

You *Wanna* Consider a Constructional Approach towards *Wanna*-contraction?

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1 Introduction

Studies of *wanna*-contraction within the Chomskyan framework (Chomsky 1981) have often focused on syntactic constraints to explain its distribution (see, e.g., Zwicky 1970, Chomsky and Lasnik 1978, Boeckx 2000). For example, while *wanna*-contraction may occur in contexts such as (1), it is generally assumed to be blocked by syntactic elements such as WH-traces in (2), by infinitival clauses in (3), and by prepositional *to* in (4).¹

(1) Kids only *wanna* have a good time, get drunk. (COBUILD)²

(2) *Who do you *wanna* look at the chickens?
 (Who_i do you want t_i to look at the chickens?)
 (Postal and Pullum 1978: 3)

(3) *I don't want anyone who continues to *wanna* stop wanting.
 (I don't want [anyone who continues to want] to stop wanting.)
 (Postal and Pullum 1978: 131)

¹For an overview of the architecture of different versions of the Chomskyan framework (i.e., the Principles and Parameters framework (Chomsky 1981) and the Minimalist Program (Chomsky 1995)), see Webelhuth (1995).

²Corpora used in this paper are the Switchboard corpus and the COBUILD Bank of English.

- (4) a. I want, to be precise, a yellow four door De Ville convertible.
 b. *I wanna, be precise, a yellow four door De Ville convertible.
 (ibid.)

In this paper, I first review previous approaches to *wanna*-contraction and then propose an alternative analysis. In Section two, I look at Ausín's (2002) arguments in favor of analyzing *wanna*-contraction (henceforth: WC) in strictly syntactic terms. In Section three, I discuss Pullum's (1997) morphological analysis of WC and argue that it exhibits problems similar to those encountered by strictly syntactic analyses. In Section four, I present an alternative approach to WC. Working within Construction Grammar (Fillmore and Kay 1993, Goldberg 1995), I show that a nonmodular analysis has a number of theoretical and empirical advantages that allow simultaneous integration of phonological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic information in order to account for the distribution of WC.

2 The Problem with Multiple Spell-out

Working within the Minimalist Program (Chomsky 1995), Ausín's (2002) analysis assumes strict modularity of the language faculty. Central to this approach is that 'the operation of Spell-out can take place several times during the derivation of a given sentence' (Ausín 2002: 53). On this view, the syntactic component 'communicates' with the phonological component several times during the derivation of a sentence, and not only once, as was assumed in earlier versions of Chomsky's Principles and Parameters framework (Chomsky 1981).

Ausín's (2002) account relies on three assumptions to explain the distribution of WC. First, Ausín proposes that 'Spell-out should be linked to the checking of the only un-interpretable features that are always erased after checking: namely Case features' (Ausín 2002: 57). According to Ausín, this explains why in sentences like *They want to leave* (Ausín 2002: 58) the infinitival complement does not get spelled out early during the derivation. Case checking does not take place on the subject position of the infinitival complement because there is no case-checking head. In contrast, Case checking and early Spell-out takes place in sentences like *They want Mary to leave*, because 'the infinitival complement is headed by a Case checking head, probably a null counterpart of *for*, that checks the Case of the embedded subject' (Ausín 2002: 58).

The second assumption made by Ausín is that there are two types of *to*. '[T]he *to* that undergoes contraction is specified in the lexicon as an affix ("to_{+Aff}"). The *to* that does not undergo contraction is specified as an independent word ("to")' (Ausín 2002: 58). Ausín's third assumption is the idea

that in order to obtain WC, ‘the infinitival *to* has to be affixal: “*to*_{+Aff}” (ibid.). This means that when the Case of the embedded subject is checked in sentences like **Who do you wanna visit you?*, early application of Spell-out is triggered which sends the syntactic object (including *to*) to the PF component. Spelling out the embedded infinitival includes the affixal variant of *to*, but no appropriate host. According to Ausín, representation is ruled out ‘as a violation of the morphological requirements of the affix ...’, which requires that a morphologically realized affix must be a dependent of a morphologically realized category at PF’ (Ausín 2002: 59). This is taken as an argument for strict modularity.

Similarly, blocking of WC in sentences such as **I don’t need or wanna hear about it* is explained by the status of *to*. In this case, WC is impossible because there are two types of *to*: an affixal and a full form. ‘There is a violation of the principle of recoverability of deletion, since the *to* that is being deleted is different from the *to* in the second conjunct’ (Ausín 2002: 62).

