

## New Description of an Interrogative as a Noun: The Case of *A/The Why(S)*

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**Abstract:** *This study reveals how the interrogative why became established as a noun, as used in phrases such as a why or the why(s), adopting a descriptive approach.*

*Dictionaries and previous studies widely acknowledge why as an interrogative. Further, why is often used as a noun in phrases like the why(s) and (the) wherefore(s) and the how(s) and (the) why(s). Most dictionaries pay little attention to why used as a noun. However, the independently used nouns (i.e. a why and the why(s)) occur frequently in present-day English, as shown by my corpus investigation.*

*This study includes a quantitative investigation of how a/the why(s) became widespread in contemporary English. In addition, as a qualitative investigation, characteristics of a/the why(s) are revealed through an analysis of their syntactic features, using corpus data. The quantitative results show that why is independently used in the phrases a why, the why and the whys and that each pattern has been frequently used since the 1920s. The qualitative results indicate that the meaning of a/the why(s) reflects the lexical meaning of why and there is a semantic difference between a why and the why(s). Syntactically, the noun forms of other interrogatives are positioned close to a/the why(s).*

**Keywords:** *noun form of interrogatives, shortening, analogy, principle of linguistic economy*

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The interrogative *why* is observed to function as an independent noun form, as in *a why* or *the why(s)*, in contemporary English, such as in the examples in (1) (italics by the author in all examples in this paper):

- (1) **a.** All I can tell you is, the day of the accident was the last day of my trying to figure out *the whys*. We can usually figure out the hows, but not *the whys*. *The whys* are where all the mysteries are.  
(COCA1, Fiction, 2014)
- b.** Under his leadership, we made sure to focus on *the why* behind every action.  
(COCA, Academic, 2014)
- c.** "I have God, and that's enough for me. I don't need a how and *a why* for why those holes are there."  
(COCA, Magazine, 2014)

Researchers have explained that *why* as a noun may have a plural form and appears in phraseological units (PUs), which are frequently used phrases consisting of at least two words, like *the whys and (the) wherefores of ~* and *the hows and (the) whys of ~*. Yet overall, there has been little discussion on the noun usage of *why* as far as I have investigated. This paper seeks to address the behaviours of *a/the why(s)*, adopting corpus pattern analysis (CPA). The aims are as follows: (i) to carry out quantitative research on *a/the why(s)* using contemporary English corpora, (ii) to reveal the syntactic and semantic features of *a/the why(s)* based on corpus data and (iii) to study when *a/the why(s)* came into use, based on historical corpora. Example (1) shows that other interrogatives are used in a way similar to *a/the why(s)* (i.e. *a how* in (1b)). Hence, this paper also examines whether interrogatives other than *why* are used as nouns, through CPA.

The paper is divided into seven sections. Section 1 gives a brief overview of the problem to be tackled. Section 2 summarizes the previous research on *why* as a noun. Next, Sections 3 and 4 describe the corpora and research methods used in the study. Section 5 deals with the syntactic behaviours of *the why(s)* and *(the) wherefore(s)* and *the how(s)* and *(the) why(s)*. The quantitative and qualitative results of *a/the why(s)* are given in Section 6. I demonstrate the noun usages of interrogatives other than *why* in Section 7. Some conclusions are drawn in the final section.

## 2. PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON WHY AS A NOUN

Many previous studies found that *why* as a noun is rarely used as an independent form and is observed within PUs such as *the whys and (the) wherefores* and *the hows and (the) whys*, as in (2) to (4). The entries in (2) are quoted from English dictionaries, those in (3) from English-Japanese dictionaries, (4) from grammar books and (5) from *OED*<sup>2</sup> ((3) and (4) are originally in Japanese).

(2) **a. IDM** *the whys and (the) wherefores* the reason for sth: *I had no intention of going into the whys and the wherefores of the situation.* (OALD9)

**b.** *the whys and (the) wherefores* the reasons or explanations for something: *The whys and the wherefores of these procedures need to be explained.* (LDCE<sup>6</sup>)

**c.** *the whys and wherefores* the reasons and explanations: *The prime minister should be able to make a decision without having to explain all the whys and wherefores to a bunch of journalists.* (MED<sup>2</sup>)

(3) **a.** *the how(s) and (the) why(s):* the way and reason (of) [the ~ (s)] reason : the ~s and (the) wherefores of the incident (Luminous)

**b.** *the how and why of :* the concept of <...> *the whys and (the) wherefores:* reason : the whys and wherefores of the organization's strategy. (Longman)

**c.** *the how and why:* the way and reason (usually ~s) reason, cause, motive | *the whys and wherefores of A ((formal)) the reason and cause of A* (Youth)

(4) **a. the why(s) and (the) wherefore(s):** the reasons for something I never understood *the why and wherefore* of their marriage./ I don't know much about *the whys and the wherefores* of his objection. [1]

**b.** *the whys and the wherefores* as a phrase is used to mean the reasons and explanations [2]

**c.** *why* as a noun is quite rare in present-day English, but it is sometimes observed.

KING: So you discuss what – the *why's* rather than the what's?

WILLIAMS: Yes, sir, yes, sir, without a doubt ([3]; Larry King Live on CNN, 11 July 1997)

(5) **a.** 1730 T. Boston Mem. App. 35 How difficult to get our *hows and whys* crucified. Mod. Bother your *hows and whys*!

**b.** 1847 Longfellow Ev. i. iii. 31 Must we in all things look for *the how, and the why, and the wherefore?*

**c.** 1771 Goldsm. Haunch of Venison 26, I was puzzled again, With *the how, and the who, and the where, and the when.*

**d.** 1828 Southey Ess. (1832) II. 415 The reader who may not be acquainted with *the when, and the how, and the why of the surrender.*

**e.** 1765 Sterne Tr. Shandy VII. xxi, The gardener troubled his head very little with *the hows and whens* of life.

**f.** 1922 Joyce Ulysses 299 *The why and the wherefore* and all the codology of the business.

**g.** 1838 Dickens O. Twist xxxi, They will have *the why and the wherefore*, and will take nothing for granted.

**h.** 1577FulkeConfut. Purg. 456 To all the other *howes and whyes* I auns were with one word, he had no warrant in the law of God.

