

Suggesterrogatives

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1 Introduction

Suggesterrogatives are, very roughly, *why*-interrogatives whose illocutionary force is suggestion.

(1) Why don't you take a left here. (Manfred Krifka's personally communicated NYC memoir)

Studied in the 70s, mainly by Sadock (1974) and Green (1975), who viewed them as a subclass of *whimperatives*.

- (2) a. Shouldn't you put that away?
b. Could you take out the trash (please)?
c. Will you close the fridge (please)?

The surface-hallmark of English suggesterrogatives is the *why not / why don't* form.

- (3) A: I'd like to know when the 55th st. post office opens.
B: **Why don't** you go there now and ask.
B: **Why not** go there now and ask.

The surface-hallmark of Hebrew suggesterrogatives is the presence of a complementizer after the *wh*- word *lama* 'why' (Francez 2015)

— *why* question:

- (4) **lama lo** yored geSem?
why neg comes.down rain
Why isn't it raining?

— *suggesterogative*:

- (5) A: I'd like to know when the 55th st. post office opens.
B: **lama Se-lo** telxi le-Sam axSav ve-tiS'ali
why that-neg go.fut.2sf to-there now and-ask.2fs
Why don't you go there now and ask.

More examples from Francez (2015):

- (6) lama Se-lo tagiS et exad ha-sfarim Selxa ke-teza?
why that-neg submit.fut.2sm acc one the-books yours as-thesis
Why don't you submit one of your books as a thesis?
(title of a blog post by journalist Raviv Druker, <http://drucker10.net/?p=306>)
- (7) az im anaxnu kvar kan, az lama-Se lo nexayex ve-niSte eyze te
so if we already here, then why that-not smile.fut.1pl and-drink.fut1pl which tea.CS
vradim im nana.
roses with mint
So since we're already here, why don't we smile and drink some sort of rose-tea with mint.
(found in Tal Linzen's Israblog corpus, <http://tallinzen.net>)

WORKSHOP QUESTIONS:

- What is the meaning and force of suggesterrogatives?
- How is their interpretation related to some puzzling features of their form?

2 Descriptive generalizations

The most obvious difference between suggesterrogatives and *why*-questions is in their presuppositions and in their main discursive effect:

- *Why*-questions presuppose the truth of a proposition and ask for reasons for its truth.
- suggesterrogatives presuppose the unsettledness of an issue under the addressee's control and suggest a resolution.

- (8) A: Why don't you feed the cats? (∂ : you don't feed the cats)
B: Because I'm training them to hunt their food.
- (9) A: Here, why don't you feed the cats. (∂ : you feed the cats? is unsettled and up to you.)
B: OK, thanks.

- Some ways to recognize suggesterrogatives in English:
 - Appendability of *here* (Gordon and Lakoff 1975)

(10) a. Here, why don't you take a left at the light.
b. #Here, why didn't you take a left at the light?
 - Appendability of *please* (Sadock 1974; Gordon and Lakoff 1975)

(11) a. Why don't you take out the trash please
b. #why didn't you take out the trash please?

– Response with 'ok'

- (12) a. A: Why don't you feed the cats tonight. B: ok
b. A: Why don't you ever feed the cats? B: #ok

2.1 The main puzzles

Suggesterrogatives in English and Hebrew have some peculiar properties that any analysis should explain:

1. Restriction to negation.

- (13) A: We have a leak.
B: Why don't you call my plumber. (\equiv call my plumber)
B: #Why (do you) call my plumber. (\neq don't call my plumber)
- (14) A: we have a leak.
B: lama Se-lo titkaSer la-Sravrav. (\equiv call the plumber)
why that-not call.fut.2ms the-plumber
Why don't you call the plumber
B: #lama Se titkaSer la-Sravrav. (\neq don't call the plumber)
why that call.fut.2ms the-plumber
Why call the plumber?

(Interestingly, (14-b) can be used sarcastically to mock A's fecklessness.)