The problem with this account is that although it explains the distribution of WC in minimalist terminology, it is difficult to falsify. In particular there does not seem to be an empirical method for discovering which features are uninterpretable and which features need to be checked. Since the distinction between interpretable and noninterpretable features is crucial for determining whether Spell-out may occur, not being able to empirically verify whether a given feature is interpretable or not is a major drawback. The same point holds for Ausín’s claim that there is a null counterpart of *for* that checks Case of embedded subjects (Ausín 2002: 58). This claim represents a theory-internal assumption peculiar to the Minimalist Program and is not backed up by empirically verifiable data. In addition, the approach relies on an extremely small set of data that is arrived at by self-introspection and intuition rather than through an analysis of larger sets of data in context.

To support this point, I conducted a search in the Switchboard Corpus of spoken English to determine the distribution of *want to* and *wanna*. I found a total of 1926 sentences including *want to*, and only 428 sentences including its reduced counterpart *wanna*. More interestingly, only 0.7% of *wanna*-sentences and 0.67% of *want to*-sentences exhibited the WH-pattern in sentences such as *What do you wanna do?* and *What do you want to concentrate on?* This small percentage of WH-clauses including *wanna* (as opposed to declarative clauses) is interesting. Most analyses place special emphasis on WC in WH-clauses, yet in comparison to non-WH clauses the latter seems to be a rather marginal phenomenon. Another interesting difference found in the Switchboard corpus is that in relative clauses *wanna*

occurs more frequently than *want to* (1.17% vs. 0.48%).³ If a theory of language claims not only to be descriptively but also explanatorily adequate, the question for Ausin's analysis is how it may account for these differences in distribution. This is an important question because from a syntactic point of view, WC appears to be a very infrequent phenomenon.

3 The Relationship between Form and Meaning

Pullum (1997) offers an alternative approach to contraction in terms of morpholexical rules. Based on Stump's (1994) theory of head marking, Pullum (1997: 85) claims that *want* takes a 'derivational postverbal element we can represent as *-to* which derives a headed morphological structure'. On this view, a morpholexical rule MLR_{to} applies to the verb stem of *want* to derive a synonymous lexeme of category $V[-AUX]$ that is subcategorized for a bare infinitive complement. According to Pullum, the synonymous lexeme derived by the rule is associated with colloquial rather than formal style. The syntactic, phonological, and semantic effects of Pullum's morpholexical rule on *want* are as follows.

(5) 'Effects' of Pullum's (1997: 85) Morpholexical Rule (MLR)

a. *Syntactically*: $MLR_{to}(X) = V[-AUX]$

b. *Phonologically*: $MLR_{to}(X) = X \cap /t\sigma/$

c. *Semantically*: $want'(to'(\beta))(\alpha) \Leftrightarrow wanna'(\beta)(\alpha)$

The problem with this account is that it is circular. That is, Pullum's morpholexical rule is posited only for contraction phenomena found with a class of so-called 'therapy' verbs (*want, go, used, have, got, ought, and supposed* (cf. Pullum 1997: 81)). On this view, because contraction only happens with these verbs, there has to be a special rule triggering it (if this assumption is not made, the rule will overgenerate). Pullum's approach does not consider in detail the fact that WC is only one instance of a more regular phonological reduction process occurring with high frequency words and phrases (see, e.g. Bybee 2001: 60-1). In order to deal with this issue, one could postulate a morpholexical rule that is a concrete instantiation of a higher-level morpholexical rule triggered only by certain phonological contexts. Characterizing WC in terms of a more regular phonological reduction process would allow Pullum to avoid circularity because he

³Although my search in the Switchboard corpus returned clear distributional preferences for *want to* and *wanna* for different syntactic patterns, these results should only be taken as a first indication. In order to arrive at a more in-depth analysis of the distribution of *want to* and *wanna*, further research needs to be conducted with other corpora of spoken English.

would not have to state a special morpholexical rule for only a small class of verbs.

However, there is a more serious problem with Pullum's (1997) analysis. Whereas for most linguists a difference in form typically signals a difference in meaning, this does not seem to be the case for Pullum. Discussing the meaning of the input and output of his morpholexical rule, he points out that '[i]t is not uncommon in English for morpholexical rules to derive lexemes synonymous with the inputs; note the synonymy of pairs like *cyclic/cyclical*, *comic/comical*, and pairs like *gold/golden*, *drunk/drunken* ...' (1997: 85). Conducting a search in the British National Corpus (BNC) for *comic* and *comical*, we would expect to find sentences in which the two words can be substituted for each other, according to Pullum. However, in sentences such as *He seemed to find her questions more and more comical* (BNC), *They remembered that comical dog on the beach* (BNC), and *She thought the mutterings were comical* (BNC), we find that the two words cannot be freely substituted for each other. The sentences demonstrate that words which at first glance seem synonymous in fact cannot be freely substituted for each other as Pullum proposes. One way of overcoming this problem may be to include more detailed syntactic and pragmatic information about inputs and outputs of morpholexical rules.