**i.** 1624 Fletcher Rule a Wife iii. i, Such as are understanding in their draughts, And dispute learnedly *the whyes and wherefores.*

## 3. SOURCE MATERIALS

Data for the investigation of how *a/the why(s)* became widespread in contemporary English are drawn from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), British National Corpus (BNC) and WordBanks Online (WB). Data for the historical perspective are drawn from the Corpus of Historical American English (COHA). The access dates of each corpora are shown in Notes 1, 3 and 4.

## 4. METHODS

The criteria for judging whether *why* and other interrogatives behave as nouns are as follows: (i) the indefinite article *a* is used in the case where *why* is singular; (ii) *-s* is added to *why* when it is used as a

plural; and (iii) the definite article *the* precedes *why* when the speaker and addressee understand what they are talking about or the speaker is referring to something that has already been mentioned. The paper clarifies the characteristics of *a/the why(s)* and other interrogatives that are used as nouns using the above criteria and CPA.

### 5. THE WHY(S) AND (THE) WHEREFORE(S) AND THE HOW(S) AND (THE) WHY(S)

Before beginning the quantitative and qualitative investigations of *a/the why(s)*, this section presents the frequencies of *the why(s)* and *(the) wherefore(s)* and *the how(s)* and *(the) why(s)*.

#### 5.1. The Why(S) and (The) Wherefore(S)

Table 1 shows the frequency of *the why(s)* and *(the) wherefore(s)* in COCA, BNC and WB.

**Table1.** Number of times the *why(s)* and *(the) wherefore(s)* appears in COCA, BNC and WB

	COCA	BNC	WB	sum
the whys and (the) wherefores	36	25	6	67
the why and (the) wherefore	4	3	0	7

We can see from Table 1 that *the whys and (the) wherefores* is observed in all three corpora, but the singular form *the why and (the) wherefore* appears only in COCA and BNC and with low frequency. The singular and plural forms of the PU each appear in the written and spoken registers. Also, there is no clear territorial distinction concerning the two PUs because they are both used in American and British English<sup>5</sup>.

Through the investigation of the examples of *the why(s)* and *(the) wherefore(s)* in Table 1, the following four syntactic patterns emerge: (i) *the why(s) and (the) wherefore(s)* serves as a subject as shown in (6), (ii) it is the object of a verb as in (7), (iii) it is the object of a preposition as in (8) and (iv) it is the complement of the verb *be* as in (9).

- (6) The swamp gum on his land had been there for 300 years and, even though Eucalyptus regnans belonged in Victoria and Tasmania, this one was in New South Wales. He didn't know how it got there, in New South Wales, but it wasn't going to budge. In fact, the whys and wherefores didn't really matter because that's the way it had been for generations. (COCA, Fiction, 2015)
- (7) They're open-minded, independent, and I'm just going to work until the last hour. I can't tell you the whys and wherefores, except that people want new leadership and I think they believe I can deliver it. (COCA, Spoken, 2004)
- (8) It is often said that one of the problems with antiracism is that it knows what it is against, but not what it is for. But do we really know enough about the whys and wherefores of racism? (BNC, Written, 1993)
- (9) ONE of the most frequently-addressed topics in literary studies today is the whys and wherefores of the canon.... (COCA, Academic, 1990)

None of the four syntactic patterns above is remarkably frequently used. From a semantic perspective, *the why(s)* and *(the) wherefore(s)* is used to explain the reason something happened earlier, as previous research on it describes.

Table 2 shows the number of tokens of *the why(s)* and *(the) wherefore(s)* for each decade in COHA. Figure 1 shows the data of Table 2.

**Table2.** Number of tokens of the *why(s)* and *(the) wherefore(s)* in COHA by decade

	the whys and (the) wherefores	the why and (the) wherefore		the whys and (the) wherefores	the why and (the) wherefore
1810	1	1	1910	5	5
1820	1	0	1920	3	5
1830	1	9	1930	4	1
1840	0	5	1940	4	2
1850	0	8	1950	4	1
1860	1	3	1960	1	0
1870	1	2	1970	1	1
1880	3	7	1980	0	1
1890	3	2	1990	3	0
1900	3	7	2000	4	1
			sum	43	61

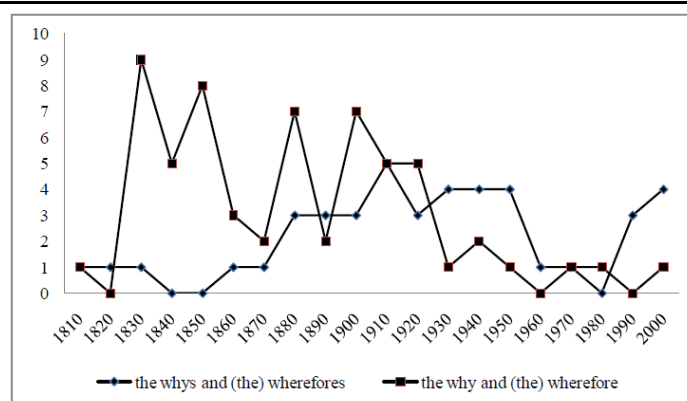


Figure1. Number of the why(s) and (the) wherefore(s) in COHA by decade

It is clear from Table 2 and Figure 1 that the singular form was used more frequently than the plural form through the 1920s and that the plural form has been more frequent than the singular form since the 1930s. All examples of *the why(s) and (the) wherefore(s)* that appear in COHA are observed in written English only because the corpus data are collected from written materials<sup>6</sup>, but *the why(s) and (the) wherefore(s)* appears in spoken English, too, as I show in Note 5.

