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**POSITIVE *ANymORE* IN AMERICAN  
ENGLISH**

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## Abstract

The use of *anymore* that is more widespread in the English-speaking world is the negative one, that is, an adverb that co-occurs with some negative expression in the clause. However, in some parts of the English-speaking world, *anymore* is also used in non-negative linguistic contexts. This positive usage of the word *anymore* that is usually restricted to negative environments has been the focus of study of many researchers. From its meaning to the restrictions that operate on its use, to the socio-cultural distribution, to the way it may evolve in the future, different hypotheses have been proposed through the years. Nevertheless, the random responses given by participants have made it difficult for researchers to validate hypotheses about this non-mainstream usage.

This study aims to analyze those hypotheses. First, I examine negation in English and what concerns to the usage of negative *anymore*. Second, I introduce positive *anymore* and the two main issues that have been studied about it: different interpretations of positive *anymore* (i.e. *nowadays*, *lately* and *from now on*) and the debate among linguists on whether there is one unique pan-dialectal *anymore* or we are talking about two different lexical items. In other words, whether the *anymore* used in negative and positive sentences is the same lexical item and only differs in meaning and the restrictions that operate on its use depending on the context or, on the contrary, they are independent lexical items with different meanings and restrictions operating on its use. Third, this study analyzes the conditions on the use of positive *anymore*: its syntactic distribution as well as its semantic conditions. Fourth, the current usage of positive *anymore* is tackled and, finally, this paper has a look at other non-mainstream constructions to some extent similar to positive *anymore*.

There are still many sides of positive *anymore* to be researched and hypotheses to be verified and accepted. For future studies it would be interesting to keep an eye on positive *anymore* as the course of this lexical element is still unknown. Whether it will undergo any changes in the future and whether it will settle and spread towards more areas in the U.S. or it will disappear for good is yet to be seen.

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## 0. Introduction

In most forms of English, the adverb *anymore* is used in contexts containing a negative element, as in (1):

- (1) I don't enjoy walking anymore.

In some parts of the English-speaking world, the adverb *anymore* can also be used in the absence of a negative expression, as in (2) below:

- (2) I enjoy walking anymore.

This construction has been widely referred to in many studies as “Positive *anymore*” and this particular use of *anymore* is the object of study of this paper. Following Youmans (1986:61) from now on we will refer to native speakers who only accept sentences like (1) as Negative Speakers, and to those who also accept the structure in (2) as Positive Speakers.

Positive *anymore* is a non-mainstream usage of negative *anymore* that has been the focus of many linguistic investigations from a number of theoretical approaches. The main concern for linguists is to determine whether there are two different *anymores* that have different meanings and are used in different contexts or, on the contrary, whether we are talking about one unique *anymore* whose meaning and the restrictions that work on them vary depending on the context in which it is being used. What is more, linguists have considered many hypotheses on many aspects of positive *anymore*: its meaning, its similarities and dissimilarities with negative *anymore*, the restrictions that have an influence on positive *anymore* (and how those restrictions differ from or coincide with the restrictions that operate on negative *anymore*) and also the socio-cultural restrictions that surround positive *anymore* and, yet, no general consensus has been reached. There are still different hypotheses that are supported by different linguists that have not been verified as there are exceptions to practically all proposed hypotheses.

Hence, the main questions to be asked are: what does this *anymore* exactly mean? Is it the positive polarity of negative *anymore* or, on the contrary, are we talking about a new lexical item? Is this *anymore* just “wrongly” used by native speakers? Does this use have anything to do with the speakers’ socio-economic-cultural background? This paper aims to analyze the hypotheses surrounding these questions and shed some light on the different theories that have been proposed about this phenomenon of Anglo-Celtic origin.

## 1. Negation in English and negative *anymore*

When talking about positive *anymore* it is inevitable to talk about negative *anymore* and, therefore, to talk about negation in English. As Siemund (2013) points out, in English (as in many other languages) we express propositions that are false with negative sentences (i.e. sentences that are marked with at least one negative element). In English, apart from the negative element *not* we can also negate with expressions like *no*, *none*, *nobody*, *never*, *nothing* and so on. We can negate a whole sentence as in (3)<sup>1</sup> or a single constituent of a sentence as in (4) below. Siemund (2013) refers to these negation types as “sentence negation” or “constituent negation” respectively.

- (3)           a. Mary is happy.  
              b. Mary is not happy.
- (4)           Mary is usually happy but not today.

Siemund also points out the existence of some negative polarity items (NPIs for short) that may occur in negative environments (as illustrated in (5) below), interrogative sentences (as in (6) below) and some other cases. These NPIs, when added to a sentence that has already been negated, turn the sentence into a positive proposition as we can observe in the example in (7) adapted from Siemund (2013:176). Inside the NPIs we can find *any*-forms and expressions like *ever*, *give a damn*, *a bit*, *at all*, *yet*, etc.

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<sup>1</sup>Examples (3) and (4) are my own. When not indicated otherwise, the examples have been made up by me for explanatory purposes.

- (5) I couldn't see anyone.
- (6) Have you seen her anymore?
- (7) John did not call nobody.  
'John called somebody.'

In the group of these NPIs we find the negative *anymore* which is a key word for the understanding and development of this study. For that reason, I will now analyze this element in more detail.

The entry “Any more or anymore?” from the Cambridge Dictionary Online states that there are two principal uses of *any more*<sup>2</sup>: as a determiner and as an adverb. The entry specifies that we use *any more* as a determiner when describing “an indefinite quantity of something”. In the same way we would use *some more* for affirmative statements, we use *any more* in questions as in (8), *if*-clauses as in (9) and in sentences that contain negative or restrictive words (i.e. *hardly*, *never*, *scarcely*) as in (10):

- (8) Would you like any more tea?
- (9) If you find any more books, please let us know.
- (10) There is hardly any traffic today.

