

# Exhortative clauses in Scots

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## 1 Introduction

To form imperatives and similar exhortations, certain varieties of Scots can use:

- A strategy familiar from Standard English (1a), or
  - A strategy involving special markers such as *gonnae* (1b) and *wantae* (1c), differing only in their exhortative strength:
- (1) a. (Don't) sit there.  
b. **Gonnae** drop it right now. (cf. (*Will you please*) *drop it right now*)  
c. **Wantae** leave me alane right now. (cf. (*Will you please*) *leave me alone right now*)

We argue that these forms are grammaticalized particles (historically a non-finite periphrasis, i.e. *going/want to*) that are unique to exhortative clause types.

- We use data from negation, overt subjects, and ellipsis to probe the syntax of such exhortations. We find that:
  - ▶ These particles occupy the complementizer position, above the subject.
  - ▶ But these particles also have modal-like properties (both in their semantics and in their syntax).
  - ▶ In fact they spell out the null inflectional element that Potsdam (1996: ch. 4) posits for Standard English imperatives.
- This study gives us a window into some of the syntactic innovations that characterize and differentiate certain varieties of Scots (see also Thoms et al. 2018).

Throughout, we will refer to exhortative clauses involving *gonnae* and *wantae* as GWCs (*gonnae-wantae clauses*).

## 2 Background on *gonnae* and *wantae*

The particles *gonnae* and *wantae* seem to have been developed from (reduced) questions with *to*-contraction:

- (2) a. (Are you) going to join us? → *Gonnae* join us  
b. (Do you) want to gies a drink? → *Wantae* gies a drink

Several properties indicate that *gonnae* and *wantae* clauses are now imperative-like, not interrogative, in contemporary varieties (see §3).

Data from the *Scots Syntax Atlas* (SCOSYA)<sup>1</sup> suggests that they're on the rise: they're generally accepted more widely by younger speakers (Thoms et al. 2018).

- But exhortations aren't frequent enough in the SCOSYA corpus (c.260 interviews) for us to draw any firmer sociolinguistic or diachronic conclusions.

<sup>1</sup>For the project description, see: <https://gtr.ukri.org/projects?ref=AH%2FM005550%2F1>  
For the forthcoming atlas itself, the link will be: <https://scotssyntaxatlas.ac.uk/>

We can see that *wantae* is less widely recognized and accepted than *gonnae* (see also Ulster *gon*: McCloskey 1997).

- Both are attested in West Central Belt Scots, with *wantae* appearing primarily around Glasgow.
- Some forms of *gonnae* are now accepted by younger speakers beyond this region.
  - ▶ Given its broader distribution, it may be that *gonnae* was grammaticalized first, with *wantae* arising more recently by analogy. But this is just speculation for now.

The verbs that grammaticalized into these imperative-like particles belong to the class of *restructuring* verbs (Roberts 1997).

- These also participate in *to*-contraction in English varieties (e.g. in American English: Pullum 1997)
- (3) a. I {wanna/hafta/oughta/usetta} leave.  
 b. I'm {gonna/sposta} leave.  
 c. I've gotta leave.
- These contractions are conditioned grammatically, not phonologically—they're not possible with non-modal or locative uses.
- (4) This is {used to/\*usetta} unblock the sink.  
 (5) \*I'm gonnae Fife.

- But none of these other verbs can occur in particle position in GWC-type exhortatives:

- (6) a. \*Spostae (you) shut up!  
 b. \*Goattae (you) shut up!  
 c. \*Huftae (you) shut up!

- So the class of verbs which grammaticalized into these exhortative particles is not identical to the class of restructuring/*to*-contraction verbs;
  - ▶ Rather, the former is a subset of the latter.
  - ▶ This may provide a clue as to how this grammaticalization took place to begin with.

### 3 GWCs are not interrogative, but imperative

From a synchronic syntactic perspective, GWCs are not interrogative.

- In fact, they exhibit characteristics of imperatives.<sup>2</sup>

First, the subject in a GWC is typically non-overt, as with standard imperatives.

- In such cases, the subject is obligatorily interpreted as 2nd person (i.e. inclusive of the hearer).
  - Indeed, the subject in a GWC can be expressed overtly (see §4.1); again, it typically appears as a 2nd person pronoun.
  - This is consistent with typical imperatives (but not with interrogatives, which show no such subject restrictions).
- (7) a. Put that doon.  
 b. Gonnae/wantae put that doon.  
 c. Gonnae/wantae {you/\*Mary/\*she/\*her} put that doon.

<sup>2</sup>Throughout, we generally shy away from characterizing GWCs as imperatives *per se*, given that they exhibit slightly different properties than canonical Scots imperatives. We therefore generally refer to them with the informal term *exhortation*, but describe their decidedly imperative-like properties in some detail.