An examination of all examples of *the why(s) and (the) wherefore(s)* revealed four syntactic patterns. The PU is used as (i) a subject, (ii) the object of a verb, (iii) the object of a preposition and (iv) the complement of the verb *be*. Each syntactic pattern is shown in (10), (11), (12) and (13), respectively. Some syntactic patterns are not observed in particular historical times. The meaning of *the why(s) and (the) wherefore(s)* is as the same as observed in contemporary English, which is explained earlier.

- (10) The church says abortion is wrong, but the whys and wherefores are not elaborated. (Fiction, 1996)
- (11) “I cannot think,” said Ellen, shaking her head doubtfully, “that Emily has any attachment to James. If she had, why did she join the shakers?” “Why! ah, that’s more than I can tell. It passes the skill of a rational creature to give *the whys and the wherefores* of the motions of you young girls. (Fiction, 1824)
- (12) “Why do tables and chairs alone show these effects? Why is this the peculiar property of furniture?” I might reply that I am simply observing and reporting facts, and that I need not enter into *the whys and wherefores*. (Fiction, 1889)
- (13) What are *the whys and the wherefores* of her growth? (Fiction, 1892)

### 5.2. The How(S) and (The) Why(S)

Table 3 shows the frequency of *the how(s) and (the) why(s)* observed in COCA, BNC and WB.

Table3. Number of tokens of the how(s) and (the) why(s) in COCA, BNC and WB

	COCA	BNC	WB	sum
the hows and (the) whys	33	2	1	36
the how and (the) why	29	5	2	36

We can see from Table 3 that *the how and (the) why* is more frequently used in British English, whereas the plural form is more frequent in American English. There are no regional or register differences between *the how(s) and (the) why(s)*<sup>7</sup>.

Regarding syntactic patterns, *the how(s) and (the) why(s)* is used as (i) a subject in (14), (ii) the object of a verb in (15) and (iii) the object of a preposition in (16). Similar with *the why(s) and (the) wherefore(s)*, some syntactic patterns are not observed in particular historical times. As previous research explains, *the how(s) and (the) why(s)* is used to refer to the reason or method of something that already happened.

- (14) Not only were the scopes’ strengths and weaknesses completely discussed; many were displayed by the clear pictures. *The hows and whys* were described accurately and in depth yet were easy to comprehend. (COCA, Magazine, 2000)
- (15) HARRY-SMITH: They sure hear about it. All right.  
VERA-GIBBONS: - all sorts of things. They hear about it all the time.  
HARRY-SMITH: Mm-Hm.

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VERA-GIBBONS: So why not use them - use this as an example to - to explain *the hows and the whys*.  
(COCA, Spoken, 2009)

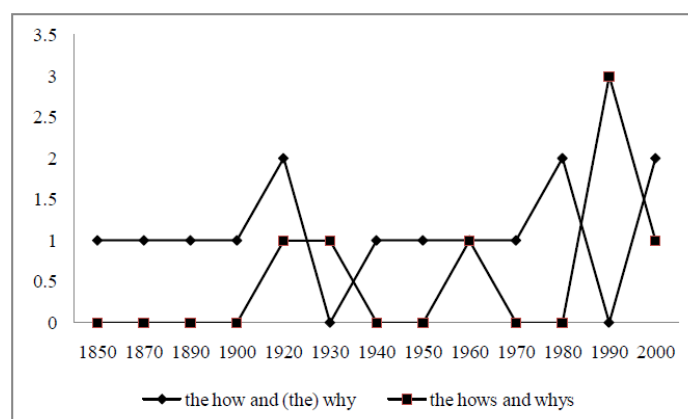
(16) What should the men of America know about the hows and whys of women's style?

(COCA, Magazine, 2015)

Table 4 and Figure 2 show the frequency of *the how(s) and (the) why(s)* in COHA for each decade.

**Table4.** Number of tokens of *the how(s) and (the) why(s)* in COHA by decade

	the how and (the) why	the hows and (the) whys
1850	1	0
1870	1	0
1890	1	0
1900	1	0
1920	2	1
1930	0	1
1940	1	0
1950	1	0
1960	1	1
1970	1	0
1980	2	0
1990	0	3
2000	2	1
sum	14	7



**Figure2.** Transition of the use of *the how(s) and (the) why(s)* in COHA

As with *the why(s) and (the) wherefore(s)*, we can see from Table 4 and Figure 2 that *the how and (the) why* was originally used more often than the plural form, but the plural form started to be observed from 1930s. *The how(s) and (the) why(s)* is used as either the object of a verb as in (17) or the object of a preposition as in (18), and it means a way or reason for something.

(17) Someday, they hope to discover the *hows and whys* of breast cancer, which this year alone will strike 180,200 women in America.  
(COHA, Magazine., 1997)

(18) the show goes on, and from it you can get a pretty fair idea of the *how and the why* of what you see around you today.  
(COHA, Fiction., 1956)

## 6. BEHAVIOURS OF WHY AS A NOUN

This section tackles the quantitative and qualitative behaviours of *why* as a noun, adopting diachronic and synchronic approaches.

### 6.1. Quantitative Findings

Table 5 shows the frequency of *a/the why(s)* independently appearing in COCA, BNC and WB (these numbers do not include *the why(s) and (the) wherefore(s)* and *the how(s) and (the) why(s)*).