According to Swan (2005:135), there are two main groups in which we can divide determiners (Group A determiners and those in Group B). On the one hand, the determiners in Group A are those that “help introduce things –to say whether they are known or unknown to the hearer”; this group is, in turn, divided into three types: articles like *the*, *a/an*; possessives like *my*, *your*, *his*, *her*, *whose* *their*, *one's* and so on and finally, demonstratives like *this*, *these*, *those*, etc. On the other hand Group B determiners are “quantifiers”, that is, they express the quantity of whatever we are talking about. In this group we can find *some*, *any*, *no*, *each*, *more*, *much*, *enough* and *all* among others. These determiners are used with singular, plural and uncountable nouns. In this group is where *anymore* belongs because, as in the case of *any more*, two Group B determiners can be put together sometimes.

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<sup>2</sup> *Any more* has not been written together as *anymore* in some sentences and examples in this paper in order to maintain the spelling from the original studies.

As regards the use of *any more* as an adverb, the Cambridge online dictionary states that, when used as an adverb, *any more* acquires the meaning of *no longer* or *in the past but not now*. The adverb is used in final position in this case and with negative verbs, as illustrated below in (11) and (12):

- (11) We don't go to Cornwall on holiday any more.
- (12) She doesn't work there any more.

Negative *anymore* is the most common usage of the adverb *anymore* for English native speakers. Nonetheless, there is also another usage of *anymore* called positive *anymore* that is only common among some English native speakers in some areas of the U.S. and Canada (the geographical distribution of this use will be tackled in Section 4 in this paper).

## 2. Positive *anymore* in American English

Positive *anymore* is described by Labov (1991:277) as “one of the most interesting and mysterious examples of divergence in English syntax.” Positive *anymore* is a non-mainstream use of the adverb *anymore* in positive sentences that involves a change in time (i.e. X was not the case but now it is). Horn (2013:5) and Chambers (2007:37) claim that the change of events is usually negative for the speaker, as illustrated in (13) and (14):

- (13) Robert smokes a lot any more.
- (14) Gas is expensive any more.

Even though its exact interpretation has not yet been determined, linguists have been considering *nowadays*, *from now on* and *lately* as possible senses of the expression.

### 2.1 The meaning of positive *anymore*

Let us now consider the sentence in (15) below which illustrates the use of positive *anymore*.

(15) I hope we see each other anymore.

The typical occurrence of (15) is one in which the speaker and the hearer did not use to see each other in the past but the speaker hopes that this situation changes in the present (and future). Keeping this in mind, which would be the most accurate synonym for *anymore* in (15) above?

On the one hand, the Cambridge dictionary web page defines positive *anymore* as meaning *now* or *from now on* and it claims that it is often used in the English-speaking-world in positive statements. On the other hand, among some linguists, *nowadays* is believed to be the closest synonym for positive *anymore* (Chambers (2007:37); Labov (1996:84) and Siemund (2013:180) among many others). However, some authors prefer *lately* (Horn 2013:5) or *from now on* rather than *nowadays* as they find them more accurate synonyms (Labov (1973) as cited in Horn (2013:5); Youmans (1986:72) and Siemund (2013:180)). Moreover, *still* is also deemed as a possible synonym of positive *anymore* by some speakers (Labov 1991:278) nevertheless, researchers do not think of *still* as a synonym but rather a polarity alternant (see Hindle and Sag (1975:90) and Labov (1991:282-283)).

Regardless of all the hypotheses linguists have proposed about the meaning of positive *anymore*, no consensus has been reached yet due to the fact that there is always an exceptional case a given hypothesis cannot hold.

First of all, even if Chambers (2007:37) states that the change of events is usually negative for the speaker, (15) which is a perfectly grammatical example of the use of positive *anymore*, contradicts that claim as the change of events is clearly positive for the speaker. This is supported by Youmans (1986:73) where he states that “positive anymore does not always imply disapproval”. Therefore, this hypothesis cannot always be held. Second, in what concerns the hypotheses that try to figure out which meaning is closest to positive *anymore*, we can see that (16) and (17) are great examples given by Chambers (2007: 37) and contribute to making a clear statement: *nowadays* is the most suitable word for translating *anymore* in positive sentences.



- (16) Mechanics charge a lot any more = Mechanics charge a lot nowadays.  
(17) I get a lot of junk mail any more = I get a lot junk mail nowadays.

Still, Labov (1991) denies that *nowadays* is the most accurate equivalent of positive *anymore* because it does not work in all cases as can be observed in (18) and (19) below:

- (18) a. \*When would you rather live, in 1920 or any more?  
b. When would you rather live, in 1920 or nowadays?
- (19) a. \*When was the best beer brewed? Any more.  
b. When was the best beer brewed? Nowadays.

These examples call into question the fact that *nowadays* is the perfect synonym for positive *anymore*. In fact, even Chambers (2007:41) admits that there are sentences like (20) that do not favor *nowadays* as a synonym: in this sentence, *anymore* could be replaced by *from now on* or even *soon*. In addition, he points out that there are sentences that do not even involve any change of state (neither positive, nor negative) as illustrated in (21) and are perfectly understandable to a Positive speaker:

- (20) There's no herring in the day, but there'll be herring anymore.  
(21) It's warm for the time of the year and it'll be warmer anymore.