Other quantified subjects are possible but must also be inclusive of the hearer, as with regular imperatives.

(8) Gonnae everybody shut up!

Second, negative polarity items can appear in the subject position of interrogatives, but not in imperatives.

- As we see below, NPIs are not licensed in GWCs, again making them look less interrogative and more imperative.

- (9) a. Is anybody gonnae help?  
 b. \*Gonnae anybody help.  
 c. Does anybody wantae help?  
 d. \*Wantae anybody help.
- (10) a. Gonnae one of youse help.  
 b. Wantae one of youse help.

Third, consider *please*, a particle that can arise in both regular imperatives and interrogative exhortations.

- (11) a. Please help John clean up.  
 b. Would you please help John clean up?

- *Please* is awkward in a non-finite clause, under matrix interrogatives:<sup>3</sup>

(12) Will you try to (??please) be on time?

- But *please* is quite natural immediately following *gonnae/wantae* in GWCs:

- (13) a. Gonnae please shut up.  
 b. Wantae please leave me alane.

- If e.g. *gonnae* were still synchronically *going to*, then the material following *gonnae* would be a non-finite clause.
  - This should rule out *please* in (13), along the lines of (12), contrary to fact.

Given these facts, it's clear that GWCs are, synchronically, neither biclausal nor interrogative.<sup>4</sup>

- Thus, *gonnae/wantae* are clear instances of grammaticalization:
  - Reanalysis from clause-embedding verbs used in interrogatives to make requests...
  - ...into special particles marking a novel exhortative clause type.
- In the next section, we will see that this is upward grammaticalization of the sort described in Roberts and Roussou (2003):
  - The particles *gonnae/wantae* are high up in the clause, above the subject position (see also Weir 2013).

#### 4 The structure of GWCs

Here we use diagnostics from various sources (overt subjects, negation, and ellipsis) to probe the structure of GWCs.

- We showed above that *gonnae/wantae* no longer act like main verbs in GWCs.
- Below, we argue that they occupy a position in the complementizer domain, though they also have certain modal properties.

<sup>3</sup>We are aware of examples involving *please* embedded in a non-finite clause under a matrix indicative, such as *I'm asking you to please be patient*. We do not attempt to provide a complete description of *please* here.

<sup>4</sup>See Weir (2013:§4.2) for additional arguments from out-of-the-blue contexts and from tag questions.

#### 4.1 Overt subjects in GWCs

The subject in GWCs may be optionally expressed, as in other imperative(-like) clauses in Scots (Weir 2013).

- Such subjects must follow *gonnae/wantae*.

- (14) a. \*You gonnae/wantae drop it right now.  
b. Gonnae/wantae you drop it right now.

Some speakers accept (14a), but it's possible these speakers are accessing a parse where the subject is a vocative

- This can be controlled for by (15a), since negative indefinites do not work as vocatives generally (but are fine as imperative subjects, cf. (15b) and Potsdam 1996).

- (15) a. \*Naebody gonnae/wantae leave just yet!  
b. Gonnae/wantae naebody leave just yet!

This tells us that *gonnae/wantae* are especially high up in the clausal structure: higher than the subject position.

There is evidence that the subject is in [Spec, TP] and not in situ in [Spec, *v*P]: floating quantifiers can occur after the imperative subject, and also after an adverbial.

- (16) a. Gonnae youse all shut up!  
b. Gonnae youse both shut up!  
c. Gonnae youse just all shut up!

Given that *gonnae/wantae* are uniquely associated with exhortative clause types, we take them to be in the C-domain.

- However, we have not yet determined their category:
  - ▶ Are they adverbials, or are they part of the clausal syntax?

#### 4.2 Negation in GWCs

Negation in GWCs can also tell us how GWCs are structured.

- Regular negative imperatives are formed with *don't* in these varieties;
- Negation in GWCs takes a different form: *no*, which is the Scots equivalent of *not*:

- (17) a. Don't dae that.  
b. Gonnae/wantae no dae that.  
c. \*Gonnae/wantae don't dae that.  
d. \*Don't gonnae/wantae dae that.

- First, this tells us that *gonnae/wantae* are not simply adverbials adjoined to an otherwise-typical imperative:
  - ▶ Dropping them from (17b) is ungrammatical (cf. (17c)), but adverbials are generally considered optional.
  - ▶ This tells us that *gonnae/wantae* are integrated into the syntax of such exhortative clauses (unlike adverbials).
- Second, negation in GWCs appears below overt subjects, as expected.<sup>5</sup>

- (18) a. Gonnae/wantae you no dae that.  
b. \*Gonnae/wantae no you dae that.

<sup>5</sup>Note that floating quantifiers can occur after this negation:

(i) Gonnae youse no all talk at the same time!

On the basis of (18), we conclude that *gonnae/wantae* are integrated into the syntax of such exhortative clauses, in a position above the subject (which itself is above negation, as usual).