**Table5.** Frequency of *a/the why(s)* in COCA, BNC and WB

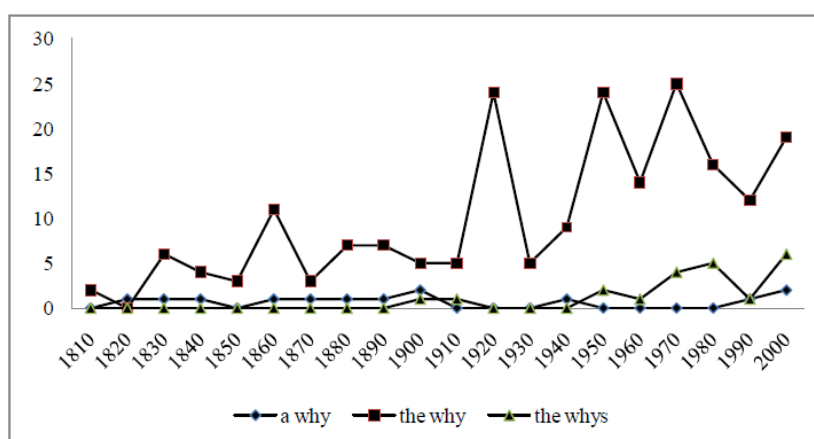
	COCA	BNC	WB	sum
a why	27	7	11	45
the why	328	36	34	398
the whys	72	2	3	77

Table 5 reveals that, unlike what previous research mentioned and the behaviours of *the why(s)* and *(the) wherefore(s)* and *the how(s)* and *(the) why(s)* revealed in the previous section, *the why* is the most commonly used among the three. Moreover, *a why*, *the why* and *the whys* are observed in both spoken and written English, so there is no difference in register<sup>8</sup>.

Diachronic changes in the frequency of *a/the why(s)* are shown in Table 6 and Figure 3.

**Table6.** Frequency of *a/the why(s)* in COHA by decade

	a why	the why	the whys		a why	the why	the whys
1810	0	2	0	1910	0	5	1
1820	1	0	0	1920	0	24	0
1830	1	6	0	1930	0	5	0
1840	1	4	0	1940	1	9	0
1850	0	3	0	1950	0	24	2
1860	1	11	0	1960	0	14	1
1870	1	3	0	1970	0	25	4
1880	1	7	0	1980	0	16	5
1890	1	7	0	1990	1	12	1
1900	2	5	1	2000	2	19	6
				sum	17	201	21



**Figure3.** Frequency of *a/the why(s)* in COHA across time

Based on Figure 3, the following three observations can be made. 1) *The why* started to be frequently used in the 1920s, although it was used in almost all decades. This is due to the influence of *the why(s)* and *(the) wherefore(s)* and *the how(s)* and *(the) why(s)*; see the former tables and figures. 2) *A why* has been used with consistently low frequency. 3) *The whys* has also been used across many decades, and its frequency has been higher since the 1950s.

The tables and figures shown so far lead us to a research question: have *the why(s)* and *(the) wherefore(s)*, *the how(s)* and *(the) why(s)* and *a/ the why(s)* coexisted long? Table 7 and Figure 4 show the frequencies of each PU.

**Table7.** Frequencies of the *why(s)* and *(the) wherefore(s)*, the *how(s)* and *(the) why(s)* and *a/the why(s)* in COHA

	the why(s) and (the) wherefore(s)	the how(s) and (the) why(s)	a/the why(s)		the why(s) and (the) wherefore(s)	the how(s) and (the) why(s)	a/the why(s)
1810	2	0	2	1910	10	0	6
1820	1	0	1	1920	8	3	24
1830	10	0	7	1930	9	1	5
1840	5	0	5	1940	6	1	10
1850	8	1	3	1950	5	1	26
1860	4	0	12	1960	1	2	15
1870	3	1	4	1970	2	1	29
1880	10	0	8	1980	1	2	21
1890	5	0	8	1990	3	3	14
1900	10	1	8	2000	5	3	27

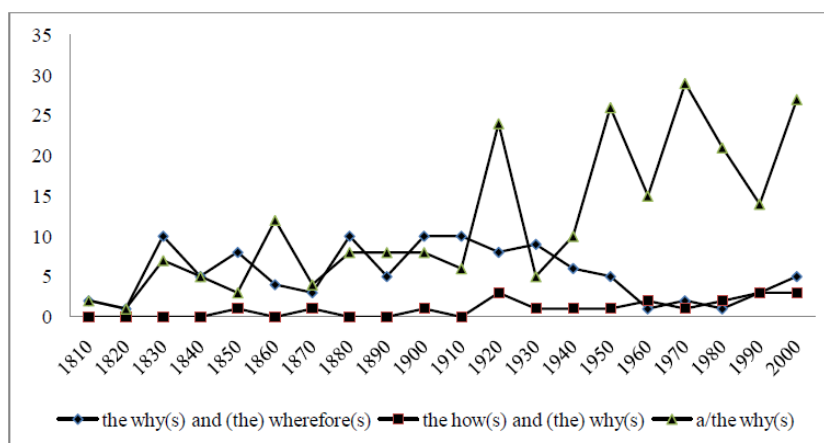


Figure4. Frequency of the why(s) and (the) wherefore(s), the how(s) and (the) why(s) and a/ the why(s) in COHA across time

Table 7 and Figure 4 clearly show that the three PUs have long existed. However, while *a/the why(s)* started to increase rapidly in the 1920s, *the why(s) and (the) wherefore(s)* and *the how(s) and (the) why(s)* decreased starting in the same decade. That is, *a/the why(s)* started to be used from the 20th century. Table 8 and Figure 5 compare the frequencies of the two PUs (i.e., *the why(s) and (the) wherefore(s)* and *the how(s) and (the) why(s)*) and *a/the why(s)* to illustrate this point.

Table8. Frequencies of the two phraseological units and a/the why(s) in COHA

	two PUs	a/the why(s)		two PUs	a/the why(s)
1810	2	2	1910	10	6
1820	1	1	1920	11	24
1830	10	7	1930	10	5
1840	5	5	1940	7	10
1850	9	3	1950	6	26
1860	4	12	1960	3	15
1870	4	4	1970	3	29
1880	10	8	1980	3	21
1890	5	8	1990	6	14
1900	11	8	2000	8	27