Similar arguments can be made against Pullum's analysis of contraction. In postulating a morpholexical rule which derives a lexeme *wanna* synonymous with *want to*, Pullum overlooks the fact that there is a difference in pragmatic meaning between the two forms (as opposed to a difference in syntactic distribution of the *comic/comical* type discussed in the previous paragraph). Whereas the latter occurs in both written and spoken English, the former is usually restricted to spoken English. While the difference in meaning between the two forms is not necessarily a lexical semantic difference *per se*, it is a pragmatic difference at the discourse level signaling a more relaxed and nonformal style on the part of the speaker. Pullum (1996: 85) states that *wanna* is 'associated with colloquial rather than formal style', but does not go into any detail as to how his morpholexical rule captures the difference in distribution between the different styles. This point is extremely important because a number of studies have shown that the restrictions on reduction of familiar words tend to be fewer in familiar social settings (see, e.g., Bybee 2001). The focus in the following section will thus be on accounting for the differences and similarities between *want to* and its reduced form *wanna*. I will argue that the simultaneous interaction of phonological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic information provides us with a better description and explanation for the distribution of WC.

4 A Constructional Approach

In order to account for the distribution of WC, I adopt the main principles of Construction Grammar (henceforth CxG) as outlined by Fillmore and Kay (1993) and Goldberg (1995). CxG differs from approaches nested within the generative tradition in that it is nonderivational, nonmodular, and flexible enough in its notation to allow for the introduction of new constructions and features when motivated by empirical facts that indicate that a satisfactory analysis of a set of given data cannot be arrived at without attributing the observed patterns to an already existing construction or feature thereof. More specifically, CxG takes the notion of the linguistic sign as central and posits that each particular form is associated with a specific meaning that licenses as well as constrains it. For example, Goldberg (1995: 4) defines a construction as follows:

C is a CONSTRUCTION iff_{def} C is a form-meaning pair $\langle F_i, S_i \rangle$ such that some aspect of F_i or some aspect of S_i is not strictly predictable from C's component parts or from other previously established constructions.

In offering a CxG analysis of WC, I propose that its distribution is best explained in terms of a construction representing a form-meaning pair that links a specific form (phonological form: *wanna*, syntactic form: NP _ VP) with a specific meaning (=colloquial style). To be more precise, the *wanna*-construction is an emerging miniconstruction (see Boas 2003) with its own semantic, pragmatic, syntactic, and phonological specifications (some are general, some are idiosyncratic).

The reason for positing a separate construction for WC is motivated by the fact that some aspect of the construction, in this case the form (i.e. phonological reduction), is not strictly predictable from the component parts. More specifically, it is impossible to predict which variant (the unmarked *want to* variant or the colloquial *wanna* variant) a speaker will choose. That is, even in colloquial speech, both *want to* as well as its phonologically reduced form *wanna* can be used interchangeably in the same context.⁴ Ultimately, the choice between the two forms is up to the speaker who decides whether she wants to come across as formal or colloquial. Consider the following diagram.

⁴The alternative account presented here crucially differs from Pullum's in that it assumes that *want to* and *wanna* are not synonymous *per se*. Whereas the former denotes formal style, the latter denotes colloquial style. However, from a syntactic point of view the two are interchangeable. Based on data from the Switchboard corpus, it appears that in spoken discourse *wanna* is used less frequently than its full counterpart *want to*. The Switchboard corpus contains 1926 sentences including *want to*, and only 428 sentences including its reduced counterpart *wanna*.