- So this evidence from negation converges on similar results as the evidence from overt subjects in §4.1.

But why is the negation in GWCs *no*, and not *don't*? (cf. StE *Let's not do that* vs. ??*Let's don't do that*)

- The lack of *do*-support is surprising:
  - ▶ Scots is like Standard English in requiring tense to be expressed on either a verb or an auxiliary/modal (otherwise *do*-support occurs).

One possible explanation comes from ellipsis in GWCs.

### 4.3 Ellipsis in GWCs

VP ellipsis (“VPE”) is an operation in which a predicate can go unpronounced under identity with an antecedent.

- VPE is prevalent in Scots (as in Standard English), and it also seems to be available in GWCs:

(19) a. Mary left, but I didnae ~~{leave}~~.

b. He's no seen this film, but Mary has ~~{seen this film}~~.

(20) [Context: speaker asks whether she should buy another round at the pub]

a. Naw, gonnae (you) no ~~{buy another round}~~.

(cf. *No, don't.*)

b. ?Aye, gonnae ~~{buy another round}~~.

(cf. *?Yes, do.*)

- Negation and the optional subject remain outside the ellipsis site, consistent with ellipsis of the *v*P (and not ellipsis of some larger constituent, e.g. TP).<sup>6</sup>

Returning to the question from above: why do negative GWCs use *no* and not *don't*?

- We claim that negation in GWCs doesn't trigger *do*-support because an aux/modal-like element is in fact present.
- We identify this element as the *gonnae/wantae* particles themselves.
  - ▶ GWCs pattern like clauses with modals originating in T:
    - They never occur with tense marking;
    - They never occur with *do*-support;
    - They license VPE; and,
    - Auxiliaries below them do not raise across negation into T (*Gonnae no be a bad boy* / \**Gonnae be no a bad boy*).
  - ▶ This falls out if *gonnae/wantae* originate in T.

Why would these particles originate in the inflectional domain?

- We suggest that they spell out the null inflectional element that Potsdam (1996: ch. 4) posits for Standard English imperatives.
- Specifically, we claim that they are in fact modals, expressing a type of *speaker-oriented modality* (Bybee et al. 1994:§6.2.2).<sup>7</sup>
  - ▶ Specifically, they encode differing degrees of exhortative modal strength: *gonnae* > *wantae*

<sup>6</sup>Furthermore, auxiliaries can be stranded in certain contexts, consistent with ellipsis of a predicate-sized constituent, but not a clause-sized one (e.g. *Yer always late, but gonnae no be the morrow*). NB: example (20b) is ungrammatical with an overt subject: \**Aye, gonnae you*. We have no explanation for this at present, but suggest that it is related to the equivalent ill-formedness of \**Let's everyone* (cf. *Let's everyone gather round*).

<sup>7</sup>This is similar to, but distinct from, agent-oriented modality such as necessity/obligation (cf. *must, need to*, etc.); see Bybee et al. (1994:§6.2).

- ▶ This is akin to the patterning of more familiar modals, which can also differ just in modal strength, e.g. *may* vs. *must*
- ▶ See Portner (2007) on the modal status of imperatives.
- Their reanalysis from [V+*to*] complexes into modal elements generated in T is therefore a clear case of upward grammaticalization (Roberts and Roussou 2003).

Why would these particles undergo subject-auxiliary inversion?<sup>8</sup>

- For the same reason such movement occurs in other non-indicative clauses in Scots/English, e.g. questions, conditionals, exclamatives, etc.:
  - ▶ Specifically, GWCs are a case of *innovative verb second* in English, a *partial V2* language.
  - ▶ See Sailor (forthcoming) for detailed arguments on the productivity of partial V2 in English.

## 5 Conclusions

We lay out some new facts about exhortative clauses in varieties of Scots involving *gonnae/wantae*.

- Using data from overt subjects, negation, and ellipsis, we argue:
  - ▶ *Gonnae/wantae* are upward-grammaticalized elements licensed in exhortative clauses
  - ▶ They are generated in T and encode speaker-oriented modality (*gonnae* > *wantae*)
  - ▶ These clauses have the partial V2 syntax of other non-indicative clause types (i.e. inversion)
  - ▶ The syntax of GWCs is therefore quite normal-looking for Scots and Standard English, despite superficial appearances to the contrary.

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<sup>8</sup>Weir (2013) argues that *gonnae/wantae* are generated in the head of a Jussive phrase in the C-domain (see Zanuttini 2008). We do not rule out the possibility that inversion of these elements (i.e., movement into the C-domain from the inflectional domain) takes place in order for them to interface with such a left-edge jussive or exhortative head.

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## Appendix 1: *Just* and the position of subjects in GWCs

Recently, Weir (2017) has argued that overt subjects in certain Scots imperatives are not in regular subject position.

