86) A: Are they honest?  
B: I {believe/think} not. / I was told not. / It seems not.

In (86B), the negation refers back anaphorically to the positive proposition evoked in the previous discourse and negates it, expressing that they are not honest.

It is also possible for anaphoric *not* to occur with a PP adjunct (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 849):

- (87) A: Does it rain much?  
B: On the whole not. / not in the winter.

The COCA corpus also yields examples where anaphoric *not* is used with a coordinating conjunction like *or* or *and*:

- (88) a. I was in a five year relationship. Believe it or not. (COCA 2014 MOV)  
b. She didn't tell me if she was coming or not. (COCA 2012 MAG)  
c. They might have different conceptions about what is rude and not. (COCA 1992 NEWS)

As also noted, similar to WNFQs, the anaphoric negator can follow an adverbial expression, with which it functions as a fragment (Kim 2025), as illustrated by the following attested examples:

- (89) a. Well, I'm not a complete naif, you know. Oh, certainly not. (COCA 2008 TV)  
b. We're not here to negotiate. Absolutely not. (COCA 2011 TV)

Hofmann (2018) would analyze the *not* in such cases as occurring in the  $\Sigma$  head with no semantic meaning. This negative concord approach would work with a negative antecedent. However, as pointed out earlier, such fragments do not always require a negative antecedent, as shown in the attested examples below:

- (90) a. They must be from your side of the family. Certainly not. (COCA 2005 MOV)  
b. I should go back to work. Absolutely not. (COCA 2012 TV)

The antecedent clause includes no negative expression, but the fragment denotes a negative proposition (e.g., *Absolutely you should not go back to work* for (90b)). For this semantic resolution, as noted, Hofmann (2018) posits two versions of *not*: uninterpretable negation for the negative neutralization, and interpretable one for cases where the antecedent is positive. This approach makes sense based on Zeijlstra's (2004) analysis of negative concord dependencies that Hofmann (2018) adopts. In this study, however, we attempt to present a unified treatment of remnant *not* in such cases as a propositional anaphor that picks up a positive proposition from discourse.

In addition, as noted earlier, anaphoric *not* serves as remnant in many other environments including the following:

- (91) a. Did you report the crime? If not, why not?  
 b. He asked if I wanted to go pro, and I said probably not. Why not?

It seems difficult to insist that the first remnant *not*, referring to the positive proposition in these examples, is interpretable while the second one, present in the WNFQs, is uninterpretable.

The same question arises with rhetorical uses of WNFQs. See the following corpus examples:

- (92) a. A: You're gonna love this!  
 B: Sure, why not? (COCA 2013 MOV)  
 b. A: Can I offer you coffee?  
 B: Sure, why not. It's free, right? (COCA 2004 MOV)

Here the WNFQ would mean a modal proposition in the form of 'Why shouldn't ...?' (e.g., *Why shouldn't I love this?* for (92a) and *Why shouldn't you offer me coffee?* for (92b)). That is, such rhetorical WNFQs involve a negative meaning. We could not ignore the negative reading of the remnant in these rhetorical uses. In what follows, we suggest an alternative view in which the remnant *not* in anaphoric and rhetorical WNFQs functions as a propositional anaphor referring to the salient proposition evoked in the given context, rather than being recovered by resorting to syntactic identity between the antecedent clause and the unpronounced material.

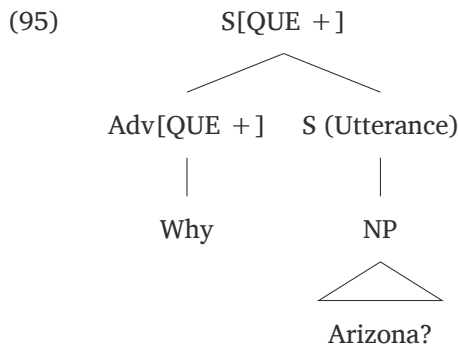
### 5.3 Directly licensing the fragment questions

As we have seen earlier, our corpus data question the ellipsis-based sentential analyses where WNFQs involve a negative sentential source and are derived via a deletion operation under semantic identity to their antecedent clause. Departing from such ellipsis-based approaches, we propose an alternative direct interpretation (DI) approach in which the remnant in *why*-stripping as well as in WNFQs projects into an NSU (non-sentential utterance) via the head-fragment construction stated in (93) (Ginzburg & Sag 2000; Kim & Abeillé 2019; Kim 2021; 2024):

- (93) Head Fragment Construction:  
 Any category can be projected into an NSU (non-sentential utterance) as long as it is a focus establishing constituent.