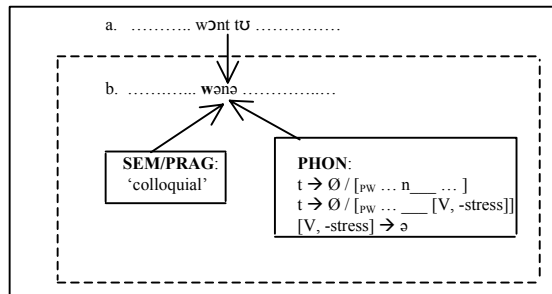


Figure 1. Options available to speaker

The large box in Figure 1 represents the discourse situation in which an utterance takes place. The dots to the left and right of *want to* and *wanna* represent the (identical) contexts in which the two forms may be embedded. For ease of illustration, the representation of the full variant *want to* in (a) does not include any particular information about either its form (syntax/morphology/phonology) or meaning component (semantics/pragmatics) because it represents the standard form-meaning pairing associated with the basic desiderative verb of English as in *I want to have a beer*.

Of primary importance in Figure 1 is the dotted box containing the reduced form *wanna*. The box illustrates that its contents—in contrast to other material contained in the larger box—are pragmatically marked. The arrow linking *want to* with its reduced form *wanna* indicates that the latter inherits all of its linguistic specifications from the former. However, *wanna* differs crucially from *want to* in that it is associated with additional information which overrides (some of) the inherited information. The idiosyncratic information associated with *wanna* is contained in the boxes SEM/PRAG (semantics and pragmatics) and PHON (phonology). That is, in addition to the linguistic specifications inherited from *want to*, *wanna* in (b) is associated with a form-meaning pairing that links a specific form PHON resulting from a general phonological process of English phonology (phonological reduction in specific contexts) with a specific meaning SEM/PRAG (colloquial style).⁵

The alternative analysis of WC in Figure 1 not only accounts for the formal similarities and differences between *want to* and its reduced form, it

⁵The PHON specifications of (b) in Figure 1 state (a) that /t/ gets deleted after /n/ in an unstressed syllable, and (b) that an unstressed vowel becomes reduced to a schwa in an unstressed syllable (see Suiko (1978: 310) and Okazaki (2002: 36/37)).

also captures a number of important observations made about discourse in general and contraction in particular. The first point concerns the role of discourse in shaping linguistic structures. Whereas the accounts reviewed in Sections two and three explain the distribution of WC in terms of syntactic and morphological constraints, they do not take into consideration the influential role of discourse information in triggering WC. By adopting a non-modular analysis of WC that incorporates discourse information in terms of assigning WC a colloquial meaning, the alternative account overcomes this limitation. It therefore accurately reflects Hopper's (1987: 142) observation that 'structure, or regularity, comes out of discourse and is shaped by discourse'.

The second characteristic of WC, as illustrated in Figure 1, concerns the relationship between frequency and phonological reduction. Contrary to claims made by proponents of generative analyses, various accounts have demonstrated that the distribution of *wanna* is constrained by general processing mechanisms inherent to English phonology and does not rely on specific constraints that apply only to WC (see, e.g., Lakoff 1970, Suiko 1978, Okazaki 2002). Immediately relevant to this proposal is the claim that the application of general phonological processing mechanisms seems to be directly influenced by the frequency of linguistic items to which they apply.⁶ For example, Bybee (2001) argues that the

development of special phonological properties in high-frequency words and phrases entails two properties of language: first, that high levels of use lead to reduction and, second, that such reduction, as specific to these items, must be represented as part of their stored image. (Bybee 2001: 61)

Bybee's claim regarding the phonological properties of high-frequency words is relevant to the distribution of WC in several ways. First, it finds support by Krug's (2001) corpus-based study that includes an analysis of the distribution of verbs in spontaneous speech in the British National Corpus. Krug (2001: 310) finds that *want to* and *wanna* are among the thirty most frequently used verbs in the corpus. They exceed a discourse frequency of more than one occurrence per thousand words, which is roughly the same as that of light verbs such as *take*, *make*, and *give*. Given Bybee's (2001) and Krug's (2001) observations, it should come as no surprise that WC is triggered by a combination of high frequency of *want to* in discourse on the one hand and general phonological processing constraints on the other. Figure 1 captures the relationship between high discourse frequency and phonological reduction in a straightforward way: *Wanna* can only oc-

⁶The fact that *wanna* is less frequent is not relevant here because it is the context and the frequency of *want to* that determines the distribution of *wanna*.

cur in the same discourse context as its full form *want to* because the general phonological reduction rules can only apply in cases in which the full form *want to* occurs (this is indicated by the arrow leading from *want to* to *wanna*). It is then up to the speaker to decide whether she wants to apply the phonological reduction rules to signal colloquial style.