2. Failure, despite negation, to license NPIs and concord items:

- (15) a. Please, come in. Here, why don't you eat something / #anything
b. hine, lama Se-lo toxal maSehu / *klum.
here, why that-not eat.2ms.fut something / nothing
Here, why don't you eat something.
- (16) a. Sam is going to Finland. Why don't you go there too / *either.
b. Why doesn't Sam know where Finland is? And why don't you know it either / *too.

3. Obligatory contraction in English:

- (17) *Why do you not have some cookies.

4. Restriction to controlable eventualities

- (18) a. Why don't you look like your mother? (question only)
b. Why don't you know Amharic? (question only)

5. Tense restrictions

- (19) Here, why don't you eat something. (=)
a. #Here, why aren't you eating something. (\neq eat something!)
COMPARE: Aren't you eating anything?

- b. #Here, why won't you eat something. (\neq eat something!)
 COMPARE: Won't you eat something?

In Hebrew, suggesterrogatives are always in the future tense.

3 A simple, attractive analysis

Suggesterrogatives are rhetorical negative *why*-questions.

We know there are rhetorical *why* questions:

- (20) a. Why do I bother talking to you? (= I shouldn't bother talking to you).
 b. Why do you do this to yourself. (Rhode 2006) (= you shouldn't do this to yourself)
- (21) Why don't you turn left.

Very roughly:

- The issue of where you should go is relevant.
- Speaker asks for reasons for *you don't turn left*.
- It's either common ground, or speaker is certain, that there are no such reasons ("obvious answer" or "challenging" rhetorical question, following Doron and Wolf 2016, following Krifka 1995; Caponigro and Sprouse 2007)
- Hearer concludes Speaker believes, and hence is communicating, they should turn left.
- NPIs are not licensed because, somehow (!!), the positive force of the utterance blocks them.

IMMEDIATE PROBLEMS:

— The non-interrogative versions of suggesterrogatives have the wrong meaning, they are obligatorily habitual.

- (22) You don't turn left.

(21) does not presuppose that, and ask why, you don't turn left.

— Suggesterrogatives clearly don't involve subject-aux inversion like *wh*- questions.

- (23) a. Why don't you be there on time (next time).
 b. *You don't be there on time (next time).

- (24) a. Why don't everybody be quiet.
 b. *Everybody don't be quiet.

So, suggesterrogatives are clearly not negative *why* questions, semantically or structurally.

POSSIBLE WAY OUT: SUBJUNCTIVE

English has a “subjunctive” form that occurs in some embedded contexts.

- (25) a. I suggest [you don't go there].
b. I suggest [you not go there].
c. I request that [you not / don't go there].

Note: not all speakers accept *don't* in (25-a) and (25-c).

Perhaps English suggesterrogatives are special *why* questions formed out of a subjunctive clause. But:

— Subjunctives cannot be matrix clauses.

— There are suggesterrogatives that do not have a grammatical subjunctive counterpart.

- (26) a. Why don't I be there early.
b. *She suggested that I don't be there early.

MY CONCLUSION: Suggesterrogatives in English are not *why* questions inquiring reasons for a negative proposition. In other words, not:
why: [... neg...]

This is a good conclusion, because it alleviates the need to figure how to account for:

- the restriction to negation
- the failure to license NPIs and concord items.

4 Another simple analysis that doesn't work

Suggesterrogatives are *why* questions formed from imperatives.

- (27) a. Why don't you turn left here.
b. Why: [don't you turn left here!]

This is not really an option at all. Neither English nor Hebrew suggesterrogatives involve an imperative. In Hebrew, this is transparent from the morphology. (See also discussion in Green 1975)

- (28) a. Why don't you shut the fuck up already.
b. #Don't you shut the fuck up already!

- (29) a. Why don't you eat something.
b. *Don't you eat something!

- (30) a. Why don't I drive.
b. *Don't I drive!

- (31) *lama Se-lo Sev.
 why that-not sit.imp
 Intended: why don't you sit down.

5 Suggesterrogatives are short-circuited *why not* interrogatives

Suggesterrogatives are formed from *why not* questions, inquiring reasons against a suggestion, expressed by a subjunctive.