Language being constantly developing and changing as it is, all meanings could be suitable in a given context for different speakers. This is why, maybe, we should not focus on which is the closest synonym but why there are so many meanings that suit this grammatical item that challenges the standard use of *anymore* in English. Could it be because we are talking about two different *anymore* dialects? Or, on the contrary, are we are talking about one unique pan-dialectal *anymore* whose meaning is determined by the context?

## 2.2 Pan-dialectal *anymore* or two different dialects?

On the one hand, Youmans (1986) states that positive and negative *anymore* cannot be a part of a pan-dialectal usage of English because positive and negative *anymore* are different syntactically and semantically. The examples in (22) and (23) illustrate one type of syntactic restriction that operates only on one of these *anymores*:

- (22) Any more, we eat fish.  
(23) \*Anymore, we don't eat fish.

There are often restrictions operating on one or the other type of *anymore*. What the contrast above shows is that syntactically, they are different items as only positive *anymore* can be preposed (i.e. the fronting of negative *anymore* yields the ungrammatical sentence that can be seen in (23)). From a semantic point of view too we seem to be dealing with different items as negative *anymore* is the opposite of *still* while positive *anymore* does not have this interpretation for Youmans (1986) which means that both *anymores* cannot be polar opposites.

Labov (1991) also defends that positive *anymore* is not just a developed use of negative *anymore* but a new grammatical item. For him, it is more than just a synonym to *nowadays* or *still* (as many speakers believe it is) Labov states that while negative *anymore* presupposes the past and asserts the present, positive *anymore* implies or asserts the past and asserts simultaneously the present. Therefore, they are different lexical items. From Labov's point of view, when applying the negation test to positive *anymore* as in (24), it yields a contradictory sentence (thus, it is an assertion about the past). On the other hand, when we apply the negation test to a sentence containing negative *anymore* like (25) below, the sentence is not affected by negation (hence, we are talking about a presupposition).

- (24) \*We eat a lot of fish anymore, in fact we have always eaten fish.  
(25) We don't eat a lot of fish anymore; in fact we have never eaten fish.

Besides, he claims that the fact that “outsiders” (i.e. those who have never used positive *anymore*) and even some linguists are confused about the meaning of positive *anymore* makes it obvious that we are not talking about a pan-dialectal *anymore*. In Labov (1991:284) he states that: “This recurrent pattern of (...) erroneous responses [when judging sentences containing positive *anymore*] demonstrates (...) that positive *anymore* is not part of a pan-dialectal grammar”. He makes it clear that “the generalizing ability of the native speaker” is not enough and that “an understanding of [positive] *anymore* requires actual contact with the new use” (Labov (1991:283)).

This hypothesis is not sustained by Hindle and Sag (1975) who state that both positive and negative *anymore* belong to a pan-dialectal grammar. The term “pan-dialectal grammar” was first introduced by Bailey in 1969 at the Los Angeles Conference on Historical Linguistics in the Light of Generative Grammar (Bailey 1972). He stated that we could write a grammar that includes all the different dialects due to the fact that a native speaker would not have any problem to understand them. Bailey justifies the existence of a pan-dialectal grammar on the basis of three arguments that are listed in Labov (1991:274):

“(a) as native speakers become older, they become familiar with an increasingly large number of other dialects; (b) they have the ability to understand and interpret the productions of those other dialect speakers, analysing their rules as extensions or limitations of their own rules; and (c) they can even extrapolate from their own rules and predict the existence of dialects which they have never heard.”

The basis of Hindle and Sag’s hypothesis is that, unlike Labov, they believe that both positive and negative *anymore* share what they call a “semantic sameness” (Hindle and Sag 1975:91-92). Taking an example of the use of negative *anymore* (26a) as a starting point, the proposition it contains can be divided into two components of its meaning, (26b) and (26c):

- (26)
- a. We don’t eat fish anymore.
  - b. We don’t eat fish (now).
  - c. We used to eat fish (at some point in the past).

Now, if we take an example of the use of positive *anymore* (27a), we can similarly divide the proposition into two components of its meaning (27bc) as well, as illustrated below:

- (27)      a. We eat a lot of fish anymore.  
              b. We eat a lot of fish (now).  
              c. We used to not eat a lot of fish (at some point in the past).

In order for both *anymores* to share semantic properties, both should presuppose or assert the present and the past. With the purpose of finding out whether they presuppose or assert both components of their meanings, the negation test is carried out by Hindle and Sag (1975:91) given that presuppositions are not affected by negation whereas assertions are. Let us consider (26b) and (28) below:

- (26)      b. We don't eat fish (now).  
(28)      \*We don't eat fish anymore, in fact, we may eat fish (now).

First, when we cancel out both components of meaning of the sentence containing negative *anymore* we get these results: when we cancel out (26b) above, the suspension test yields sentence (28) which is a contradiction whereas when we apply the negation test to (26c) below, we see that the sentence yielded (29) is completely valid for any speaker. This means that negative *anymore* asserts the present and presupposes the past.

- (26)      c. We used to eat fish (at some point in the past).  
(29)      We don't eat fish anymore, in fact, we may never have (eaten fish).

Second, when it comes to the positive *anymore*, after cancelling out both components of meaning of sentence (27a), we find that when (27b) is cancelled, (30) is a contradiction whereas when (27c) is cancelled out, (31) is not.

- (27)      b. We eat a lot of fish (now).  
(30)      \*We eat fish anymore, in fact we may not (now).

- (27) c. We used to not eat a lot of fish (at some point in the past).  
 (31) We eat a lot of fish anymore, in fact, we may have always done so.

Therefore, for Hindle and Sag, positive *anymore* also asserts the present and presupposes the past.

