

Why-stripping targets Voice Phrase

Introduction. This paper considers the phenomenon of *why* with fragments ((1); Freeman 1976, Collins 1991). The phenomenon in (1a,b,c) is referred to as *why*-stripping by Nakao et al. (2012).

- (1) a. John ate natto. Why natto? d. Why go to Italy on holiday?
 b. Jane left. Why Jane? e. Why be hung for a lamb when you could be shot for a sheep?
 c. They left on Tuesday. Why on Tuesday?

Nakao et al. propose that the pronounced fragment in *why*-stripping is moved to the specifier of a Focus head in the CP layer, which then licenses the ellipsis of its TP complement (by bearing an [E] feature, along the lines of Merchant 2001). The *why* is base-generated in [Spec, CP], which Nakao et al. argue is motivated for independent reasons, and explains the lack of (e.g.) *where*- or *how*-stripping; only *why* may be base-generated and triggers the association with focus licensing the focus head. I will argue that, while Nakao et al. are right to argue that *why* is base-generated and that fragments as in (1a-c) are the result of movement to the Spec of an ellipsis-licensing Focus head, they are incorrect in identifying *why*-stripping as TP ellipsis. On the basis of various diagnostics, I propose that a CP containing *why* is base-generated above Voice Phrase, with no TP in the structure (2a). I argue that cases like (1d, e) (which I will call *why*-fragments) are by contrast not ellipsis, but rather *why* taking a non-finite TP as complement (2b,c).

- (2) a. [_{CP} Why [_{FP} on Tuesday F_[E] <[_{VoiceP} [_{VP} we [_{VP} leave]]]]>]]
 b. [_{CP} Why [_{TP} PRO [_{VoiceP} [_{VP} [_{VP} go to Italy on holiday]]]]]]
 c. [_{CP} Why [_{TP} PRO [_{VoiceP} be [_{VP} [_{VP} hung for a lamb]]]]]]

Reasons to believe that *why*-stripping selects VoiceP. An analysis in which *why*-stripping targets VoiceP (rather than TP or v/VP) can explain some otherwise mysterious properties of *why*-stripping.

- *Why*-stripping does not tolerate Voice mismatches, as pointed out by Nakao et al. (2012). The ellipsis-licensing head should then be above vP, as vP-ellipsis does tolerate Voice mismatches (Merchant 2007).

- (3) I know why MARY took out the garbage. *Why by JOHN, though?

- *Why*-stripped verbs are untensed. This is expected if *why*-stripping targets a constituent below TP.

- (4) Mary danced. Why dance(*d)? (only “metalinguistically” = “Why are we saying ‘danced’?”)

- *Why*-stripping does not preserve tense. (5) below can be interpreted with a different tense from the antecedent. Assuming a syntactic matching requirement between ellipsis and antecedent (Merchant 2007 a.o.), this is unexpected if the ellipsis site contains Tense (the past tense should be ‘copied over’), but can be explained if it does not (with the temporal location of the event perhaps derived pragmatically).

- (5) *Context: There is an empty bowl of what clearly was stew. John wipes his mouth, changes his spoon, and is about to dig into a bowl of natto.* I understand why John ate the stew. Why the natto, though?

[_{CP} Why [_{FP} the natto₁ <[_{VoiceP} [_{VP} John eat t₁]]>]] (no past tense node)

- *Why*-stripping preserves root modality but not epistemic modality. Compare (6a) and (6b).

- (6) a. I understand why John can access the guest account. Why the superuser account, though?

b. [Detectives' conference – debating possible hypotheses]

I understand why John might be in Stockholm (a witness saw someone answering to his description). ??Why in Oslo, though? (OK: 'why might John be in Oslo?')

Root modality is preserved in the ellipsis in (6a) (= “why can John access the account”), but epistemic modality is not preserved in (6b) (≠ “why might John be in Oslo”). If root modality is generated below T but epistemic modality above (following Hacquard 2006 and refs therein), this behavior can be explained.

Support from the behavior of subjects. If TP is not present in the structure of *why*-stripping, then subjects cannot receive nominative Case from T. Given a principle like the Case Filter, we expect overt subjects to be disallowed in *why*-stripping, as they cannot receive nominative Case. I argue that this is what leads to the ungrammaticality of (7a). Objects, however, can receive accusative Case in the normal way, and so are licensed, leading to the grammaticality of (7b).

- (7) a. I understand why Bill left. Jane left too, though. *Why Jane? (OK: '...why did Jane?')

b. I understand why you ate the beans. You ate the natto too, though. Why the natto?

([_{CP} why [_{FP} the natto₁ <[_{VoiceP} you eat t₁]]>]])

There are various apparent counterexamples to this general principle, discussed below. I will argue that none are real counterexamples to the generalization that *why*-stripping targets Voice Phrase.