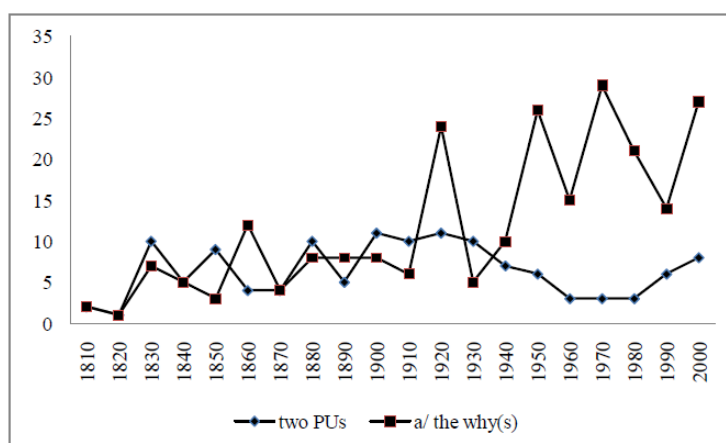


Figure5. Frequencies of the two PUs and a/the why(s) in COHA across time

As mentioned above, it is obvious from Table 8 and Figure 5 that the two PUs appear more than *a/the why(s)* until the 1920s, but *a/the why(s)* has been used more than the two PUs since the 1940s. In other words, *why* has been used as a noun for a long time, but the usage became more established thanks to the higher frequency in the 20th century, and it became widespread.

## 6.2 Qualitative findings

Examples of *a why*, *the why* and *the whys* obtained from the corpora are shown in (19), (20) and (21).

(19) a. JAIME-RAMOS: .... I jumped out of my seat, and I hit him on the head three times quickly.

He put his arms up, and I – jumped out of I – sounded like a what and *a why* at the same time.

And he threw — as he threw his arms up, they automatically fell down. (COCA, Spoken, 2014)

**b.** Then Maria Archuleta said, “What if you ask the witness a yes or no question, but he gives you a *why* or *why-not* answer? (COCA, Academic, 2009)

**c.** “But you can’t see the bile in my veins, Cinderella, or the pollution in my soul, or the fire burning in my thoughts. You can’t see a *why*...” (COCA, Fiction, 1995)

As (19a) shows, *a why* tends to be used with the noun form of another interrogative (i.e. *a what*), while it is used with *why-not* working as a noun in (19b). Also, *a why* in (19c) can be used independently. *A why* is used to refer to the reason for something, that is, the lexical meaning. The combination of the indefinite article and *why* is merely used to refer to the reason for something, and it does not matter whether there is a reason or not.

(20) **a.** “... All this trouble with the courts and lawyers cannot have been cheap for him. It certainly pinched our purse hard. *The why* does not matter,” she said as she stood up.

(COCA, Fiction, 2014)

**b.** They said, you know what? I’d rather be poor back home than here, and some of those folks left.

MARTIN: Well, now that we’ve talked about the what and we’ve talked about *the why*, I think it would be helpful to talk about what we think this might mean. (COCA, Spoken, 2010)

**c.** And it turns out that, again, in a global economy, in a knowledge-based economy, the preparation that students need is more rigorous than ever before. So, this is exerting upward pressure. Secondly, in terms of, you know, the creativity issue, you put it very well, this is about *the why*, not about the how. (COCA, Spoken, 2010)

*The why* is the subject in (20a) and the object of a preposition in (20b, c). Also, the nouns of another interrogatives like *the what* and *the how* are observed around *the why* in (20b, c).

*The why* in (20a) is used to explain the reason for the sentence (*It certainly pinched our purse hard*) receiving the content (*All this trouble with the courts and lawyers cannot have been cheap for him*). It seems that the sentence, i.e. *It certainly pinched our purse hard*, is left out after *the why*. *The why* in (20b) explains the reason *I’d rather be poor back home than here, and some of those folks left*. It is considered that the syntactic pattern [*the why* S + V] (in this case, *the why I’d rather be poor back home than here, and some of those folks left*) was originally used, but S and V were omitted and only *the why* remained. *Why* then started to work as a noun. In (20c), *this* of *this is about the why* implies *the creativity issue* and *this is about the why the preparation that students need is more rigorous than ever before* was an originally used pattern, but like in (20a, b), *the why* was part of a pattern in which S and V were left out, and then it came to be used independently.

The background factor that *the why* is an independently used noun is due to the influence of the syntactic pattern or *the reason why* S + V (e.g. *I like children. That’s the reason why I’ve become a teacher.*) The syntactic pattern, i.e. *the reason why* S + V is intrinsically used, but first the syntactic pattern *the reason* S + V, in which *why* is left out, became used, and then *the why* S + V, in which *reason* is left out, was established because *why* implies the same meaning as *reason* (i.e. a fact, situation or intention that explains why something happened). In the case of *the why*, *why* originally functioned as a relative adverb, but it was located at the place of *reason* (i.e. a noun place), so it came to work as a noun. In other words, *why* shifted from an interrogative to a noun without changing its form thanks to other interrogatives being used as nouns. The two syntactic patterns are used to mention the reason something happened earlier with S and V, and S and V redundantly show that something happened earlier, so S and V are left out and *the why* or *the reason* is independently used as a noun.

*The why* in (20) is used to mean the reason or why for something, which reflects the lexical meaning of *why*, but unlike *a why*, *the why* explains the reason or why something took place earlier. This holds true in *the whys* shown in (21). I investigated the features of verbs that tend to co-occur with *a/the why(s)* to clearly explain the difference between *a why* and *the why(s)*. The result is shown in Table 9.

(21) **a.** All Scottish rugby fans will know what has happened in the past few weeks, that the chairman and chief executive of the SRU have been replaced. The whys and hows are too complicated to go into and there seems to be no consensus (sic.consensus) as to whether it will prove to be a good or bad thing. (WB, Written, 2005)

**b.** Torin had held on to her as she’d moved from one location to another in a blink, traveling with



her. He'd tended her to the best of his ability. But his best hadn't been good enough. Would never be good enough. "I don't care about *the whys*," the female said. (COCA, Fiction, 2014)

c. The cartoon was published after Perry denied that the state regulatory system was to blame for what happened in West. But lawmakers are clearly facing pressure to get to the bottom of the state's role in what happened. "We're inundated with *the whys* and whos, and we're trying to clarify what role the state has at each individual level." (COCA, Spoken, 2013)

d. Ms-LANDRY: You have disrespected our court system. You've spit on the floor of the court. You've smiled at my family. You smiled for the cameras. And what I wanted to say to you was, 'Who's smiling now?' But I can't. Nobody has won here, nobody. Not my family, not you. I just pray that you will never have the opportunity to devastate another family like this again.