**Figure 1: Representation of “Semantic sameness” (adapted from Hindle and Sag 1975: 92)**

| ASSERTION                       | PRESUPPOSITION             |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------|
| X anymore: eat fish now         | [-] ASSERTION (time prior) |
| [-] X anymore: [-] eat fish now | [-] ASSERTION (time prior) |

This “semantic sameness” represented in Figure 1, implies that both positive and negative *anymore* presuppose the past and assert the present: On the one hand, in (26a) negative *anymore* presupposes that “we used to eat fish” and asserts that “now we do not eat fish”. On the other hand, in (27a) positive *anymore* presupposes that “we did not use to eat fish” and asserts that “we do eat fish now”.

The difference between Hindle and Sag’s and Labov’s hypotheses is that, for Labov, sentence (31) above, is a contradiction while for Hindle and Sag it is not. This is why Hindle and Sag defend that both *anymores* belong to a pan-dialectal grammar. In other words, if both *anymores* presuppose the past and assert the present, any native speaker should be able to understand correctly the sentence in (32) and the sentence in (33) because we would be looking at the same semantic situation in different linguistic contexts (positive and negative).

- (32) John doesn’t eat a lot anymore  
 (33) John eats a lot anymore

The pan-dialectal theory proposed by Hindle and Sag (taking into account Baileys’ definition of “pan-dialectal grammar”) can be also supported by the fact that participants in Labov (1991) and Youmans (1986) were able to identify the meaning of positive *anymore* when they were given a context (even though for Labov and Youmans this is not enough as some responses were confusing and therefore not decisive).

As we consider these hypotheses, we have to ask ourselves, are we talking then about a pan-dialectal *anymore* (i.e. a unique *anymore* where its meaning is determined by context and environment) or are we talking about two different *anymores*? Linguists are divided on these questions as well: Hindle and Sag (1975) defend the pan-dialectal hypothesis while Youmans (1986), Labov (1991) and Chambers (2007) claim that we are looking at two different *anymore*'s.

### 3. Restrictions operating on positive *anymore*

It must be clear by now that the main distributional property of positive *anymore* is that it occurs in non-negative contexts. The fact that it is an adverb determines that positive *anymore* cannot appear in positions in which adverbs cannot occur, for instance between a determiner and a noun, as shown in (34) for *always* and (35) for *anymore*:

- (34) a. This man is always quiet.  
b. \*That always man is quiet.
- (35) a. That man smokes anymore.  
b. That anymore man smokes.

The fact that it occurs in non-negative contexts, that is, that positive *anymore* does not need to be within the scope of a negative expression, allows for positive *anymore* to have much freer distribution than negative *anymore*. This issue is dealt with in 3.1. On the other hand, the meaning itself of the adverb determines its contexts of occurrence. If positive and negative *anymore* do not mean the same thing they will necessarily occur in different contexts. The relationship between semantics and distribution is tackled in section 3.2.

#### 3.1 Syntactic distribution of positive *anymore*

Positive *anymore* not being restricted to negative linguistic context, it can be placed in more adverbial positions than negative *anymore* as the latter has to be c-commanded by negation. For example, in the survey carried out by Youmans (1986), he

states that most of the Positive speakers accepted the fronting of *anymore* in affirmative sentences as in (36) but not at the beginning of negative sentences like (37):

(36) Anymore those are worthless.

(37) \*Anymore I don't cry much.

As Youmans (1986:70) suggests, it would be common for Negative speakers to think that *anymore* is slowly developing into an unrestricted adverb for Positive speakers which is far from the truth as preposed *anymore* is still not valid in negative sentences by Positive speakers either. Similarly, *anymore* is not accepted in future affirmative sentences by neither Positive or Negative speakers (see 38 below) while it is accepted in future negative sentences (as seen in 39 below):

(38) \*We will talk anymore.

(39) We won't talk anymore.

As mentioned before, Hindle and Sag (1975) believe that there is one unique *anymore*. However, that does not mean that they are both restricted in the same way. Negative *anymore* being the more restricted one and positive *anymore* the less restricted one, sentences like (40) below violate the restriction of “negativity” that usually operates on *anymore* and sentences like (41) below violate both negativity and preposing restrictions that work on negative *anymore* (which for Hindle and Sag (1975:107) is an example of an “extreme *anymore* sentence”). These violations are what make speakers unable to interpret sentences containing positive *anymore*.

(40) He listens to rock anymore.

(41) Anymore, we eat a lot of fish.

Hindle and Sag's (1975) hypothesis about *anymore* undergoing any change into an unrestricted adverb, is that, even though there is no evidence that *anymore* is actually changing, given the lexical history of other *any*-words, it may in the future. Hindle and Sag (1975:107) compare the case of *anymore* to *at all* which can also be used in positive and negative sentences as seen in the examples (42) and (43) below (the case of *at all* is also referred to in section 5).

- (42) This doesn't bore me at all.  
 (43) This bores me at all.  
 "This bores me a lot"

Hindle and Sag (1975:108) state that *at all* underwent a change and lost its "polarity-sensitivity". *At all*, however, did not undergo a change in meaning: for Hindle and Sag, *at all*, whether it is in positive or negative linguistic context, it still has the same meaning: intensification. The word *at all* just experienced a change of "selectional restriction" which, for Hindle and Sag, is the same that *anymore* has experienced.

As regards to Labov's (1991:286) stance on this issue, he states that the movement from negative context to positive linguistic contexts is not restricted just to *anymore* as there is no doubt that *any* in (44) is positive (example (6) in Labov (1991:285))

- (44) These razor blades are going like hot cakes. I hope there's any left.