This construction rule allows any constituent (XP) to function as an NSU as long as it represents a focus representing salient information. For instance, the *why*-stripping in (94) would have the simple syntax given in (95):

- (94) A: Mimi went to Arizona.  
B: Why Arizona?



The focus establishing constituent *Arizona* serves as the sole daughter of an S-node with no reference to ellipsis.<sup>13</sup> The *wh*-expression *why*, bearing the positive question feature ([QUE +]), combines with the fragment and generates a well-formed information-seeking *wh*-question. This simple syntax is then linked to the process of semantic resolution which involves two key tasks: identifying the source parallel to the sentential meaning of the remnant and resolving the sentential content by referring back to the proposition evoked in the previous discourse (Fernández et al. 2007).

In the DI framework the present analysis adopts, structured discourse and context play a key role in the semantic resolution of elided material. Following Ginzburg & Sag (2000), and others, we take the dialogue context (CTXT) to include at least information about question-under-discussion (QUD) and focus establishing constituent (FEC), as represented in the feature-structure format:

- (96)  $\left[ \text{CTXT} \left[ \begin{array}{l} \text{MAX-QUD ...} \\ \text{FEC ...} \end{array} \right] \right]$

<sup>13</sup> Kim & Abeillé (2019) point out that attested examples of *why*-stripping like (i) would be a challenge to a movement-cum-deletion analysis:

- (i) a. Well, I think what's happening is both risky and immoral. Why immoral? (COCA 2009 SPOK)  
b. A pack of lean dogs, all different colors, loped across the street far ahead of her. Why dogs? (COCA 1992 FIC)  
(Kim & Abeillé 2019: (39))

If the ellipsis-based analysis holds true, the examples above would be ruled out since they violate island constraints: the Coordinate Structure Constraint for (ia) and the Complex NP island for (ib). On the other hand, the DI analysis correctly predicts the well-formedness of such examples by analyzing the remnant as an NSU with sentential meaning, without resorting to movement and ellipsis.

The MAX-QUD identifies the maximal QUD among a number of questions evoked in a given context. The FEC represents a salient or focal constituent of the utterance and serves as a potential parallel element. This attribute can also include not only semantic but also syntactic information such as case and categorial information (Ginzburg & Sag 2000).

To illustrate how this system works, consider the following:

- (97) A: Mimi didn't pass the exam.  
 B1: Why?  
 B2: Why not?

The declarative antecedent clause makes an assertion that Mimi didn't pass the exam ( $\neg[\text{pass}(m, e)]$ ), as represented in the following simple feature structure:

$$(98) \left[ \begin{array}{c} \text{SEM} \\ \left[ \begin{array}{c} \textit{proposition} \\ \neg[\text{pass}(m, e)] \end{array} \right] \end{array} \right]$$

As shown in (98), the declarative antecedent is communicatively complete and its semantic content represents a proposition as a subtype of message (Ginzburg & Sag 2000).<sup>14</sup>

The *why* FQ as well as the *why not* FQ in (97) ask for a reason for the event described by the negative proposition of the antecedent. This information is triggered by the QUD referring to the context involving the previous negative assertion. We could represent this as in the following feature structure:<sup>15</sup>

$$(99) \left[ \begin{array}{c} \text{SEM} \\ \left[ \begin{array}{c} \textit{question} \\ \lambda x[\textit{reason}(x, \boxed{1}\neg[\text{pass}(m, e)])] \end{array} \right] \\ \text{CTXT} \\ \left[ \begin{array}{c} \text{MAX-QUD } \lambda x[\textit{reason}(x, \boxed{1})] \end{array} \right] \end{array} \right]$$

This information-seeking FQ asks for a reason for Mimi's not passing the exam.

As noted by Bromberger (1992: 160–161), unlike other *wh*-words, *why* functions as a focus assigner. Compare the following:

- (100) a. A: Why did ADAM eat the apple?  
 B: because he was the one that Eve worked on.  
 b. A: Why did Adam eat the APPLE?  
 B: because it (the apple) was the only food around.