- (32) Why-not [you turn left]

English Suggesterrogatives consist of:

- A subjunctive clause that
 - Presupposes an unsettled issue.
 - Denotes the proposition that the speaker prefers a particular resolution.
- *why*
- negation: *not* if there subjunctive has no subject, *don't* if it does. (why??)

The meaning of subjunctive is the same as that of imperative.

- English subjunctive: non-matrix form that expresses speaker commitment to an effective preference for a particular resolution of a presupposed unsettled issue.

$$(33) \llbracket \text{you turn left at the light} \rrbracket = PEP_{sp}(\text{Ad turn left at the light})$$

(I leave it open whether a subjunctive operator, similar to Condoravdi and Lauer's Condoravdi and Lauer (In Press) IMP is involved.)

- *why+not*, *why-*, inquires about reasons against a proposition.

$$(34) \llbracket \text{why-}, S_{subj} \rrbracket = \lambda p.p = \exists x[x \text{ is a reason against } S] \text{ (following Doron and Wolf 2016).}$$

$$(35) \llbracket \text{why don't you turn left} \rrbracket = \lambda p.\exists x[p = x \text{ is a reason against } PEP_{sp}(\text{Ad turn left at the light})]$$

a. What reasons are there against the suggestion that you turn left?

- So, the literal meaning of a why-not-subjunctive sentence is a question asking for reasons against the speaker publicly committing to preferring a particular resolution of an unresolved issue.

IMMEDIATE EXPLANATION OF:

- The failure of NPI licensing: there is no licenser in the clausal complement of *why not*.
- The tense restrictions: tensed sentences cannot express speaker's public commitment to effective preferences.
- Obligatory contraction: negation does not "originate" in the main clause.

What about the restriction to negation?

- The sentences might be candidates for positive suggesterrogatives:

- (36) a. Why be a doctor?
b. Why drink and drive if you can smoke and fly?
c. Why leave?

- But they cannot really convey suggestions or be responded to as suggestions:

- (37) a. Why be a doctor? #ok.
b. #Please, why leave! (cf. Please, why don't you stay!)

I don't know why suggesterrogatives can be formed from *why not* but not from *why* questions.

5.1 Force

Suggesterrogatives have the force of imperatives. They can be used to make commands, give advice, etc. (though they cannot form wishes.)

- (38) a. Why don't you shut the fuck up / get the hell out of here / do what I tell you! (Command)
b. Why don't you use some more olive oil. (Advice)

If their literal meaning is a question, how do they get their force?

INDIRECT SPEECH ACTS?

Idea: suggesterrogatives are questions that indirectly convey suggestions.

- (39) Could you pass the salt?

But what are indirect speech acts?

option 1: conversational implicatures (a la Searle (1975); Gordon and Lakoff (1975))

- (40) Why don't you eat something.
a. Semantically, a question asking for reasons for something.
b. MANNER implicature: you should eat something.

— As Sadock (1972) points out according to Horn and Bayer (1984) (as does Green 1975) such alleged implicatures, unlike normal conversational implicatures, are detachable.

- (41) a. #Is it possible for you to pass the salt?
b. #Here, what are reasons against the suggestion that you eat something?

option 2: conventions of usage (a la Morgan (1977))

conventions that are, strictly speaking, not conventions *of* the language, but conventions *about* the language, properly considered conventions of the culture that uses the language.

On this view, there is a convention about English that says that you can make suggestions by using Suggesterrogatives, which have the meaning of questions.

- (42) **convention of usage for suggesterrogatives:** you can make a suggestion by inquiring for reasons against it.

But the impositive force of suggesterrogatives seems to be part of their conventional meaning:

— They can occur in anankastic conditionals, unlike indirect suggestions.

- (43) a. If you want to go the Harlem, why don't you take the A train.
b. #If you want to go the Harlem, can/could you take the A train.
c. #If you want to go the Harlem, would you like to take the A train.

(same in Hebrew)

— They can't be literally interpreted as a question, even a rhetorical one (Green (1975))

- (44) a. Why don't you be a doctor.
b. Why don't you get the hell off my property!
c. Why don't I take that upstairs for you.

— They are not compatible with question-forcing material:

- (45) a. #Why on earth don't you be there 10 minutes early.
b. #Why, tell me, don't you be there 10 minutes early.
c. #Why in the world don't you be a little more careful next time.

