

# Suggestive Interrogatives

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Minor Sentence Types, Lisbon 2025

## English suggestive interrogatives

Non-cannonical interrogatives with *why* and negation, used to make suggestions, not to ask questions.

- (1) Why don't you take a left at the light.



- Are suggestive interrogatives just negative *why*-questions? If not, what are they?
- Why can they be used to make suggestions, but not ask questions?
- What does it mean to “suggest”?

## My goals

- Point out a host of properties, formal and interpretative, that distinguish suggestive interrogatives from negative *why*-interrogatives and that any analysis must explain.
- Propose an analysis.

## Main claims

- There is no active negation in the interpretation of suggestive interrogatives.
- *why don't* is a conventionalized force marker that embeds a subjunctive clause and encodes suggestive force.

# Outline

- 1 Descriptive generalizations and explananda
- 2 Two obvious analyses that don't work
- 3 So what *are* suggestive interrogatives

## A1: No subject-aux inversion

*why*-interrogatives are formed with subject-aux inversion from declaratives. Suggestive interrogatives are not.

- (2) Why **don't** **you** look like her?
- (3) **You** **don't** look like her.
- (4) Why **don't** **you** be there early tomorrow.
- (5) \***You** **don't** be there early tomorrow.

## A2: Presupposition

*why*-questions presuppose the truth of the question radical. Suggestive interrogatives presuppose that what they are suggesting is an unsettled issue.

- (6) Why don't you look like her?  
( $\partial$ : you don't look like her)
- (7) Why don't you look at her.  
( $\partial$ : unsettled whether you will look at her.)

## B1: Obligatory negation

Unlike *why*-interrogatives, suggestive interrogatives require negation.

- (8) a. Why don't you have an apple. (suggestion to have an apple)
- b. # Why do you have an apple? (#suggestion to not have an apple)

## B2: Obligatory contraction

Unlike in *why*-interrogatives, in suggestive interrogatives negation must be contracted.

- (9) a. \*Why do not you have an apple.
- b. Why do you not have an apple? (ok question, #suggestion to have an apple)

### C: Suggestion particles

Suggestive interrogatives, but not *why*-interrogatives, are compatible with suggestion-marking particles like *here* and *please*.

- (10) a. Why don't you please sit down. (suggestion)  
b. \*Why didn't you please sit down? (question)
- (11) a. Here, why don't you take this pen. (suggestion)  
b. \*Here, why don't you like chocolate? (question)

## D: Polarity items

Suggestive interrogatives fail to license polarity items, whereas *why*-interrogatives do.

- (12) a. Why don't you tell someone / \*anyone about this.  
b. Why didn't you tell someone / anyone about this?



## Present tense

Suggestive interrogatives are restricted to the simple present, whereas *why*-interrogatives are not.

- (13)
- a. Here, why don't you borrow my car.
  - b. #Here, why didn't you borrow my car.
  - c. # Here, why won't you borrow my car.
  - d. # Here, why aren't you borrowing my car.
  - e. Why didn't / won't / aren't you borrow(ing) my car?

## Agent control

Suggestive interrogatives, but not *why*-interrogatives, must be about thing under an agent's control.

- (14)
- a. #Why don't you please win the game / be taller / look like me.
  - b. Why don't you win any games / look like me?
  - c. Why aren't you taller?

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## why+imperative

why [*imp* don't you open the door].

- Suggestive interrogatives clearly do not embed an imperative

- (15) a. Why don't I lend you my bike.  
b. \*Don't I lend you my bike!

## Indirect speech act

Suggestive interrogatives are *why*-interrogatives expressing suggestions as an indirect speech act.

- (16) a. Can you pass the smoked salmon?  
(Convention: You ask for something to be done by asking if the addressee can do it)
- b. Why don't you try the smoked salmon?  
(Convention: You suggest that something be done by rhetorically asking for reasons not to do it.)
- Suggestive interrogatives are not *why*-interrogatives and can't express questions.
- (17) a. Why don't you be my editor.  
b. \*You don't be my editor.  
c. \*She is wondering why you don't be my editor?

## Upshot: negation is not part of a clausal constituent

- Not part of a negative imperative embedded under *why*:  
x why [ don't ... ]
- Not part of a sentence radical (“raised” through subj-aux inversion):  
x [why [ don't [ you ....] ]

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## A dedicated clause type for suggestions

[why don't] [you have a seat]

- *why+neg* is a grammaticalized “force indicating device”.
- *why+neg* selects for the so-called *mandative subjunctive*, a non-root clause type of English.

- (18) a. I suggest / demand / request [you be there early]  
b. Why don't [you be there early]



## The mandative subjunctive

encodes that the subject has an *effective preference* (Condoravdi and Lauer 2012) for some unsettled content.

- (19)  $\llbracket \text{you be there early} \rrbracket = \lambda w. EP(\text{you}, \text{you-be-there-early}) =$   
You effectively prefer to be there early

## Why+neg encodes directive force

Directive force is public speaker commitment to an effective preference.

- (20)  $\llbracket \text{why don't you be there early} \rrbracket =$   
 $\lambda w. PEP_{sp}(EP(\text{you}, \text{you-be-there-early}))$   
'Speaker publicly commits to a preference that the addressee have a preference to be there early'

## What does this capture and explain?

- Immediately captures the fact that suggestive interrogatives do not involve subject-aux inversion and do not presuppose a question radical (A1-2).
- Immediately explains why suggestive interrogatives do not license NPIs (no negation or other DE environment) (D).
- Negation and contraction are part of the conventionalized *why*+neg operator. (B1-2)
  - you might ask, *why* is the operator *why*+neg? (reasons against *p* vs. reason for  $\neg p$ )
- Immediate explanation for suggestion particles (C), present tense (E), and agent control (F) – these are all features of suggestions.

## What is a suggestion?

A suggestion is a speaker's public commitment to a preference for their addressee to form a preference.

## Suggestive interrogatives vs. imperatives

Suggestive interrogatives have only a subset of the uses of imperatives  
No wish uses, no permission uses

- Imperatives: speaker preference for a proposition.
- Suggestive interrogatives: speaker preference for an addressee preference.

## Conclusion

An analysis of suggestive interrogatives as a clause type conventionally encoding suggestive force, rather than as negative *why*-interrogatives, explains a host of their formal and interpretative properties.

## Things left out for lack of space and time

The crosslinguistic picture: Hebrew also has suggestive interrogatives that are formally and interpretatively distinct from *why*-questions and, arguably, feature a *why+neg* operator.

## Open mysteries

Syntax: Why do suggestive interrogatives feature *do*-support and contraction?