Epistemic and Deontic Modality Preference Through 'Wanna':
A corpus-based study

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Abstract

'Wanna' which is the contraction of 'want+to' has its own meaning. Nonetheless, a message in which 'wanna' appears possible leads to different interpretations. In this study, 'wanna' is analyzed in terms of its epistemic and deontic implications. The data were collected from the scripts of the TV series 'Riverdale'. It was found that out of 24 tokens, 10 carried epistemic implication while deontic implication was present in the rest 14 tokens. This contrasts the findings in Lorenz (2012) which suggest that 'wanna' is used only to express deontic modality.

Keywords: Epistemic modality, Deontic modality, 'Wanna', Corpus linguistics

ทัศนะภาวะปริชาน และ ทัศนะภาวะปริพัทธ ในคำกริยา 'wanna': กรณีศึกษาทาง ภาษาศาสตร์คลังข้อมูล

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บทคัดย่อ

โดยทั่วไปคำว่า 'wanna' ซึ่งเป็นรูปย่อของ 'want to' นั้น สื่อความหมายเฉพาะซึ่งสามารถตีความได้หลากหลาย งานวิจัยนี้นำเสนอการวิเคราะห์ความหมายของ 'wanna' ในมุมมองของการสื่อทัศนภาวะสัญชาน (epistemic modality) และทัศนภาวะปริพัทธ (deontic modality) ผ่านบทละครโทรทัศน์เรื่อง Riverdale ตามระเบียบวิธีภาษาศาสตร์คลังข้อมูล จากผลการศึกษาพบว่า มีการใช้ 'wanna' ทั้งในการสื่อความหมายเชิงทัศนภาวะสัญชานและทัศนภาวะปริพัทธ กล่าวคือ ใน จำนวนข้อมูลที่เก็บได้จาก 24 ตัวอย่างพบว่า มีการใช้ 'wanna' เพื่อสื่อทัศนภาวะสัญชานใน 10 ตัวอย่าง และเพื่อสื่อทัศนภาวะ ปริพัทธใน 14 ตัวอย่าง ซึ่งผลการศึกษานี้แตกต่างจากผลการศึกษาของ Lorenz (2012) ที่พบว่ามีการใช้ 'wanna' เพื่อสื่อ ทัศนภาวะปริพัทธเพียงอย่างเดียว

คำสำคัญ: ทัศนะภาวะสัญชาน ทัศนะภาวะปริพัทธ 'Wanna' ภาษาศาสตร์คลังข้อมูล

1. Introduction

'*Wanna*' is the contraction of '*want (+to)*'. The verb '*to want*' is not a modal verb like *must, shall, can, will, or may*. However, as the language evolves has formed itself as a semi-modal which has its own meaning used to express something to someone in a particular situation. A message behind the use of '*wanna*' can be interpreted in different ways. As Kiefer (1987:80) points out, "there is no sentence (proposition) without modality", whether being expressed directly or not. This study thus focuses on the pragmatic aspect of modality and is based on Palmer's (2001:1) account of modality which suggests that "Modality is concerned with the status of the proposition that describes the event." It emphasizes the two main types of modality—epistemic and deontic. According to Matthews (1991), epistemic modality exhibits speaker's knowledge or an objective probability regarding the truth of the proposition. It can also demonstrates the degree of certainty or evidence a speaker has for the proposition expressed through his or her utterance. Kreidler (1998:241) notes that "deontic modality is the necessity of a person to do or not to do in a certain way" while Saeed (2003) points out that deontic modals may reveal two kinds of social knowledge: obligation and permission.

This study utilizes the scripts from the TV series 'Riverdale' which has played an influential role in many societies for decades and reflects an essential part of individual lifestyles all around the globe. Bednarek (2010), Pennycook (2007), and Androutsopoulos (2012) noted that the language in television drama had not been taken seriously enough in linguistics, inasmuch as it is devalued in comparison to its relative popularity. Due to this reason, the investigation on the pragmatic implications of '*wanna*' will be based on the TV series Riverdale, a very popular teenage drama which won the people's choice award and teen choice award in 2018.