• Apparent *why*-stripped subjects are actually objects of clefts. (8a) (=1b)) shows an apparently clear case of a *why*-stripped subject. I argue, however, that (8a) involves ellipsis of a cleft sentence, as in (8b).

(8) a. Jane left. Why Jane? b. [_{CP} Why [_{FP} Jane_i <[_{VoiceP} it was t_i that left]>]]

Following Reeve (2011)'s syntax for clefts, the copula *was* is generated in vP, and so can be captured by the ellipsis. Merchant (2001) argues against a cleft analysis for sluicing ('pseudosluicing'), but Merchant's counterarguments do not apply to *why*-stripping. Clefts bring about a uniqueness presupposition; when that presupposition cannot be accommodated, as in (7a), the structure is ungrammatical. Furthermore, subjects like *nothing* or *nobody*, which are degraded in clefts, show the same degree of degradation in *why*-stripping, although in object position they are fine.

(9) a. Nothing appeared. ??Why nothing? (??Why was it nothing that appeared?)

b. You ate nothing. Why nothing? ([_{CP} Why [_{FP} nothing_i <[_{VoiceP} you eat t_i>]])

• *Why*-stripped subjects in passives. Subject *why*-stripping in passives seems better than actives.

(10) I understand why Bill was fired. John was fired too, though. (?)Why John?

(Compare (10) to (7a).) The grammaticality of (10) is surprising, as it represents a case where a subject has been extracted from the ellipsis site, contrary to the conclusion reached for cases like (7a). Such a subject should fail to pass the Case Filter, or equivalent principle. However, we independently know that accusative case can be assigned in English passive constructions if T is not present, as shown by absolute constructions like (11a,b), while this is not possible e.g. in unaccusatives or active unergatives (11c,d):

(11) a. [The ban lifted], the publishers could proceed. b. [Him paid], the building can start.

c. *[The manager arrived], the meeting could start. d. ?*[Him sleeping], we could go to bed.

We can sketch an account for (10) in the current framework by arguing that the suppression of accusative Case in (standard) passives is due to the presence of T, following for example a 'hierarchical' model of Case assignment as in Marantz 1991, where T introduces a nominative Case which must be assigned to some argument. *Why*-stripping is one environment, along with absolute constructions, in which there is no T to introduce Nominative, so internal arguments are free to receive accusative Case.

***Why*-fragments without ellipsis.** Given this analysis of *why*-stripping, it is tempting to extend it to cases such as (1d,e). However, I argue that *why*-constructions with full verb phrases are not elliptical and cannot be identified with *why*-stripping; specifically, I argue that these fragments do contain (non-finite) T.

• *Why*-fragments license PRO subjects, such as those which appear in other non-finite contexts in English. This can be detected from the binding requirements imposed by a subject pronominal.

(12) a. I thought, why overexert myself/*me?

b. Why PRO_{arb/*1} teach me₁ Spanish?

c. Why PRO_{1/*arb} teach myself₁ Spanish?

• *Why*-fragments contain modality common to non-finite contexts. Bhatt 1999 discusses the teleological modality in non-finite contexts such as *Hafdis knows where to get gas* (≈ "Hafdis knows where one should get gas"). *Why*-fragments show the same teleological modality:

(13) Why go to Italy? ≈ "Why should one go to Italy?"

• *Why*-fragments do not license accusative Case on passive subjects. This behavior contrasts with instances of *why*-stripping such as (10). It can be explained if the suppression of accusative Case is due to T, as argued above; if T is present in structures such as (14), accusative Case cannot be assigned.

(14) *Why him be fired? *[_{CP} Why [_{TP} him₁ T_{nonfin} [_{VoiceP} be [_{VP} fired t₁]]]]

Conclusion. This paper extends the analysis of *why*-stripping provided by Nakao et al. (2012) and provides evidence that *why* and its ellipsis-licensing Focus associate must merge with a VoiceP, rather than a TP. This expands our knowledge of which constituents can be selected for ellipsis. It also illustrates a difference between the syntax of *why*-fragments and *why*-stripping, despite surface similarities; *why*-fragments select non-finite T, not VoiceP, clarifying the syntax of this understudied construction.

References. Bhatt, R. 1999. *Covert modality in non-finite contexts*. PhD dissertation, UPenn. • Collins, C. 1991. Why and how come. *MITWPL* 15. • Freeman, C. 1976. A pragmatic analysis of tenseless why-questions. *CLS* 12. • Hacquard, V. 2006. *Aspects of modality*. PhD dissertation, MIT. • Marantz, A. 1991. Case and licensing. *ESCOL* '91. • Merchant, J. 2001. *The syntax of silence*. OUP. • Merchant, J. 2007. Voice and ellipsis. Ms. • Nakao, C., M. Yoshida and I. Ortega-Santos. 2012. On the syntax of *why*-stripping. *WCCFL* 30. • Reeve, M. 2011. The syntactic structure of English clefts. *Lingua* 121:142–71.