MURPHY: (Voiceover) To this day Doreen is haunted by *the whys* and what ifs. (COCA, Spoken, 2012)

e. NOBODY KNOWS when the war began, and no sane human mind claims to understand *the whys* and for whats that keep it alive today. But we know for sure that the first human recruits vanished four decades ago. (COCA, Fiction, 2008)

The syntactic patterns of *the whys* are similar with those of *a why* and *the why*. First, in (21a,e), *the whys* is used with the noun of an interrogative. Second, *the whys* is located at the object of a preposition in (21b,c,d). Third, *the whys* in (21a) is a subject. Last, it is used as the object of a verb.

In (21a), the noun of an interrogative or *hows* comes with *the whys*. It seems that *the whys and hows the chairman and chief executive of the SRU have been replaced are too complicated...* was originally used, and *the whys and hows* explains the reason that the chairman and chief executive of the SRU have been replaced. Similar with *the why*, S and V followed by *the whys and hows* were already mentioned, so they were left out and then *the whys and hows* came to be independently used. In (21b), *the whys* is used to mention the reasons his best had not been good enough. What is left out after *the whys* is *his best hadn't been good enough*. As for (21c), *the whys* is used with *whos* and explains the reasons the cartoon was published and people who published the cartoon. In other words, *the cartoon was published* is omitted after *the whys* and *published the cartoon* is left out after *whos*. In (21d), the sentences noted in brackets, *To this day Doreen is haunted by the whys (you smiled at the family and for cameras, and my family lost) and what ifs (my family won)* are left out and *the whys* is used to explain some reasons for the sentences in brackets. In the case of (21e), *the war began* is hidden after *the whys* and *the whys* is used to refer to the reasons the war began.

As mentioned above, *a why* and *the why(s)* are apparently semantically same in that both of them are used to explain a reason(s) for something. However, through careful examinations of the data of *a why* and *the why(s)*, *a why* and *the why(s)* are different in that the former is used to merely ask or to explain a reason without any preconditions attached, while the latter is used to ask or to explain something that already happened. I investigated whether or not semantic differences between *a why* and *the why(s)* are observed in each syntactic pattern and the verbs each unit co-occurs with. The results are shown in Table 9. The verb (phrases) and syntactic patterns of *a why* and *the why(s)* in BNC, WB and COCA are listed at least three occurrences are shown in Table 9.

**Table 9.** List of co-occurring verb (phrases) with *a/the why(s)* and syntactic patterns

<i>a why</i>	<i>the why</i>	<i>the whys</i>
answer (to)	answer (to)	get to answer (from)
<i>be</i> verb	ask	know explain
there is/ was	<i>be</i> verb	learn figure out
	explain	tell understand
	figure out	think
	focus on	understand

It can be easily assumed from Table 9 that *answer* is the common verb between *a why* and *the why(s)*. This is because all units have the same meaning (i.e. used to explain a reason for something). In addition to this, *be* verb is the common verb between them (please note that *be* is not listed in the column of *the why* because it is used only twice in the corpora), but it just exists to fulfill the grammatical function of a sentence. Hence, *be* is not a characteristic verb which *a why* and *the why(s)* typically co-occur with.

As for syntactic patterns, *a why* has the only noticeable syntactic pattern, *there is/was a why ~*. This is established by the analogy of the syntactic pattern, *there is/was a reason why ~* and the shortening of

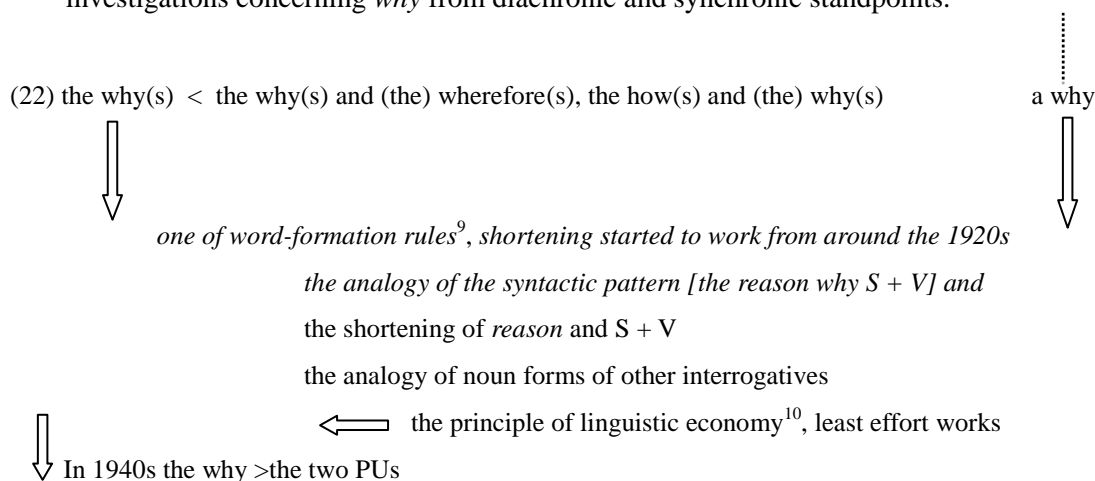
the word *reason* because *reason* and *why* have the same meaning.

Table 9 shows that *explain*, *understand* and *figure out* are common verbs which are only used with *the why(s)*. Generally, they tend to co-occur with *wh*-words such as *why*, *what*, *how* and *when*, but they are used to explain not something without any preconditions attached but something already happened. Consequently, *a why* and *the why(s)* differently behave from semantic and syntactic perspectives. The qualitative discussions of *a why* and *the why(s)* are summarized in Table 10.