The focus of the study is to find out the modal implications of '*wanna*'. The findings will be compared with those proposed in the study of Lorenz (2012) which investigates the use of '*wanna*' based on its pragmatic variation in terms of modality. In Lorenz's study, the use of '*wanna*' is investigated from the data collected from Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken and American English (SBC) which include sixty recordings of natural speech from all over the United States. This set of data represents a variety of people in term of ages, origins, occupations, ethnic, and social backgrounds (Dubois et al. 2005). There are also face-to-face

conversations including telephone conversations and public talks which take place in private and professional situations. This corpus also presents different levels of formality through 249,000 words in the transcripts. In order to examine whether any changes are detected in the use of *'wanna'* and to investigate the presence of epistemic and deontic modality in the use of *'wanna',* the study will compare the findings with those proposed in Lorenz's study. The analysis of findings follows the research question, **"**How does the use of *'wanna'* change over time in terms of epistemic or deontic implications?".

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Expressions of modality

Speakers can express their opinion or judgment that something may be viewed differently than it is initially perceived through the use of linguistic expressions of modality. This allows speakers to commit to what they say. (Turnbull and Saxton, 1997:45-181)

Saeed (2003) states that modality is a term for devices which grant speakers the ability to express different levels of degrees of commitment to or belief in a proposition. It is one significant aspect in the semantic category which operates at the sentence level and signals a person to act or respond in varying ways based on the expression given.

Cruse (2004) states that modality is a speaker's attitude toward the information of event or utterance. Due to the fact that a message might be conveyed in an implicit fashion, it is necessary to understand the authentic meaning behind every sentence. This integrates itself in the characteristic feature of all modality types, e.g. they do not show a situation as straightforward facts (Zandvoort 1964 and Bache and Davidsen-Nielsen 1997, among others).

2.1.1 Epistemic modality

According to Halliday (1970), epistemic modality is the speaker's assessment of probability and predictability. Likewise, Palmer (1986) indicates epistemic modality as the commitment of the speaker toward the proposition.

Depraetere and Reed (2006) state that epistemic modality reflects the speaker's judgment of the likelihood that the proposition underlying the utterance is correct. The epistemic scale of likelihood ranges from weak epistemic possibility (*"That may be Rosie"*) to epistemic necessity (*"That must be Rosie"*).

2.1.2 Deontic modality

According to Kreidler (1998), deontic modality is the necessity of a person to do or not to do something. It shows the speaker's desire for the proposition expressed in his utterance. Saeed (2003) notes that deontic modals may convey two kinds of social knowledge, e.g. obligation and permission. Obligation concerns 'what a person must do' while permission deals with ' someone' s authority to permit somebody else to do something'. Depraetere and Reed (2006) point out that deontic modality also implies an authority which may be a person, a set of rules, or something as vague as a social norm responsible for granting the permission. An example is "Rosie can go home," which carries a deontic (permission) reading that it is possible for Rosie to go home. Deontic modality also implies ability.

2.2 The contraction form 'wanna' as a semi-modal

Krug (2000) conducted the most prominent work which includes an analysis of the semi-modal contractions 'wanna'. He argues that the semantics of semi-modal hugely influences the development of contractions including 'wanna'. As proposed by Krug (2000:219) in the Iconicity of Grammatical Categories Principle, "other things being equal, the more a form refers to what is cross-linguistically realized as a grammatical morpheme, the more distinct its linguistic form will be from neighboring forms and its source construction syntagmatically, and the more similar it will be to related forms paradigmatically". Grammatical morphemes include the semi-modal of futurity, 'going to' and its contraction 'gonna', and 'wanna'. However, Lorenz (2012:16) argued that it's unclear whether this resulted from a competition ('want to' will from the domain of volition) or a pull chain ('want to' was resorted to in the absence of an expressive marker of volition, filling the place 'will' had left on being bleached to a future marker)".