### 3.2 Semantics of *anymore* and contextual conditions

Labov (1991:280) states that Negative speakers in his sample were not able to give a correct interpretation of sentences containing positive *anymore* unless those sentences were given within an extra-linguistic context. Without that context, Negative speakers would consider sentences containing positive *anymore* like (45a) as ungrammatical. However, when sentences were given within an extra-linguistic context, the percentage of participants that accepted those sentences containing positive *anymore* increased. When participants were given examples like that in (45b) below in context and were asked if they would say it themselves, 11 out of 25 subjects answered that they would do so. Surprisingly enough, 6 out of those 11 participants stated that "no native speaker would say it" when they were given an isolated sentence containing positive *anymore*.

- (45) a. He exercises a lot *anymore*.  
 b. Lucas has lost a lot of weight. Someone says "He exercises a lot *anymore*".



Many linguists agree that the right interpretation of positive *anymore* is due to the support of extra-linguistic context. As Chambers (2007:35) points out, sentences containing positive *anymore* (unless they are supported by context) seem to be odd and incomprehensible for most native speakers. Within that context, “the speaker’s intention is clarified by the conversation”. This is also supported by the fact that in Youmans (1986), a study carried out with participants from Missouri -a positive *anymore* area-, we find that even those who reject the positive use of *anymore* interpret this construction correctly (meaning *now* rather than *still*) even if they do not use it themselves.

However, when speakers are not provided with any context to support sentences containing positive *anymore*, how do they interpret those sentences? How do they decide whether that sentence is an example of the use of positive or negative *anymore*? For further analysis of positive *anymore*, it is appropriate to know which environments determine the speakers’ linguistic intuitions because, sometimes, even a clearly negative or positive linguistic environment is not enough to determine which *anymore* is being talking about. In fact, when it comes to *wh*-questions, there are two hypotheses open to debate.

On the one hand, Klima (1964) (as cited in Youmans (1986:66)) states that, even if negative *anymore* is usually associated to a negative environment (explicit or implicit) “an explicit relationship with *neg*[ation] cannot convincingly be assumed” for interrogative sentences. This means that, in a sentence like (46) it is hard to determine whether we are dealing with a negative or positive *anymore* as the sentence is given with no context:

(46) Who likes fish anymore?

Therefore, Klima (1964:311) accepts NPIs in *wh*-questions as the one in (46) even if they are not valid in other varieties of English that can be characterized as “Standard”. For Youmans (1986:69), the only way he could accept *wh*-questions containing an NPI as sentence (47) below would be interpreted as a rhetorical question where a negative answer is expected:

(47) Who expects him to write any novels?

On the other hand, Katz (1972:207-11) (as cited in Youmans (1986:66)), states that negative *anymore* is not valid for *wh*-questions because they do not imply a *yes/no* answer like the sentence in (48) below. For this reason, the use of negative *anymore* is not valid in these cases.

(48) Does he (or doesn't he) drive?

In other words, Klima (1964) states that, for him, negative *anymore* is valid in *wh*-questions when the sentence is given free of extra-linguistic context, as it is hard to understand whether there is a negative connotation implicit or not. On the contrary, Katz states that as the use of negative *anymore* in *wh*-questions is not valid in Standard English, only the use of positive *anymore* is expected, in *wh*-questions. Thus, sentence (49) below would be doubtful between positive and negative for Klima and positive for Katz.

(49) Who watches TV anymore?

Another type of sentences that are similarly doubtful and affect the environment are sentences containing words with negative connotations. As a rule, those sentences should be determinant for deciding which *anymore* we are talking about. However, they are not so in some cases. We should keep in mind that, as Chambers (2007:36) states, the unusual characteristic about positive *anymore* is that it lacks a negative expression whereas the adverbial *anymore* is a Negative Polarity Item (NPI). However, it is yet to be known how strong that negation must be for the sentence to be acceptable (either for negative or positive *anymore*).

In Labov (1991:285) we find that, for Negative speakers, sentence (50a) is acceptable, (50b) is questionable and (50c) and (50d) are not possible:

- (50) a. It's impossible to do that anymore.  
 b. ?It's so hard to do that anymore.  
 c. \*It's hard to do that anymore.  
 d. \*It's easy to do that anymore.

As we can see, Negative speakers reject the uses of *anymore* where “the strength of the negative presupposition falls off” Labov (1991:285). The sentence in (50d) is a clear example of positive *anymore* so it is obvious that Negative speakers would never accept that sentence as valid as there is not only no negative expression but no negative connotation at all. However, (50bc) should be acceptable for a Negative speaker as *hard* involves some sort of negative connotation; still, participants in Labov's study found (50b) doubtful and (50c) invalid. This difference in acceptability can be explained in terms of negativity degree of the context. Specifically, (50b) sounds better to a negative speaker than (50c) because *so hard* sounds more restrictive than simply *hard*.

However, there are linguists like Youmans (1986:75) and Klima (1964:315) that still maintain that the negative implication of words like *hard* should be strong enough to make the sentence acceptable in their dialects. This hypothesis is also accepted by Chambers (2007:36). He states that, even if the NPI *anymore* usually occurs in negative sentences with an overt negative element like *don't* or *never* as in (51) and (52) below, the negative sense can be also implicit as in (53), (54) and (55) below, examples in which there are no explicit negative elements:

- (51) You don't find many greased pigs at fairs and exhibitions anymore.  
 (52) Jimmie never calls me anymore.  
 (53) Jimmie seldom calls me anymore.  
 (54) I get very little junk mail anymore.  
 (55) I'm scared to play any more, Charlie Brown.