**Table10.** Features of *a why* and *the why(s)*

	<i>a why</i>	<i>the why(s)</i>
meaning	reason (without any preconditions attached)	reason (with any preconditions attached)
typical syntactic pattern or co-occurring verb (phrase)	there is/ was ~.	explain, figure out, understand

(22) represents graphically the process of how *why* was established as an independently used noun based on the description of *OED*<sup>2</sup> and the findings of the quantitative and qualitative investigations concerning *why* from diachronic and synchronic standpoints.



*Why* is established as an independently used noun

In 1950s the *whys* starts to increase a *why*

*A/the why(s)* diachronically existed same as *the why(s)* and *(the) wherefore(s)* and *the how(s)* and *(the) why(s)* did. *A why* has been in low frequency since the 1810s, and its usage remains unchanged since then. However, *a why* has a unique syntactic pattern, i.e. *there is (was) a why ~*, which is observed only in contemporary English. As mentioned earlier, this establishment lies in the mixture of the analogy of the sentence structure [*there is (was) a reason why S + V*] and of the shortening of *reason*. Of course, there is an oppositional pattern, *there is (was) a reason ~*, in which *why* is thought to be left out.

When the frequency of *the why* is compared with those of *the why(s)* and *(the) wherefore(s)* and *the how(s)* and *(the) why(s)*, we see that the latter was higher than the former until the 1920s. However, the frequency of use of *the why* has been higher than those of the two PUs since the 1920s. The reason is due to a mixture of the adaptation of the following three phenomena: (i) the shortening of the two PUs (*the why(s)* and *(the) wherefore(s)* and *the how(s)* and *(the) why(s)*), which is caused by one of the word-formation rules, (ii) the analogy of the syntactic pattern [*the reason why S + V*] and the shortening of *reason* and *S + V* of the pattern, and (iii) the analogy of noun forms of other interrogatives. The three phenomena are supported by the least effort of the principle of linguistic economy.

Consequently, it is clearly shown that *why* has long been used as a noun and has its own establishment as a noun through use in various patterns such as *the whys* or *there is (was) a why ~* in contemporary English.

Next, let us consider the difference between *there is a reason* and *there is a why*. *There is a reason* has three syntactic patterns with 833 tokens in sum: (i) *there is (are, was, were) (a) reason(s)/ for ~/ that S + V/ φ S + V/ (not) to ~*, (ii) *if there is (are, was, were) (a) reason(s)* and (iii) *there is (are, was, were)*

(a) *reason(s)*. On the other hand, only one syntactic pattern, *if there is (was) a why* is observed with 3 tokens for *there is (was) a why*. Please look at the examples of *if there is (was) a why* in (23).

(23) a. Because that's what we do. We humans. We make things. And then we study them, and then we make them over if we have to. We make them better. It's why we're here on Earth. If there is a why. To make things. (COCA, Fiction, 2001)

b. What I wanted to know was why Simons had done it. *If there was a why*. (COCA, Fiction, 2006)

c. SIMON: You were held — Was it for six days? — by Iranian authorities back in 1987.

Mr-SEIB: Mm-hmm.

SIMON: The why, *if there was a why*, was never quite clear. You had what they might have thought was a Jewish last name. (COCA, Spoken, 2004)

Example (23) shows that *if there is (was) a why* has a literal meaning and there is no semantic difference between *there is a reason* and *there is a why* as far as the corpus data show. It will be an issue in the future to tell their meanings apart.

## 7. OTHER INTERROGATIVES FUNCTIONING AS NOUNS

This section investigates whether interrogatives other than *why* (*what*, *which*, *who*, *whose*, *where*, *when* and *how*) and phrases consisting of an interrogative and a word such as *for what* and *what if* are used as nouns in COCA, BNC and WB. (24) shows an example of *what*, (25) shows *who*, (26) shows *where*, (27) shows *when*, (28) shows *how* and (29) shows *what if*. Sentence (a) of each example comprises the indefinite article and the noun form of an interrogative, (b) comprises the definite article and the noun form of an interrogative and (c) comprises the definite article and the plural noun form of an interrogative. If there are not any applicable examples of each pattern, they are not described in each example. Please note that no noun examples of *which* and *whose* are observed in the corpora and that the example of *for what* is already shown in (21e).

(24) a. The blues is many things to many people — a foundational African-American cultural tradition, a way of being in the world, a philosophical system —but it is also a skilled artistic trade, a how and *a what* of music-making that needs to be learned and practiced,....

(COCA, Academic, 2002)

b. For a single second I imagined reporting this story, but the where and the why and the who and *the what* all mixed together in a pile of debris as I knew they shouldn't but must: scars, fire, scars, fire, scars. (COCA, Fiction, 2014)

(25) a. ..., but when his eyes became accustomed to the subtle and wonderful color variations emanating from the luminescence, he became convinced that the light was a *who* and not a what.

(COCA, Fiction, 2003)

b. This relationship with Judy Clarke may have been the first time the Unabomber felt the erotics of courtship. *The who* is chasing whom favored him. (COCA, Magazine, 2015)

c. I was so excited, so curious, he had to warn me: "Now, don't start giving me the third degree, asking for all *the whos* and hows. (COCA, Fiction, 2015)

(26) a. "If the Nuadians' new strength prevents Leah from living out her life without fear, perhaps we err in looking for *a where* to take her. Perhaps we should consider a when."

(COCA, Fiction, 2010)

b. ... things were relatively calmer and more secure. "Iraq," she said. "*The where* doesn't matter."

(COCA, Spoken, 2015)

c. But word to the whys and *the wheres* and the hows, there are no merchants of love who have reaped greater profits than have Goldie and Gimlet on this Festival night, ....

(COCA, Fiction, 2014)

(27) a. SIMON: Is the matter of you running for governor of New York *a when* or an if?