So, it looks like the force of suggesterrogatives is not a convention *about* language, but a a convention *of* language.

ALTERNATIVE: SHORT CIRCUITED IMPLICATURE

Morgan (1977) suggests the notion of short-circuited implicature.

... where the implicature... is in principle *calculable*, but is not actually calculated.

— Essentially, this is a grammaticalization / conventionalization story.

— What was once an implicature has become a convention of *use*, determining the *sentential force* of suggesterrogatives.

I follow Condoravdi and Lauer in modeling suggestions in terms of speaker commitments.

- (46) **Suggestions:** Self-verifying assertions of Speaker preference for an action.
- a. Doxastic commitment: Speaker publicly commits to behave as if she believes the proposition that she prefers p .
 - b. Preferential commitment: Publicly commits the speaker to a preference for p (by virtue of Speaker having publicly behaved as if she prefers p).

(47) $\llbracket \text{Why don't you turn left} \rrbracket = \lambda p. \exists x [p = x \text{ is a reason against } EP_{sp}(\text{Ad turn left})]$

The short-circuited implicature:

- Since Speaker is inquiring about reasons against the proposition that she is committed to *Ad turn left*, she must have no such reasons.
- By communicating that she has no reasons against it, she is committing to it, and hence she commits to preferring *Ad turn left*.

The contextual effect of a suggesterrogative is thus conventionally implicative.

- The component of inquiry about reasons is still accessible.
- When there are reasons available to Addressee but not to Speaker, a possible response is to state them.

- (48) A: Why don't you be a doctor.
 B: Because doctors work hard. No thanks.
 B: #I don't be a doctor because doctors work hard.

6 What about Hebrew?

The analysis of suggesterrogatives I proposed for English is the one I first proposed for Hebrew in Francez (2015).

- *Se*-clauses serve as something like subjunctives in Hebrew (borrowed from Judeo-Spanish, Schwarzwald and Shlomo 2015).

- (49) a. Se-tamut amen ba-kever ha-Saxor Sel hitler.
 that-die.fut.2ms Amen in.the-grave the-black of Hitler
 May you die in Hitler's black grave, Amen!
- b. Se-tiye lexa nesia tova!
 that-be.fut.3fs to.you journey good.f
 Have a good trip!

- So the analysis works the same, and explains the inability to license concord items.

But in Hebrew, negation really seems to be, syntactically, within the *that*-clause:

- (50) lama Se-lo teSev.
 why that-not sit.fut.2ms
 Why don't you sit.

Are there other ways to show that negation in Hebrew is really external to the *that*-clause?

— In Hebrew, negation can only have surface scope relative to subject quantifiers.

- (51) a. **kol** exad **lo** hicliax.
 every one neg succeeded
 Everybody didn't succeed. ($\forall > \neg$)
 b. **lo kol** exad hicliax.
 not every one succeeded
 Not everybody succeeded $\neg < \forall$

— But, in suggesterrogatives, negation in either position is interpreted higher than in either surface positions.

- (52) a. yalla, lama Se-**lo kol** exad yaavod levad.
 yalla, why that-neg every one work.fut.3s one
 Alright, how about everybody work alone.
 b. yalla, lama Se-**kol** exad **lo** yaavod levad.
 yalla, why that-every one neg work.fut.3s in-self
 Alright, how about everybody work alone.

— In fact, in these cases negation can even appear outside the clause on the surface

- (53) lama **lo** Se-**kol** exad yaavod levad.
 why not that-every one work.fut.3ms alone
 How about everybody work alone.

7 Conclusions

- Suggesterrogatives in both Hebrew and English are *why not [S]* interrogatives, not *why [not S]* interrogatives. That is why they fail to license NPIs and concord items.
- They are formed with a subjunctive or subjunctive-like core.
- They are not indirect speech acts, their impositive force is conventional.
- While *why don't you q* denotes a question, the question is not about reasons against *q*, but about reasons against the speaker preferring *q*.
- Their impositive force arises as a contextual effect of updating with the questions they denote.

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