Chambers states that in (53) *seldom*, when followed by negative *anymore*, acquires the sense of “almost never” and *get very little* in (54) acquires the sense of “don't get much” and in (55) Chambers claims that the word *scared* has a negative connotation strong enough to make the sentence's meaning clear for any speaker (this is a case we could compare to (50) above that contains the word *hard*). In the words of Chambers:

“The gradation of the notion of negation in the clause (...) seems to stretch semantic definitions and goes well beyond the presence of overt negative lexemes.” This means that, even if we do not have an overt negative element, words like *scared* add the negative connotation that negative *anymore* needs for sentence acceptability.

Nonetheless, this does not always happen as we have seen in (50) above. Another example in (56) below, includes a negative element that not only is not enough for a Negative speaker to accept it but the sentence is, in fact, accounted to be a use of positive *anymore* in British English by Lawrence (1920) (in Youmans 1986:62).

(56) Suffering bores me, anymore.

If we check all the requirements for that *anymore* to be accepted as positive, first we should know if this *anymore* can be substituted for by *nowadays*, *from now on* or *lately*. Second, we should know whether it describes a (negative) change in time (i.e. something was not the case and now it is). In this case any speaker of English would agree that *anymore* could be substituted for by *lately* or *nowadays* and that this sentence describes a change in time: suffering did not use to bore the speaker and now it does. However, is *to be bored* not considered a negative verb phrase? Is it not strong enough? Then, where is the line that defines whether a verb is negative enough? All these questions could be up for further investigation.

We should, still, keep in mind that some considerations about the restrictions that operate on *anymore* must be taken into account knowing that they are not totally reliable. The observation that positive *anymore* is not completely settled in the U.S. makes it difficult to analyze the results of the different studies that have been carried out due to the fact that participants give confusing and misleading responses (see Labov (1991), Hindle and Sag (1975) and (Youmans (1986)).

Hindle and Sag (1975:105) states that when participants in their study were asked to judge sentences containing positive and negative *anymore*, “speakers incorrectly reject perfectly grammatical sentences while they do not incorrectly accept ungrammatical sentences.” What this means is that participants rated grammatical sentences lower than they should. Hindle and Sag (1975:105) also point out the lack of

coherence between the participants' way of speaking and their judgments on sentences. For example, Hindle and Sag (1975:105) state that one participant was heard using proposed positive *anymore* several times while speaking, however, when he was asked to judge sentences like (57), he would rate it "questionable" or "totally unacceptable".

(57) Anymore, we eat a lot of fish.

Youmans (1986:64) claims that incoherent judgments were also found in his study. Furthermore, he states that those judgments were "based on (...) stylistic rather than grammatical" objections (This is also pointed out by Labov (1991: 277)). As an example of this, some participants in Youmans (1986:64) rejected the sentence in (58) below "because *anymore* was not followed by a coma, or was not written as two words, or for some other reason irrelevant to the survey".

(58) Anymore those are worthless.

This, as Youmans (1986:71) points out, is an example of how low-frequency phenomena can be filtered out by listeners. For him, this means that "positive *anymore* can be heard for years without registering on a listener's consciousness".

## **4. Current usage of positive *anymore* in the U.S.**

### **4.1 Geographical distribution**

The difficulty of studying this phenomenon lies in the fact that, comparatively to other constructions, it is used by very few people in the English-speaking world. Positive *anymore* is a "Midland phenomenon" (Labov (1991:277)) in the U.S. In Figure 2 below we can see a map where places with records of the use of positive *anymore* are pointed out.



**Map 1: Places where positive *anymore* is likely to be attested and accepted. (from Zack Maher (n.d.))**

As we can see in Map 1 above, there are records of the use of positive *anymore* almost everywhere in the U.S. however, the highest rate of recordings are found in the Midland speech area settled in Ohio, Pittsburgh, Indiana, Utah, West Virginia, South Carolina, Missouri (see Youmans 1986 study carried out in Missouri), Philadelphia (Western Pennsylvania) (see Shields’ 1997 study on positive *anymore* in Philadelphia), southern Ontario, Michigan and Wisconsin and also in Kentucky and Indiana and the suburban speech of New Jersey. Besides, positive *anymore* has settled down in New York and New England precisely thanks to people that are native from the Midwest (Horn, 2013:4).

Some people consider positive *anymore* as a recent phenomenon. The Harper Dictionary of Contemporary Usage (HDCU) defines positive *anymore* as “confined to the speech of young people” and states that it “represents a new sense” (adapted from Horn (2013:9)). However, this could not be further from the truth: Chambers (2007), Eitner (1949) and Crozier (1984) (as cited in Youmans (1986)), agree that the origins of positive *anymore* come from Scottish-Irish settlers in Canada (Ontario), that were settled in an area known as “The Golden Horseshoe” and the U.S..