2.3 The popularity of 'wanna'

Larsen and Zukowski (2011) point out that the most commonly cited findings in introductory linguistics courses involves a phenomenon in 'wanna' contraction which is a reduced form of the verb 'want' and an infinitive to. The use of the reduced form 'wanna' is common in conversations in the TV series (Bergman, 2013). The study of conversations in the TV series 'Friends' by Bergman shows the high frequency of the occurrences of 'wanna' in Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), reflecting the popularity of using

'wanna' in spoken and written American English. This evidence helps determine the selection for *'wanna'* in the data.

2.4 TV series dialogue

There is evidence which supports the idea to use TV series dialogues as a source of data for linguistic explorations. This includes the studies of Chamber (2003) on 'The West Wing', Bubel (2006) on 'Sex and The City', Quaglio (2008) on 'Dawson's Creek', Quaglio (2009) on 'Friends' and Bednarek (2010) on 'Gilmore Girls'. According to Richardson (2010), these TV series can serve as rich resources for research studies as they are rich authentic language and culture which deserves as much attention as their cinematic counterparts. By studying the language used in native speakers' conversations in a TV series, a researcher can gain more understanding about the language its pragmatic use. Studying linguistic features and functions from this form of media can also be interesting thanks to the different views about social issues (Lembo 2000; Rey 2001), the influence of the language used in a TV series on the audience's speaking and thinking processes (Stuart-Smith 2007; Fitzmaurice 2000), and the specific language features of television conversation (Mattsson, 2009). This motivates the use of TV series 'Riverdale' in the present study in order to examine the use and pragmatic functions as a modal.

2.5 Relevant research

Lorenz (2012) investigates the lexical emancipation of the contractions *'wanna'*, *'gonna'*, and *'gotta'*. He examines the *'wanna'* and its variation that causes the change in its emancipation. One variation he focuses on is the pragmatic variation. He states based on the examples *'You must go now.'* and *'You had better go now.'* that 'wanna' " is particularly prominent in expressions of modality" which differ in terms of the strength of the obligation and the degree of the authority being conveyed (p.6). They are used for different pragmatic purposes. The study is based on a set of data collected from Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken and American English (SBC) which consists of sixty recordings of natural speech from the native speakers of American English all over the United States. It represents a variety of people in terms of age, origin, occupation, and ethnic and social backgrounds (Dubois et al. 2005). The results reveal higher frequencies of use of 'wanna' to express the deontic implication, suggesting the preference for deontic modality to epistemic modality which is present in indirect advice and suggestions in casual conversations.

In addition to SBC, Lorenz included Corpus of Historical American English (COHA) which consists of more than 400 million words of texts in American English collected from 1810 to 2009. The random samples of seventy-five instances of each variant in each decade comprising of 1,213 tokens of *'wanna'* and *'want to'* shows that the deontic *'wanna'* is a colloquial way of expressing weak obligations although it is not preferred in written dialogues.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 The target word

The word *'wanna'* was chosen in this study because of its high frequency in everyday English. Also, Collins (2009) and Brisard (2001) claim that there are expressions of modality such as epistemic (stating assumption) and deontic (express advice or obligation) modality involved in *'wanna'*.

Additionally, Lorenz (2012) states that *'wanna'* is an informal character which favors the use of (indirect) advice in a conversation of a more casual tone. His works also indicates that *'wanna'* is frequently used to express deontic modality. It is interesting and worth studying whether Lorenz's claim also applies to the data used in the current study and whether there are any changes in the use of *'wanna'*.

3.2 Materials

This present study uses the conversations in TV series 'Riverdale' self-collected from the scripts available online. All episodes of Season 1 have been checked to filter the occurrences of *'wanna'*. The whole sentences in which 'wanna' appears are checked and, when necessary, surrounding sentences are included in the analysis in order to get a full understanding of the sentences.

3.3 Procedures

This section discusses the research design and data collection.

3.3.1 Research Design

The study examines the data self-collected from the online scripts of Riverdale in which the target word *'wanna'* appears. Conversations from Season 1 are investigated and categorized in accordance with their modal implications.

3.3.2 Data Collection

The data are self-collected from the website *springfield.co.uk* for Riverdale Season 1 which provides spoken dialogue in form of a text file. Then researchers counted the sentences containing *'wanna'*. The Riverdale series is a teenage drama airing from 2017-2019 (still airing at the time of data collection).