<sup>14</sup> Following Ginzburg & Sag (2000), we assume that all clauses represent a type of message: *proposition*, *question*, *outcome*, or *fact*. These values could be mapped onto the speech act that an utterance performs in the given context, such as assertions, requests, suggestions, and so forth (Searle 1969; Austin 1975).

<sup>15</sup> The boxed number here is used to show that the SEM and MAX-QUD features share the same value, i.e., the salient proposition that Mimi didn't pass the exam.

- (101) a. A: When did ADAM eat the apple?  
 B: At 4 P.M. on July 7, 24,000 B.C
- b. A: When did Adam eat the APPLE?  
 B: At 4 P.M. on July 7, 24,000 B.C

The possible answers here tell us the key difference between *why* and other *wh*-questions. Unlike *when*, the interpretation of *why* differs depending on where focus is placed in its prejacent. That is, *when* itself carries a focus value, while *why* assigns a focus to the phonologically prominent expression. This difference predicts that the remnant *not* cannot occur with other *wh*-phrases as an FQ, as in (102), since these cannot assign a focus value to the negator:

- (102) \*{Who/What/When/Where/How} not?

As noted earlier, the negator *not* (inducing a *neg-relation*) serves as a propositional anaphor selecting a contextually salient proposition ( $\varphi$ ) as its semantic argument. This lexical information could be represented by the following:

- (103) 
$$\left[ \begin{array}{l} \text{SYN } \textit{adv} \\ \text{SEM } \neg(\varphi) \\ \text{FEC } \{\neg[\varphi]\} \end{array} \right]$$

Taken together, the proposed DI approach would then allow the following structure for the FQ *Why not?* in (97):

- (104)
- $$\begin{array}{c}
 \text{S} \\
 \left[ \text{SEM } [2] \lambda x [\textit{reason}(x, [1])] \right] \\
 \diagdown \quad \diagup \\
 \begin{array}{cc}
 \text{Adv} & \text{S} \\
 \left[ \text{SEM } [2] \right] & \left[ \begin{array}{l} \textit{hd-frag-cxt} \\ \text{FEC } \{[1] \neg [\textit{pass}(m, e)]\} \end{array} \right] \\
 | & | \\
 \text{Why} & \text{AdvP} \\
 & \left[ \text{SEM } \neg [\textit{pass}(m, e)] \right] \\
 & \triangle \\
 & \text{not?}
 \end{array}
 \end{array}$$

The focused fragment *not* as a propositional anaphor can project into an NSU via the head-fragment construction. For its semantic resolution, it takes as its argument the salient proposition ( $pass(m, e)$ ) contextually provided from the antecedent clause, yielding the negative propositional meaning ( $\neg[pass(m, e)]$ ). The expression *why* then asks for a reason for Mimi's not passing the exam. In the present system, anaphoric *not* selecting a salient proposition as its semantic argument ( $\neg(\varphi)$ ) captures the sentential negativity of WNFQs.

The present approach thus relies on discourse structure for the resolution of the anaphoric *not*. Hofmann (2022; 2023) also suggests an anaphoric analysis, but under a syntactic identity condition. Consider the following structure that Hofmann (2023: (49)) postulates:

(105) [Mary didn't [<sub>vP</sub> ~~Mary dance~~] <sup>$\phi^1$</sup> ] <sup>$\phi^2$</sup> . Sue explained why not [<sub>vP</sub> ~~Mary danced~~] <sup>$\phi^1$</sup> .

Hofmann suggests that the anaphoric *not* here refers to a proposition in the scope of the negation and undergoes clausal ellipsis under the syntactic isomorphism condition in (106):

(106) Syntactic isomorphism condition (Hofmann 2023: (48)):

The argument-domain in the elided clause (i.e. the smallest phrase denoting a property of eventualities) is syntactically isomorphic to a phrase in the discourse context.

The elided vP of the WNFQ in (105) satisfies this condition. Such an ellipsis approach, however, would be challenged by attested examples like the following, which we repeat from Section 3:

- (107) a. You decided not to run. Why not?  
 b. A: I was thinking of not going.  
 B: Why not?