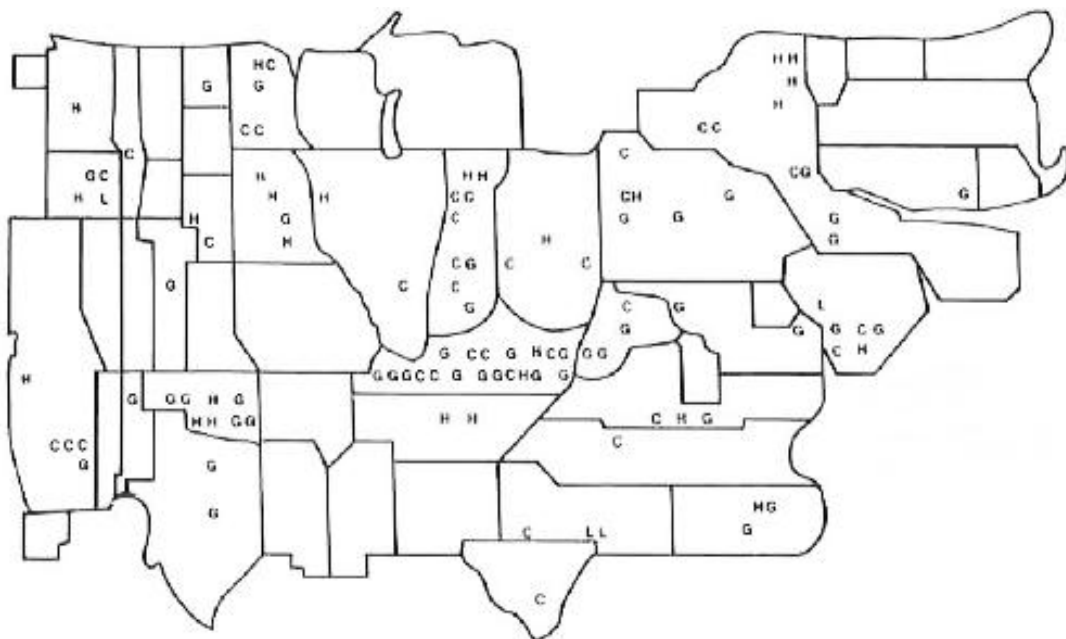
**Map 2: The Golden Horseshoe in Ontario (Canada)**

The Golden Horseshoe is an area in Canada where American refugees known as “Loyalists” stayed. They were known as “Loyalists” because did not support the War of Independence (1775-1783) against their British governors. They made their way into The Golden Horseshoe around 1783-1790 when the British fell. The Golden Horseshoe as we can see in Map 2 above borders the western part of Lake Ontario. It includes the Halton Region, Hamilton and the Niagara Region. It also borders the U.S state of New York. Chambers (2007:35) states that positive *anymore* is “the last incontrovertible remnant of the old historical tie between The Golden Horseshoe and Pennsylvania”.

## **4.2 Socio-cultural distribution**

When a non-standard use of a grammatical item is only used in certain places, linguists try to find out whether the use of that word or construction has any socio-cultural restrictions (e.g.“BIN” in African American Vernacular English [AAVE]). As Horn (2013:6) states, “One important issue in the investigation of constructions subject to regionally and/or socially variation like our target is the extent to which non-mainstream constructions are or are not stigmatized, and by whom.”

Among Negative speakers there is an immense stigma towards positive *anymore*. Even experts describe the use of positive *anymore* as “uneducated”, “nonce slang”, “a barbarism”, “nonsensical”, “confusing”, “illiterate and without meaning” or “lower class”(see Horn 2013:8-9). Regardless of the stigma attached to positive *anymore*, no relation with cultural background, age, genre, race or educational level has been found. Murray (1993:178, 184) states that the occurrence of positive *anymore* in the U.S. does not appear to be determined by sociolinguistic factors (i.e. social class, gender or age). To support this idea, take a look at Map 3 that represents Youmans’ (1986:63) “Education Map”.



**Map 3: Education Map (from Youmans (1986:63))**

Map 3 portrays the educational level of 110 students who answered with positive *anymore* to the question 24 of the *Dictionary of American Regional English* (DARE). Students were asked to fill in the gap in sentence (59) below. As Youmans (1986: 63) states, the map shows that almost 30% of them were college graduates (C in Map 3).

- (59) Talking about the past: People used to walk a lot, but everyone drives a car \_\_\_\_\_.

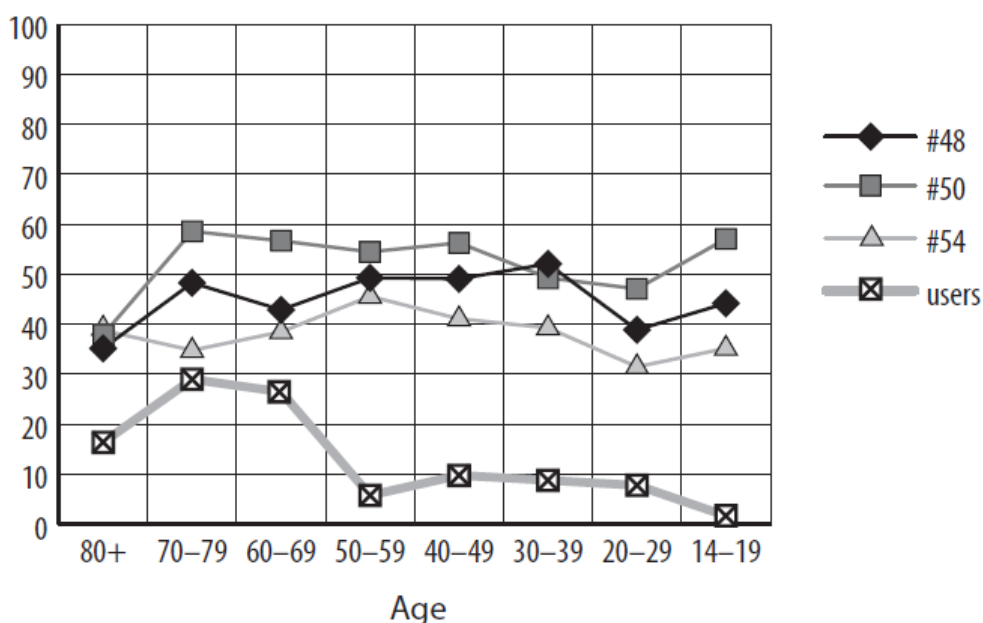
In addition, it is remarkable that, Youmans’ (1986) survey also corroborates the lack of correlation between the speaker’s academic level and the usage of positive *anymore*. Of



all participants, 62% were full-time students and 58% were between 18 and 24 years old. Therefore, the majority of the participants were young and few of them were strictly Negative speakers (Youmans 1986:69).

