

The role of form and meaning in licensing contraction: The case of *-ing+to* → *-na*

This paper examines conditions governing the contraction of *-ing+to* → *-na* (e.g. *going to* → *gonna*). In testing subjects' tolerance for this contraction, we manipulated: grammatical category of the complement (IP vs. PP); grammatical construction (Raising vs. Control); and aspect of the complement (contemporaneous vs. prospective). The results of pilot studies showed that aspect, more than other factors, predicted acceptability of *-na* contraction ($p=0.075$). These results have implications for the relationship between form and function, in that we find contraction not exclusively licensed by morphological form, but also by semantic properties.

Gonna is the most familiar example of *-na* contraction, which has begun to spread to other English verbs (more recent *-na* forms include *trying to* → *tryna*, *fixing to* → *finna*). XXX 20## claimed that *-na* contraction is licensed by the presence of an IP complement denoting prospective aspect. The present paper seeks to discover the properties that determine the distribution of *-na* contraction for as wide a range of constructions as possible.

Three experiments manipulated properties that might affect *-na* contraction acceptability: (1) IP vs. PP complement, *Caitlyn is going to [gonna] leave* vs. *Caitlyn is going to [gonna] Paris*; (2) Raising vs. Control, *Caitlyn is appearing to [appearna] be nice* vs. *Caitlyn is tryng to [tryna] be nice*; (3) contemporaneous vs. prospective aspect, *Caitlyn is pretending to [pretendna] be nice* vs. *Caitlyn is tryng to [tryna] be nice*. The design of each experiment was identical, presenting subjects visually with sentences containing no contractions and aurally with the same sentences pronounced with one contracted form, asking them to rate the acceptability of the latter on a 9-point Likert scale. Each experiment included 24 experimental items and 36 distractors. Distractors included 18 acceptable contractions (e.g. *won't*) and 18 unacceptable contractions (e.g. *willn't*).

Although results presented here are from pilot data (Exp.1 $n=10$; Exp.2 $n=11$; Exp.3 $n=11$), important patterns have already emerged. Most significant was the preference for contractions involving prospective IPs over those involving contemporaneous IPs. Accordingly, sentences like *Caitlyn is appearna be nice* were judged less acceptable than sentences like *Caitlyn is tryna be nice* ($p=0.075$). Also of interest is that no significant difference was found between contractions involving Raising vs. Control verbs ($p=0.7659$). Finally, relative acceptability of prospective IPs across all three experiments was higher (but not significantly so) than PP complements ($p=0.1792$). And the acceptability of PP complements was higher than contemporaneous IPs in Exp.1 ($p=0.0945$).

The conclusions drawn from these pilot results (to be confirmed with further testing) are: (1) the grammatical category of the verb's complement contributes to the acceptability of *-na* contraction (e.g. **Caitlyn is gonna Paris*); (2) the Raising/Control distinction plays no role (in keeping with theories of Control that derive both through movement, e.g. Hornstein 1999); and (3) the aspectual properties of the IP complement play a (possibly) larger (and more general) role, suggesting that the contraction is also licensed by semantic properties of the verb complex, wherein the *to* involved in *-na* contraction bears an aspectual feature absent from other IP complements addressed here.

Word count = 499

Reference

Hornstein, Norbert. 1999. Movement and control. *Linguistic Inquiry*. 30(1): 69-96.