(COCA, Spoken, 2003)

- b. But he realized what people really wanted to know was not so much the why of earthquakes as *the when* and where. (COCA, Magazine, 2015)
- c. ... it seems logical to inquire whether Mrs. Bush, now 63, still smokes. "I quit fairly recently," she says. An awkward back-and-forth ensues regarding *the whens* - sometime while she was still first lady (the White House, she says, is "not conducive to smoking") (COCA, News, 2010)
- (28) a. I have God, and that's enough for me. I don't need *a how* and a why for why those holes are there. (COCA, Magazine, 2014)
- b. These questions focus on the who, *the how*, and the why of readers' advisory. (COCA, Academic, 2015)
- c. All I can tell you is, the day of the accident was the last day of my trying to figure out the whys. We can usually figure out *the hows*, but not the whys. The whys are where all the mysteries are. (COCA, Fiction, 2014)
- (29) a. KING: By the way, you can continue calling in. We will be taking calls. Pat Brown, this is strictly *a what if*, strictly hypothetical. If this person or persons did live there in Tacoma - Pat is not there. I'll ask Dr. Welner. (COCA, Spoken, 2002)
- b. SEABROOK: We all think we know you, you know?  
Mr-DAFOE: No, I'm teasing. Those roles all are me or they're fantasies that I have. The whole proposition of acting is *the what if*. If my life was differently, I could be this guy. (COCA, Spoken, 2004)
- c. The club, general manager Doug Armstrong said Wednesday, has already made contingency plans if the defenseman is a no-show. "I've talked to the coaches about *the what ifs*' on a few different situations," Armstrong said. (COCA, News, 2013)

An examination of (24)–(29) reveals that interrogatives other than *which* and *whose* are used as nouns similar with *why* and that they are sometimes used all by themselves and are used with the noun forms of other interrogatives. In other words, the noun forms of interrogatives establish their noun usages by having a syntactic impact on other interrogatives, in which the noun form of an interrogative is positioned close to that of another interrogative. Semantically, the noun form of each interrogative implies its lexical meaning.

## 8. CONCLUSION

On the basis of the quantitative and qualitative characteristics of *a/the why(s)* from diachronic and synchronic viewpoints, it can be concluded that the noun form of *why* has long existed and has widespread usages in various patterns, especially in the present.

Unlike previous studies described, *why* is used by all itself, and the plural noun form, i.e. *the whys*, appears more frequently moving toward the present. This means that *why* is coming to be established as a noun in contemporary English. Also, the observation made in the study is to show the relationship between *the why(s)* and *(the) wherefore(s)* and *the how(s)* and *(the) why(s)* on one hand and *a/ the why(s)* on the other. As a peripheral phenomenon, this study argued that interrogatives other than *why*, *which* and *whose* have noun forms and establish their noun usages thanks to the analogy which the noun form of an interrogative has an impact on forming that of another interrogative.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I accessed COCA on July 5th, July 19th, July 27th, Aug., 8th, and 9th in 2016.

<sup>2</sup>In OED<sup>2</sup>, *the how and why* is used one time, *the how*, and *the why*, and *the wherefore* is also used one time, *the whys and wherefores* appears five times (in 1833, 1932, 1937, 1967, and 1975), and *the why and wherefore* is observed seven times (in 1799, 1838, 1847, 1891, 1911, 1922, and 1949).

<sup>3</sup> I accessed BNC and WB on July 5 and 19 and Aug. 10, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> I accessed COHA on July 19, 2016.

<sup>5</sup> In COCA, *the whys and the wherefores* is observed twice in written English (fiction, magazine, newspaper and academic) and only once in spoken English. In the case of *the whys and wherefores*, it appears in 31 times in written English and twice in spoken English. *The why and wherefore* is used four times only in written English. In BNC, *the whys and the wherefores* is used twice in written English and once in spoken English. In the case of *the whys and wherefores*, its frequency is 20 times in written English and twice in spoken English. *The why and the wherefore* is observed three times only in written English. Lastly, in WB, only *the whys and wherefores* appears 6 times in written English. As a matter of common sense, it is impossible to indicate the percentage of the frequency of such phrases because each corpus consists of words.

<sup>6</sup> The corpus is composed of more than 400 million words in more than 100,000 individual texts. The major sources for each genre are as follows: fiction, magazine, newspaper and non-fiction.

<sup>7</sup> The data obtained from COCA, BNC and WB show that *the how and (the) why* is observed twice in spoken English and 34 times in written English and that *the hows and (the) whys* is observed 11 times in spoken English and 25 times in written English.

<sup>8</sup> In COCA, *a why* appears 15 times in written English and 12 times in spoken English. In the case of *the why*, it is used 234 times in written English and 94 times in spoken English. *The whys* is observed 56 times in written English and 16 times in spoken English. Data obtained from BNC show that *a why* is used 3 times in written English and 4 times in spoken English, that *the why* is used 21 times in written English and 15 times in spoken English and that *the whys* is used twice in written English only. In WB, *a why* appears 7 times in written English and 4 times in spoken English. *The why* appears 15 times in written English and 19 times in spoken English. *The whys* appears twice in written English and only once in spoken English.

<sup>9</sup> Much attention has been paid to word-formation rules. The following are common methods of word-formation identified in previous research: compounding, derivation, borrowing, conversion, acronym, backformation, shortening, blending, lexicalization of phrases, meta-analysis and root creation.

<sup>10</sup> Linguistic economy has two principles: the principle of least effort and the principle of redundancy. The essential role of a language is to maintain effective communication. These two principles are thought to be responsible for changes in languages without giving a false impression of the essential role. For example, we tend to choose and use an easier and simpler way of saying things such as *pirate version* because of the underlying principle of least effort. In contrast, we can find examples such as *until to Friday*, which are somewhat excessive. It is quite safe to assume that the speaker must have thought that *until Friday* might give a false impression to the hearer, so he/she added *to*, which functions similarly as *until*. That is, wordy expressions such as *until to Friday* appear as a consequence of the underlying principle of economy [4].

## CORPORA

British National Corpus (BNC)

The Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA)

The Corpus of Historical American English (COHA)

WordBanks Online (WB)

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