

Gonna and wanna
 A Quantitative Corpus-Based Study on the Emancipation of
 Contractions

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The forms *gonna* and *wanna* have formed in a process called “univerbation” in which “a complex construction is condensed into a single item” (Lorenz 2013: 33). Lorenz (2013) argues that contractions like *gonna*, *wanna*, and *gotta*, which were once regarded as colloquial, have now become independent, that they are used more frequently, and are preferred over the full form in certain contexts. He analyses data from between 1910 and 2005 and finds a drastic increase of the contractions in the 1960s in American English. As this does not lead to a decrease of the full forms, Lorenz deduces that, in American English, all three forms are currently undergoing a development towards independence with *gonna* leading the way. Berglund (2000) provides similar results for British English. She investigates the variants *going to* and *gonna* and concludes that their distribution varies with several text- and speaker-related factors, such as medium, register, and age of the speaker.

The present study contributes to answering the question whether the contracted forms have further emancipated over the past 15 years. To this purpose, we use the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA; Davies 2008-). Since we aim at carving out in which linguistic contexts the contractions are preferred over the full forms, we look at two factors also investigated by Lorenz (2013), namely negation, such as in (1) and first person singular subjects, such as in (2). We further consider interactions between these factors, as illustrated by (3). We expect that in negated clauses, speakers tend to choose the full form over the contracted form, as it appears that the contractions *gonna* and *wanna* are rarely used in combination with negation.

- (1) If we’re **not gonna** find her, I just need to know now.
- (2) **I’m gonna** go get a ginger ale.
- (3) **I’m not gonna** let two frauds steal it from them.

First results show that the contracted form *gonna* increases in frequency over the course of the 15 years, while the frequency of *wanna* fluctuates. Additionally, we see a relation between the form (full vs. contracted) and the polarity of the sentence (affirmative vs. negated).

References

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