As tested by *neither*-tags, the negator *not* in the antecedent clause here is constituent negation. Hofmann's movement-and-delete approach would take the elided parts of the WNFQs in (107) to be syntactically isomorphic to their antecedents, as given in (108):

- (108) a. Why not [<sub>vP</sub> ~~you decided not to run~~]  
 b. Why not [<sub>vP</sub> ~~you were thinking of not going~~]

The possible issue here is that these putative sources yield different interpretations from what the WNFQs in (107) really mean. The ellipsis analysis would then require not to interpret one of the negators.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> The in-situ ellipsis approach to WNFQs could avoid this issue by assuming the following derivations:

- (i) a. Why ~~did you decide not to run~~  
 b. Why ~~were you thinking of not going~~

The present DI approach, taking the structured discourse and context to play a pivotal role in the semantic resolution of WNFQs, could avoid such an issue. Consider again the following examples involving constituent and lexical negation:

- (109) a. A: Mimi is thinking about not going.  
           B: Why not?  
        b. A: The computer is unable to comply.  
           B: Why not?

In the present system, the remnant *not* need not refer to a syntactic or semantic representation of the antecedent. As shown here, within the present analysis, the interpretation of the anaphoric remnant *not* depends on the salient discourse information in the given context. Given that declaratives evoke a QUD construed as a polar question that asks whether  $p$  is true or not (Ginzburg et al. 2000), the propositional anaphor *not* in (109) would refer to a positive proposition in the scope of the negation, which is provided by the QUDs in question:

- (110) a.  $\left[ \text{CTXT} \mid \text{MAX-QUD } \lambda\{ \} [\neg[\text{going}(m)]] \right]$   
        b.  $\left[ \text{CTXT} \mid \text{MAX-QUD } \lambda\{ \} [\neg[\text{able}(c, \text{to.comply})]] \right]$

The QUD evoked by the antecedent in (109a) includes a subquestion of whether Mimi is going or not, and the remnant *not* refers to this for its semantic resolution while the QUD in (109b) asks whether the computer is able to comply or not. As such, the meaning of the fragment is resolved with no recourse to syntactic structures.<sup>17</sup>

It is generally assumed that the truth of the propositional content of information-seeking *why*-questions is presupposed (Bromberger 1992; Fitzpatrick 2005). Observe (111).

- (111) A: Why did Kim leave?  
        B: #He has been here the whole time, and won't move an inch.

(Hofmann 2022: (54a))

The infelicity of the response here is because its content contradicts the presupposed proposition that Kim left. Adopting Hofmann's (2022; 2023) insights, we assume that this factivity property of *why* is inherited by anaphoric WNFQs, alongside a construction-specific contextual constraint, as stated in (112).

- (112) Anaphoric Why-not FQ Construction:

The construction presupposes the negative proposition asserted in the previous discourse.

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<sup>17</sup> Speakers use various strategies to answer questions by breaking them down into smaller subquestions (Roberts 2012). On this view, the QUD raised by the antecedent asks the superquestion 'Is Mimi thinking about not going?' which breaks down into more specific subquestions including 'Is Mimi going?'



This contextual constraint on the anaphoric WNFQ construction could account for the negative antecedent condition imposed on it:

- (113) A: Mimi passed the exam.  
B: \*Why not?

The factivity presupposition of the negative prejacent ( $\neg\varphi$ ) of *why* requires that its antecedent clause assert a negative proposition (Hofmann 2018; 2022). However, in (113), the factivity condition is not met because of the conflict between the negative prejacent (i.e., Mimi didn't pass the exam) and the positive antecedent asserting that Mimi passed the exam.

This contextual constraint can also account for why the antecedent of anaphoric WNFQs is disallowed in the complement clause whose propositional content is not asserted (Hofmann 2018; 2022). Consider the following (Hofmann 2018: (75)):

- (114) a. A: I wonder if Jasmine didn't sleep last night.  
B: #Why not?  
b. A: It's a possibility that Josh didn't go to school.  
B: #Why not?  
c. A: I'm sure that Jim doesn't surf.  
B: Why not?

In (114a), the antecedent clause embedded under the question verb is not assertive, hence it leads to the unacceptability of the WNFQ. In (114b), the antecedent also occurs in the nonassertive context where it is embedded under the nonassertive predicate *be a possibility/possible* in the sense of Hooper (2012). On the other hand, in (114c), the strong assertive predicate *be sure* in Hooper's view commits the speaker to the truth of the proposition expressed by the embedded antecedent, thus the assertion condition is satisfied.