3.4 Data analysis

First the occurrences of the target word *'wanna'* were counted. Second, the target word *'wanna'* will be categorized based on the characteristics of epistemic and deontic modality stated in Sections 2.1.1 and 2.1.2. Finally, the findings were compared to the findings about *'wanna'* revealed in Lorenz's study which is based on the data from Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken and American English (SBC).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 The frequency of target word *'wanna'* in Riverdale

**Figure 1** occurrence of *'wanna'*
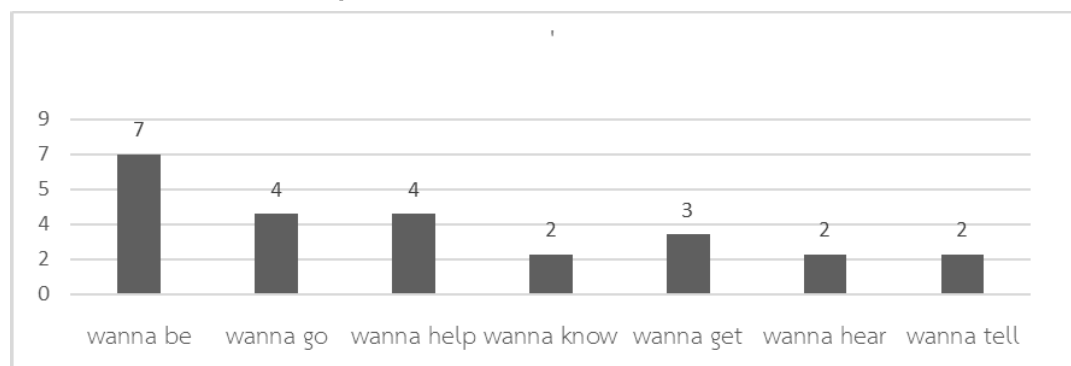
The data from all 13 episodes of Season 1 show that the target word *'wanna'* co-occur 53 times with some of its combination with other verbs occur more than once. In this study, the single occurrences of *'wanna'* were excluded as the combinations do not suggest the prominent use of *'wanna'*. *'Wanna'* occurs more than once in 24 tokens as shown in Figure 1. Out of these, *'wanna be'* occurs 7 times while *'wanna go'* occurs 4 times and *'wanna get'* occurs three times. In addition to these, *'wanna help'*, *'wanna hear'* and *'wanna tell'* occur twice.

4.2 The categorization of *'wanna'*

4.2.1 *"Wanna"* as an expression of epistemic modality

'Wanna' is used to express epistemic modality in 10 tokens. These include 4 occurrences of *'wanna be'*, 2 occurrences of *'wanna go' and 'wanna hear'* and 1 occurrence of *'wanna know'* and *'wanna get'*.

Figure 2 The occurrences of *'wanna'* epistemic implications
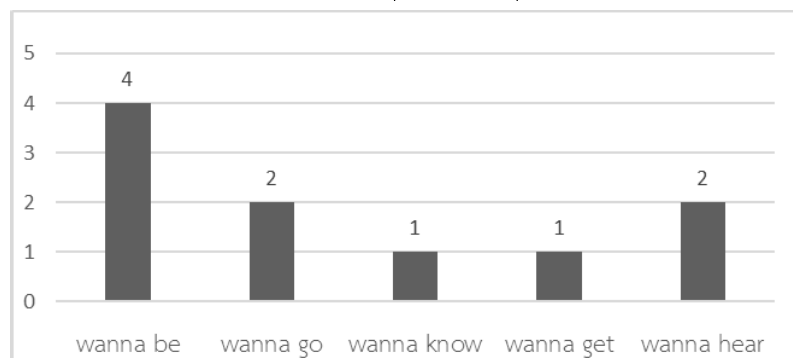
An example of the tokens where *'wanna'* is used to express epistemic modality is provided below:

(1) BETTY: I've been thinking lately, how I *wanna* be more like her.

CHUCK: You wanna be a bad girl? (This *'wanna'* categorized in second order with separate explanation).