The third point in which my analysis differs from previous accounts has to do with Bybee's (2001: 61) requirement for reduced items, namely that reduced items 'must be represented as part of their stored image'. Figure 1 captures this requirement imposed on reduced items by linking the specific form-meaning pairing expressed by the reduced *wanna* form to its full form *want to*. Representing information specific to *wanna* is relevant because it has been pointed out that *wanna* is in the process of becoming grammaticalized as a modal-like element (Okazaki 2002).

Mention of the special status of *wanna* necessitates a more in-depth description and formalization of its properties within a broader theory of language. Following the principles of Construction Grammar as outlined by Fillmore and Kay (1993) and Goldberg (1995), I assume no strict separation between the lexicon and syntax. On this view, 'lexical constructions and syntactic constructions differ in internal complexity ... but both ... are essentially the same type of declaratively represented data structure: both pair form with meaning' (Goldberg 1995: 7). In contrast to abstract syntactic constructions, the *Wanna*-Construction is a specified lexical construction—or miniconstruction in the sense of Boas (2003)—that pairs a specific meaning (in this case a colloquial use of the verb *want* expressing a desire) with a specific phonological and syntactic form. This means that although the distribution of *wanna* is still restricted to some degree by the distribution of *want to* (it appears in the same syntactic contexts), it is an emerging construction in its own right. Using the Construction Grammar notation developed by Fillmore and Kay (1993), we can formalize the *Wanna*-Construction in more detail as in Figure 2.

The *Wanna*-Construction (henceforth WCx) is characterized by two main attributes, namely phon (phonology) and pss (pragmatics, semantics, and syntax). At the top of the box we see that the phon value of the construction's phonological form is specified as *wanna*. The arrow indicates that the phonological form *wanna* may only occur in cases in which two adjacent words may be parsed and pronounced as a prosodic word. The two indices #6 and #7 stand for phonological information specified in the two smaller boxes in the lower part of the WCx. Each of the two boxes is a lexicalized miniconstruction itself, representing information associated with the basic desiderative verb *want* (in the small box on the left) as well as the infinitival marker *to* (in the small box on the right). In other words, the

presence of the WCx crucially depends on the availability of the two other constructions that form the basis for it. Within the smaller boxes we find the same attributes as in the WCx, namely phon (phonology) and pss (pragmatics, semantics, and syntax).

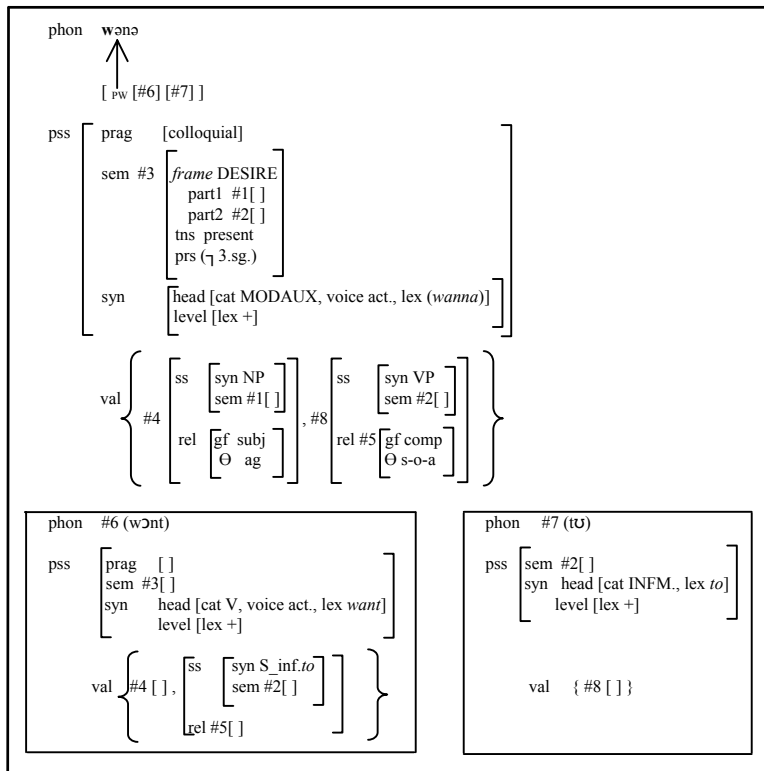


Figure 2. The *Wanna*-Cx

The important point here is that information associated with the indices #6 and #7 need only be stated once. That is, instead of repeating the entire phon value of each of the smaller constructions again in the phon value of the WCx, the indices signal identity of information for the individual phon values. Another important point is that the phon values of #6 and #7 at the top of the smaller boxes are in parentheses. This notation is used to indicate that the phon values are not actually pronounced but rather are implicitly understood whenever the string of words is pronounced as a single prosodic word *wanna*. Before discussing the remaining information associated with

the miniconstructions of *want* and *to*, we first turn to the values of the *ps* attribute of the WCx.