In addition, the present analysis correctly predicts that anaphoric negation can serve as the antecedent for anaphoric WNFQs. Consider the following attested example:

- (115) A: I can help you out with a down payment.  
B: Absolutely not.  
A: Why not? (COCA 2003 TV)

In the above dialogue exchange, the first remnant negator in B's response refers to the positive proposition ( $\varphi$ ), yielding the negative meaning, i.e., *You can't help me out with a down payment* ( $\neg[\varphi]$ ). The remnant *not* in the WNFQ is not different: the positive proposition ( $\varphi$ ) serves as its argument, resulting in the same negative proposition ( $\neg[\varphi]$ ).

As for anaphoric WNFQs, Stockwell (to appear: 9–10) notes that both the reason and negative meanings introduced by *why* and *not*, respectively, must come from the same clause:

- (116) A: John didn't tell Mary he was going.  
 B1: Why? (✓why ~ tell)  
 B2: Why not? (✓why ~ tell)
- (117) (In truth, John went to the party. But ... )  
 A: John told Mary he didn't go to the party.  
 B1: Why? (✓why ~ tell, ✓why ~ go)  
 B2: Why not? (\*why ~ tell, ✓why ~ go)

In (116), both of the *why* and *why not* FQs are interpreted as inquiring about a reason for John's not telling. In (117), however, unlike the *why*-question, the WNFQ can only be associated with the negative embedded clause, but not the positive matrix clause, questioning a reason for John's not going to the party. This clause-mate condition can be captured by the present analysis. Under the negative antecedent condition, the embedded clause serves as the antecedent. The propositional anaphor *not* in the WNFQ refers to the salient proposition evoked from the antecedent, yielding the negative proposition ( $\neg[\text{go}(j, \text{to.the.party})]$ ). The *wh*-word *why* then directly takes this negative proposition as its semantic argument:

- (118) The meaning of *Why not*:  $\lambda x[\text{reason}(x), \neg[\text{go}(j, \text{to.the.party})]]$

As noted before, anaphoric WNFQs are insensitive to complex NP islands, as in (119), repeated from (44).

- (119) a. A: That's [the one part I could never buy into].  
 B: Why not? (COCA 2017 TV)  
 b. It's about [a young soldier who doesn't want to be in the army anymore]. I can't imagine why not. (COCA 1991 TV)

Since the present analysis directly projects the negative fragment into a non-sentential utterance, it is expected that WNFQs involve no island-sensitive operations (cf. Stockwell to appear). The DI approach has no expectation that properties of unbounded dependencies are also projected in WNFQs.

In accounting for the rhetorical reading of WNFQs, we follow Han (2002) in assuming that the *wh*-phrase in rhetorical questions is mapped onto a negative quantifier (e.g., *what* as *nothing*, *who* as *nobody*); in other words, as sketched in (120) and (121), the value of a rhetorical *wh*-phrase denotes an empty set.

- (120) a. What has John done for you?  
 b.  $\neg\exists(x)[\text{thing}(x) \ \& \ \text{has.done}(j, x, \text{for.me})] \rightarrow$  John has done nothing for me.

- (121) a. Who knows?  
 b.  $\neg\exists(x)[person(x) \ \& \ knows(x)] \rightarrow$  Nobody knows.

The semantic negation contributed by the rhetorical *wh*-phrase is responsible for the polarity reversal effect in the interpretation of rhetorical questions (see Han 2002 for detailed discussions on rhetorical questions).

Accepting Han's approach, we assume that rhetorical *why*-questions like (122) express an assertion in which the value of the rhetorical *why* is the empty set and not some other set:

- (122) a. Why do I bother talking to you? (= I shouldn't bother talking to you.)  
 b. Why do you do this to yourself? (= You shouldn't do this to yourself.)

The rhetorical meanings of (122) would be derived as follows:

- (123) a.  $\neg\exists x[reason(x) \ \& \ bother(I, \ talking.to.you, \ for.x)]$   
 = There is no reason that I bother talking to you.  
 = I shouldn't bother talking to you.  
 b.  $\neg\exists x[reason(x) \ \& \ do(y, \ this, \ to.yourself, \ for.x)]$   
 = There is no reason that you do this to yourself.  
 = You shouldn't do this to yourself.