BETTY: Maybe.

CHUCK: Like your sister Polly was? Season 1 ep. 3

Betty as a speaker of the sentence states the probability and possibility of becoming like her sister, Polly who got pregnant while still in school with the late Jason and had had a plan with Polly to run away and build a family of their own. The police was still searching for the person who murdered him. Betty is confident that she can be more like Polly or become like Polly since they are sisters growing up together. By using the word *'wanna'* instead of other expressions that convey the message straightforwardly, the

speaker covertly signals that she strongly believes that what she wants will become possible.

(2) MANTLE: Sup, Coach?

COACH: You *wanna* be captain?

MANTLE: Hell yeah, I do. Season 1 ep. 5

Archie is the captain of Riverdale High School's football team. Mantle always competes with Archie to become the best player even though Archie is the quarterback and leader of the team. The coach is mad with Archie, so he offers the position to Mantle. From this sentence, the high probability and possibility of Mantle to take the spot leads the coach to say the sentence. The speaker (the coach) is very certain that Mantle will take this chance to become captain of the team.

4.2.2 *'Wanna'* as an expression of deontic modality

'Wanna' appears 14 times to express deontic modality. The occurrences include *'wanna help'* (4 times), *'wanna be'* (3 times), *'wanna go'* (twice), *'wanna tell'* (twice) and *'wanna know'* (once).

Figure 3 occurrence of *'wanna'* in deontic modality in Riverdale series
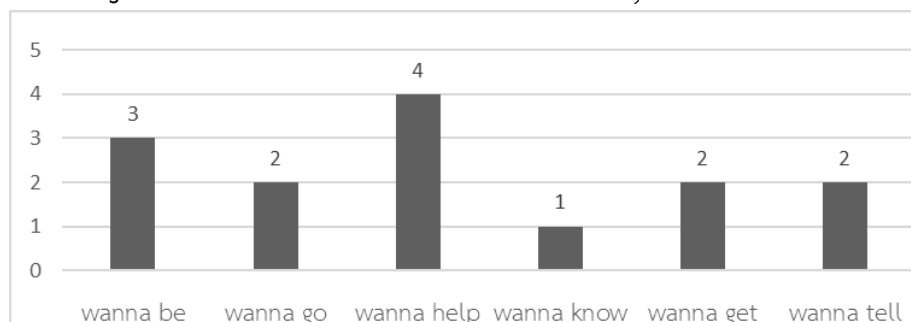
Deontic modality is expressed in the two examples below:

(3) BETTY: But you should still come with us.

ARCHIE: No. I don't *wanna* be a third wheel.

BETTY: Come on. It'll be like old times. Season 1 ep10

Archie is not interested in going to a movie with Betty and her boyfriend Jughead because he does not want to be a "third wheel." It is not a serious obligation for him to go or not to go from the other speakers' point of view, but it is an obligation Archie places upon himself, knowing what one must do in this situation. Additionally, looking at their whole conversation, Betty is permitting Archie to go with her and Jughead and that she does not mind as they did this before. However, Archie insists on not going with the couple because it is something he feels he should not do when people go on a date.

(4) ARCHIE: Can I be with Cheryl?

VERONICA: And I *wanna* be with Betty.

BETTY: Oh, uh, I was thinking I'd partner with Kevin.

MOOSE: Actually, uh, Keller's (Kevin's last name) with me. We, like, talked. Season1 ep2

Veronica does not use modals that strongly imply deontic modality like 'must' or 'have to' nor does she adopt 'can' to directly ask for a permission. Instead, she uses *"wanna"* to communicate in a less formal, friendlier, and more casual tone to Betty. She does this in a hope that there will be a chance she would pair up with her in science class. As a consequence, the listener feels less pressure when giving a response.

