

## ***Wanna* Contraction, p. 1**

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The sentence (1a) is usually pronounced as (1b) by speakers of English:

- (1) a. I want to read.  
b. I wanna read. (more precisely, *wanna* = [wa:nə] or [wa:ɹ̃ə])

Similarly, questioning (2a) as (2b) is usually pronounced as (2c):

- (2) a. I want to read *The Minimalist Program*.  
b. What do you want to read?  
c. What do you wanna read?

However, questioning (3a) as (3b) cannot (for most speakers of English) be pronounced as (3c).

- (3) a. I want my students to read *The Minimalist Program*.  
b. Who do you want to read *The Minimalist Program*?  
c. \*Who do you wanna read *The Minimalist Program*?

These facts were noted, in a slightly more complex way, by Lakoff (1970). Lakoff's observation dealt with the sentences:

- (4) a. Teddy is the man I want to succeed.  
b. Teddy is the man I wanna succeed.

Lakoff observed that (4a) is ambiguous ('I want Teddy to succeed' vs. 'I want to succeed Teddy') while (4b) is unambiguous (only 'I want to succeed Teddy'). Lakoff's proposed analysis involved what were referred to as "global rules", rules that can examine the entire transformational derivation; something to the effect of "contract *want to* to *wanna* if there was never anything intervening between *want* and *to*."

After empty categories were introduced into the arsenal of transformational grammar (specifically as "traces" of moved *wh* elements) it was observed that they could be called upon to account for the *wanna* facts.

- (5) a. I want to read.  
b. What do you want to read *e*?  
c. Who do you want *e* to read *The Minimalist Program*?

This observation was first made by Chomsky (1976) and Lightfoot (1976).

The proposal that empty categories are what block contraction is attractive, because it provides an explanatory account. However, there are certain problems with it (and with

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Lakoff's original version, as well), originally pointed out by Postal and Pullum (1978). The main ones:

- The representations in (5a,b) are not really accurate. They omit another empty category, the one that has come to be known as PRO:

- (6) a. I want *e*(=PRO) to read.  
 b. What do you want *e*(=PRO) to read *e*(=trace)?

This is important because in the fuller representations, PRO intervenes between *want* and *to*. If the empty category “trace” blocks *wanna* contraction, why doesn't the empty category “PRO”?

- Similar contractions occur with other verbs. These other verbs can be shown to be Raising verbs, which means that under the assumptions of transformational theory they should also have an empty category (“trace”) intervening between the verb and *to*.

- (7) a. I'm going *e* to read the latest paper by Chomsky.  
 b. I have *e* to start reading some LFG stuff.  
 c. I ought *e* to learn some other theoretical frameworks.  
 d. I used *e* to think that transformational theory was right.  
 e. There has got *e* to be something better.  
 f. We are supposed *e* to study HPSG also.

If the only empty category is the one in *wh* constructions (as in Jacobson 1982), these aren't problems. But the standard approach, then and now, includes all these empty categories.

As a result of problems such as these, *wanna* contraction has been heavily discussed in the theoretical literature, with alternative analyses of the basic facts. We will be taking a look at some of these alternatives. (Even within GB/MP, alternative analyses have been adopted.)

Despite the controversy and the alternative analyses, textbooks on GB and MP inexplicably continue to cite *wanna* contraction as empirical evidence for empty categories, as if it were still 1976. Here are two examples:

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(Uriagereka 1998: 228)

- (29) a. I want Such-and-such to convince the queen.  
 b. \*who do you wanna convince the queen?  
 c. who do you wanna convince?

...

If you think about it, it's exactly what you'd expect if traces are real and their structural presence can affect a morphological [sic] process. (30a) is the structure underlying (29b), and (30b) is the structure underlying (29c):

- (30) a. who do you want (who) to convince the queen  
 b. who do you want to convince the queen (who)

You see, in (30a) the trace (who) interferes in the morphological formation of the contraction between *want* and *to*—that is, the formation of the word *wanna* at the outset of the PF component, which is nothing but *want* with a cliticized *to*—whereas in (30b) this obviously isn't the case...

(Radford 1997: 269)

The assumption that moved operator expressions leave a trace behind can be defended on empirical grounds. One piece of evidence comes from facts relating to a phenomenon generally known as *wanna* contraction. In colloquial English, the string *want to* can generally contract to *wanna* ... so that alongside (4a) we find (4b):

- (4) (a) I *want to* go home.  
 (b) I *wanna* go home.

In nonsloppy speech styles, however, the sequence *want to* cannot contract to *wanna* in a sentence such as (5a) below, as we see from the ungrammaticality of (5b):

- (5) (a) Who would you want to help you?  
 (b) \*Who would you wanna help you?

... Since we have already seen in earlier chapters that cliticization is subject to an *adjacency* condition (and hence is only possible when the two words involved are immediately adjacent) the presence of the intervening trace *t* between *to* and *want* will prevent *to* from cliticizing onto *want*, and hence blocks *wanna*-contraction. (We might suppose that in sloppy speech styles, intervening traces are ignored, and so do not suffice to block contraction.)

### References

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