We assume that the *why* in rhetorical WNFQs like (124) also functions as the rhetorical *why* mapped onto a negative quantifier.

- (124) a. We would like to dance. Why not? (conveying a positive assertion)  
 b. A: Let's dance.  
 B: Why not? (conveying acceptance)

In deriving both of the rhetorical readings, the fragment *not* as a propositional anaphor evokes a negative proposition, as it does in anaphoric WNFQs. The rhetorical *why* takes this proposition as its semantic argument and is mapped onto a negative quantifier, as sketched in (125).

- (125)  $\neg\exists x[reason(x) \ \& \ \neg[dance(we, \ for.x)]]$   
 = There is no reason that we do not dance.  
 = We should dance.

The classical rhetorical WNFQ in (124a) is interpreted as an assertion that there is no reason not to dance, which is paraphrasable roughly as *We should dance*. On the other hand, the one in (124b) is interpreted at a pragmatic level as an acceptance of the suggestion in the sense that the assertion implies a positive reception and a willingness to participate in the dancing suggested by the speaker A in the appropriate context.

The present analysis assumes that both anaphoric and rhetorical WNFQs basically involve a negative propositional meaning introduced by the fragment *not*. But they crucially differ in that in the former case, *why* inquires about a reason for the proposition, while in the latter case, it functions as a negative quantifier whose value is the empty set for the proposition. This analysis can be extended to account for the rhetorical meaning of *why*-stripping (see Zaitsev 2020 for discussion on rhetorical uses of Why-VP). Consider (126).

- (126) A: Let's dance.  
B: Why dance? I don't like it.

The NSU projected from the fragment *dance* denotes a positive proposition, and the rhetorical *why* takes this salient proposition and yields the rhetorical meaning like the following:

- (127)  $\neg\exists x[\textit{reason}(x) \ \& \ \textit{dance}(\textit{we}, \textit{for}.x)]$   
= There is no reason that we dance.  
= We shouldn't dance.

In sum, the remnant *not* in both types of WNFQs functions as a propositional anaphor that picks up a contextually salient proposition in the given context. The two different readings of WNFQs are captured by positing two different functions of *why*: information-seeking *why* for anaphoric uses and rhetorical *why* for rhetorical uses. This direction offers a uniform analysis for anaphoric as well as rhetorical uses of WNFQs.

## 6 Conclusion

The intriguing feature of WNFQs is that they are non-sentential units, but they induce a propositional interpretation, namely an anaphoric or rhetorical reading. This mismatch between form and semantic function has led the development of ellipsis-based approaches. The ellipsis approaches we discussed in this article crucially assume that elliptical fragments are external to a single, elided constituent. This leads to assume two main points, namely that WNFQs involve a putative negative source and the remnant negation, which is semantically vacuous, forms a negative concord chain with the semantic negation at the ellipsis site, giving rise to the negative neutralization effect.

After reviewing the key properties of WNFQs, we discussed the arguments for and against the agreement-based move-and-delete approaches for anaphoric WNFQs. We then reported the corpus investigation of WNFQs, making use of the COCA data. It analyzed the dataset with the following variables: polarity values of the antecedent, negation types of the antecedent, and clause types of the antecedent. The quantitative results showed that the semantic resolution of WNFQs are dependent on the context, challenging the negative concord analyses.

Assuming that WNFQs are a subtype of *why*-stripping and further that the remnant negation is a propositional anaphor referring to a contextually salient proposition, we proposed the alternative DI (direct interpretation) approach couched upon the framework of construction-based HPSG (Head-driven Phrase Structure Grammar). According to this analysis, the remnant negation, as a focus establishing element, projects into an NSU, yielding a proper propositional meaning. To capture the two different readings of WNFQs, we postulated the two different functions of *why*. For anaphoric uses, *why* is used as an information-seeking *wh*-word, and for rhetorical uses, it is used as a rhetorical *wh*-word mapping onto a negative quantifier. This non-ellipsis, discourse-based direction offers a uniform analysis for anaphoric as well as rhetorical uses of WNFQs.

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The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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