4.3 A comparison to Lorenz's (2012) findings and the research questions of the study

4.3.1 A comparison to Lorenz's (2012) findings

The findings from Lorenz's (2012) study show that 'wanna' is mainly used to denote volition and weak deontic. The deontic *'want to'/ 'wanna'* is used to suggest non-authoritative advice or weak obligation. Additionally, the data from Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English (SBC) show a higher rate in the use of *'wanna'* to denote deontic modality. This is probably due to *'wanna's* informal implication which is aimed at giving indirect advice in a casual conversation. An example given in Lorenz's data, *'… but you don't wanna stretch those ligaments very much […] while they're healing.'* (SBC 046-51.382) exemplifies this. In his work, he explains that this type of example is frequent in the SBC data. It also is also evidence of the form's modalization.

Interestingly, Lorenz proposes that the use of 'wanna' to denote deontic modality is preferred by people aged less than 40 years old. This phenomenon is prominent among younger generations.

4.3.2 Has the modality implied by 'wanna' shifted from deontic to epistemic?

Following the findings presented in Figure 4 in percentage, the use of 'wanna' to denote epistemic modality accounts for 41.66% of the tokens while the use of the contraction to express deontic modality accounts for 58.3% of the tokens.

Figure 4 Expressions of modality in percentage
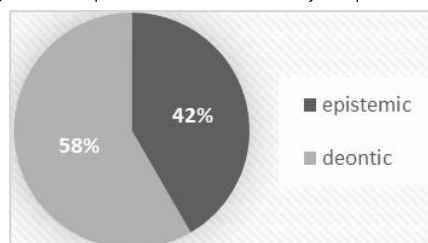
The findings indicate that *'wanna'* is mainly used to denote deontic modality in order to signal weak obligation, permission and ability. The use of the contraction to denote epistemic modality in order to suggest probability, possibility, predictability, and necessity is less preferred. In Riverdale, the characters express epistemic modality through *'wanna'* in two cases: when they know the probability of things happening and when they know that their utterance is true. Deontic modality expressed in the Riverdale series was used to convey weak obligation for someone to do or not to do something or to demand an answer, to give a permission to someone to go somewhere and to be friend with (again). Deontic modality also denotes the ability to protect someone and a challenge to someone's ability to perform something that does not suit one's personality.

The results of the current study comply with the findings from Lorenz's study. *'Wanna'* is used mainly to denote deontic modality. Lorenz proposes that this is the trend of the use of this contraction and strongly prevails among speakers of younger generations. Nonetheless, Lorenz does not discuss thoroughly the use of in *'wanna'* to express epistemic modality. The results from his work roughly show that epistemic modality mostly occurs with *gonna* to suggest a prediction or an assumption about a future event. To answer the research question of the current study, *'wanna'* is still widely used to denote deontic modality. However, the emerging of epistemic modality in what *'wanna'* implies possibly leads to the assumption that the modality implications of *'wanna'* have started to shift toward epistemic modality.

5. Discussions and Recommendations

5.1 Discussion

Both the findings from Lorenz's study and the current study indicate the sign that *'wanna'* might not denote deontic modality only. It can be assumed from the results that *'wanna'* now has a potential to convey possibility and probability in certain circumstances.

As seen from the data collected from Riverdale, epistemic modality is expressed through *'wanna'* in two cases, namely when the speakers are aware of the possibility of things taking place and when they know that their utterance is true. Another implication of epistemic modality is necessity which occurs once when Betty already knows what she needs to do with Chuck.

Regarding deontic modality, *'wanna'* is used in three different ways. First, it is used to test the abilities of individuals, second, it represents obligation and responsibility. The final deontic implication of *'wanna'* involves permission. In Riverdale, this occurs either when the speaker asks for a permission or when s/he gives a permission to others.

5.2 Recommendations

Some recommendations based on the findings are given as follows:

5.2.1 The focus of the study is only on *'wanna'* in TV series. Thus, further research should be carried out with different modal verbs or semi-modal verbs.

5.2.2 The data used in this study were collected from an American series. It would be interesting to explore data in other varieties of English and from English speaking people in different areas of the world. Different sets of data might reveal some new facts about ways to express modality.

5.2.3 The results from the current study are beneficial to English language teachers and learners. Once the modality implications of *'wanna'* are recognised, teacher could provide an opportunity to their students to practice using different linguistic devices to denote modality in authentic situations.

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