The pragmatic value of the WCx is specified as ‘colloquial’, thereby signaling its difference from the unspecified pragmatic value (indicated by empty square brackets) of the *want*-construction in the left hand box at the bottom of Figure 2. The value of the *sem* attribute is specified for the semantic frame of desire, present tense, and nonthird person singular. The Desire Frame consists of two Frame Elements (or semantic roles), #1 being the agent expressing a desire, and #2 being the state of affairs desired by the agent.⁷ Index #3 indicates that the semantic value of the WCx is a specific instantiation of the semantics of the *want*-construction in the bottom left box in Figure 2. Index #2 indicates that the semantic value of the state of affairs desired by the agent is the same as the semantics of the infinitival complement headed by *to* in the bottom right box in Figure 2.

A comparison of the syntactic specifications of the WCx with those of *want* and *to* in the two smaller boxes indicate that *wanna* is a modal auxiliary, used only in the active voice, and that it is a lexeme in its own right (although limited when it comes to its inflectional morphology as the non-third person singular restrictions in its semantics and head restrictions show). In contrast, the head value of *want* is specified as verb, whereas that of *to* is specified as infinitival marker.

The valence list of the WCx contains two elements. The first element—marked with the index #4—is identical to the first element on the valence list of the incorporated *want*-construction. That is, the agent of the Desire Frame (#1) is realized as an NP (indicated by the *ss* (syntax/semantics) link). The values of the *rel*(ation) attributes indicate that the agent of the Desire Frame is realized as a grammatical subject. The second element of the valence list of the WCx is marked with the index #8, indicating that its value is identical to that of the incorporated *to*-construction in the lower right box. Its *ss* attribute shows that it requires the state of affairs value (indicated by #2) to be realized in terms of a VP that serves as a complement of the WCx. An important point to note here is the discrepancy between the second element on the valence list of the WCx and the second element index on the valence list of the *want*-construction. Whereas the two share the same value for the *rel*(ation) attribute indicated by index #5, they differ in how that relation is expressed syntactically. The *want*-construction requires the state-of-affairs Frame Element to be realized in terms of an infinitival clause headed by *to*, whereas the WCx requires a VP as its second valence element. However, both the WCx and the *want*-construction crucially rely

⁷For an overview of the theoretical status of Frame Elements in Frame Semantics, see Fillmore (1982) and Petruck (1996).

on information provided by the *to*-construction in the lower right box in Figure 2.

The incorporation of phonological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic information from both the *want*-construction and the *to*-construction into the WCx shows that once a simultaneous integration of different types of linguistic information is achieved, it is not only possible to account for the distribution of its component parts (*want*- and *to*-constructions), but also for the distribution of the WCx as a whole.

5 Conclusions and Outlook

The constructional approach towards WC offered in this paper differs from previous accounts in three crucial points. First, by integrating phonological, pragmatic, semantic, and syntactic information it is nonmodular. Thus, instead of positing different levels of representation that have to be linked by rules in order to derive WC, the alternative analysis proposed in this paper allows for a direct interaction between different types of linguistic information. Second, following previous work in Construction Grammar (Fillmore and Kay 1993, Goldberg 1995), the constructional analysis of WC regards the notion of the linguistic sign as central to linguistic explanation. That is, a difference in form equals a difference in meaning. We have seen that once close attention is paid to the difference in meaning expressed by *wanna*, semantic and pragmatic information (besides syntactic and phonological information) become relevant to explaining the restrictions on WC. Third, the constructional approach towards WC allows for explaining the distribution of WC in terms of two general linguistic phenomena. The first is phonological reduction that occurs regularly in fast speech (form). The second is the speaker's choice of colloquial style (pragmatic meaning). The interaction of the two phenomena is part of the form-meaning pairing that makes up the WCx. The other parts come from the syntactic, phonological, and semantic specifications of *want* and *to*.

Obviously, further research is required to investigate the distribution of WC and other contraction phenomena within a constructional framework in more detail. More specifically, future research must concentrate on gathering more corpus material and incorporating frequency information in constructions (see, e.g., Boas 2003). The goals of the present paper have been more modest: to set out a constructional approach towards WC and to illustrate the necessity of paying more attention to the links between general linguistic phenomena such as fast speech and colloquial style.

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