- Instead, they remain low, inside *vP*.<sup>9</sup>
- Weir’s evidence comes from a diagnostic involving the adverbial *just*.
- Weir assumes that this adverbial is *vP*-adjacent, meaning its initial position in sentences such as the following would require a low (*vP*-internal) position for the subject (and for the verb):

(21) Just get you back to school.

However, this diagnostic is flawed: this *just* is not at the *vP* edge, but much higher.

- English has (at least) two different adverbial uses of *just*:
    - ▶ One which is indeed *vP*-adjacent,
    - ▶ and one which is construed significantly higher in the clause (perhaps at the CP edge).
  - The latter is what arises in imperatives and exhortations, strengthening the plea or command involved;<sup>10</sup>
  - This is the one that appears in (21). Evidence that this element is quite high comes from negative imperatives:
- (22) a. Just don’t touch anything while I’m gone.  
 b. #Don’t just touch anything while I’m gone.
- (22a) has the strong negative exhortation reading, as intended.
    - ▶ The only reading for (22b) is one in which the hearer is told to do more than just touch something—infelicitous in a negative exhortative situation.
  - The position of negation (with *do*-support) tells us that this exhortative *just* is higher than TP.
    - ▶ As such, this *just* cannot inform us of the position of the subject.<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, the lower *just* can arise in GWCs, and it appears below the subject:

(23) Gonnae you just sit there and keep quiet.

<sup>9</sup>Specifically, Weir argues that the “subject” actually occupies the specifier position of a small clause embedded within *vP*.

<sup>10</sup>The meaning, similar to *only*, can be paraphrased as something like, “I don’t care what else you do, just as long as you do P” (or, in the case of a negative imperative, “...just as long as you don’t do P”).

<sup>11</sup>For completeness, we illustrate the differential behavior of *vP*-adjacent *just*, which is similar to *only* in associating with a focus within the *vP* (seemingly an event). This *just* naturally follows negation (ii), and cannot appear clause-initially on the relevant (event-related) reading (iii):

- (i) John just stood there instead of actually helping us.
- (ii) John didn’t just stand there, he actually helped us.
- (iii) #Just John stood there instead of actually helping us.

Thus, the *vP*-adjacent variety of *just* is not the one found in sentences such as (21), which is instead a clause-level *just*, leaving open the possibility that the verb and the subject are outside *vP*. This raises questions about the position of negation; see below (and Potsdam 2007).

## Appendix 2: GWC negation isn't constituent negation, but sentential negation

Consider *no* in negative GWCs, e.g. (17):

- Is this actually sentential negation, or is it constituent negation (which would have less probative value)?

Constituent negation: negation with non-sentential scope which attaches lower in the clause, e.g. closer to the verb.

- Negates just the verb phrase, not the proposition, and it takes low scope with respect to adverbials (e.g. we get an *all-not* reading).

(24) John has not been studying all day. (He only studied in the morning.) *Sentential negation*

(25) John has been not studying all day. (He's a total skiver.) *Constituent negation*

- The position of attachment correlates with interpretation, and also with morphology: only sentential negation occurs in a contracted form.

(26) a. They {should not / shouldn't} have been fired.  
 b. They {have not/haven't} been fired. *Sentential negation*

(27) They should {have not / \*haven't} been fired. *Constituent negation*

With this background in place, we find that *no* in GWCs cannot be constituent negation:

- Whereas *no* can be stranded next to a VPE site (see (20)),
- Constituent negation cannot be stranded next to a VPE site (see Potsdam 1996:§3 for discussion and references):

(28) \*Mary has been studying, but John has been not.

Thus, it must be that *no* in GWCs is regular negation, but does not trigger *do*-support (see above).

## Appendix 3: TP is present in GWCs

We now also have evidence against approaches that would assume imperatives (or at least GWCs) lack TP entirely (see Weir 2017:8 for a list of references arguing for the absence of T in imperatives).

- A well-known property of VPE: it must be properly licensed by an auxiliary or modal (Bresnan 1976, Zagana 1982, Lobeck 1995).<sup>12</sup>
- This licensing condition is satisfied even if the aux/modal moves away, as in an elliptical question (e.g. *Haven't you?*).
- Given that VPE is possible in GWCs, we argue that there must be some aux/modal-like element present in such clauses.
  - ▶ This element properly licenses VPE from the T position, militating against analyses in which TP is absent (or present, but unfilled) in GWCs.

<sup>12</sup>This is generally thought of as a property of the T head. Potsdam (1997) argues that negation (i.e. the Neg head) can also license VPE, even in the absence of overt T, as in subjunctives; however, the fact that VPE can take place even in affirmative GWCs suggests that T must be present (and filled by an aux/modal at some point in the derivation). See further below.