Now, if we take a look at Chambers' (2007) research conducted in the Golden Horseshoe area, it is at least surprising that responses on the meaning of sentences containing positive *anymore* are inconsistent.

**Figure 2: Results for four questions about positive *anymore* according to the age of the respondents in the Golden Horseshoe (adapted from Chambers (2007:39))**



It is remarkable that even though there is no age difference in the percentage of correct interpretations for positive *anymore*, there is actually a huge age difference regarding people who actually use positive *anymore* (see Figure 2 above). For Chambers (2007:39) this means that “positive *anymore* is recessive in the Golden Horseshoe.” as the highest percentage (30%) of the participants that claimed to use positive *anymore* were between 70 and 79 years old while the lowest percentage (1%) belongs to the youngest participants that were between 14 and 19 years old.

This difference in correlation between age and usage of positive *anymore* in Missouri and the Golden Horseshoe could mean that not only has the use of positive *anymore* been spreading from Canada towards the U.S, but that it is, at the same time, slowly disappearing in Canada. Of course, more research would be necessary for the

validation of this hypothesis. Still, looking at these two surveys, it would be interesting for future studies, from my point of view, to analyze whether it is true that positive *anymore* is a recessive phenomenon or not.

## 5. A look at other non-mainstream constructions

It is hard to foresee whether positive *anymore* will progressively fade away or whether it is in the US to stay because language is quite unpredictable when it comes to non-mainstream usages. This is why it would be interesting to observe how other non-mainstream constructions that are similar to positive *anymore* have evolved. There are some constructions that disappear because their new usage is very different from the original. In other cases, it is this dissimilarity that makes them endure and stay. For example, some people decide to stick to a construction because they feel that it gives them some kind of identity. For instance, if you heard someone say the sentence in (60) below, you would assume the speaker is from somewhere in the south of the U.S.

(60) Y'all get ready to go and meet us there at the blue building.

The expression *y'all* which refers to the second person plural *you*, is a contraction of the words *you* and *all* (or fusion in Tillery *et al.* (2000:290) terms). It is usually associated to Southern American and African American English although it has spread quickly outside the south of the U.S.

If we were to analyze another example of these non-mainstream usages, there is this innovative construction *I could care less* (sentence 61 below is an example of this usage). *I could care less* shares meaning with the more common construction *I couldn't care less* (see sentence (62) below). I find this expression to be quite similar to positive *anymore* in the sense that the negative element in the sentence is non-explicit.

(61) It's raining today and I could care less.

(62) It's raining today and I couldn't care less.

Maybe the adverb *less* is enough for speakers to understand the negativity of the construction. Consequently, the fact that it implies a certain negation or restriction could

have led people to omit the negation in *couldn't*. The contextual information in the sentence is enough to determine that we are talking about a negative expression. Here, it separates from positive *anymore* in that the linguistic context is always negative and therefore, there is no place for misinterpretation. In fact, this is a construction I have encountered many times lately on the internet and the new usage is so similar to the standard usage that I sometimes have not realized about the absence of the negative contraction. This could also be a similarity with positive *anymore* because, as previously mentioned in section 3.2, many of the participants that were asked to correct sentences containing positive *anymore* filtered positive *anymore* out and focused on other grammatical issues of the sentence and ignored the positive *anymore*. These same participants stated later that they had never heard about positive *anymore* and they would never use it (see Labov (1991:277) and Youmans (1986:64)). Maybe the fact that the lack of negation is filtered out will help the construction “I could care less” stay or maybe it is another temporary construction. These expressions *I could care less* and *I couldn't care less* can be compared to their Spanish counterparts *me importa un pimiento* and *no me importa un pimiento* as the negation is also omitted and the meaning does not change as can be seen in sentences (63ab) and (64ab):

- (63) a. Jen and Richard are back together but I could care less actually.  
 b. Jen y Richard han vuelto pero, sinceramente, me importa un pimiento.
- (64) a. Jen and Richard are back together but I couldn't care less actually.  
 b. Jen y Richard han vuelto pero, sinceramente, no me importa un pimiento.

Another example that is very similar to positive *anymore* is mentioned by Hindle and Sag (1975:107) and it refers to a particular use of the phrase *at all*. This expression is confined to negative environments in Standard English; however, it is accepted by some speakers in positive linguistic contexts as well, as we can see in (65). *At all* in a positive context acquires the meaning of “a lot”.

- (65) I ignored it at all.

As mentioned previously in section 3.1, Hindle and Sag (1975:107-108) state that *at all* and positive *anymore* are very similar in the sense that both underwent a change of selectional restriction and that positive *anymore* will also undergo a “loss of polarity sensitivity”. This type of change has also occurred to words like *anyway* and *anyhow* which in American dialects they “exhibit no sensitivity to polarity”. As illustrated in (66) and (67) below *anyhow* can be used in negative and positive sentences:

(66) I’m not going to do it anyhow.

(67) I’m going to do it anyhow.

As can be seen, there are other non-mainstream expressions that are similar to positive *anymore* in some kind of way. Still, even if these expressions have stayed in the speech of many speakers, we still have to wait to see the way positive *anymore* evolves.

## 6. Conclusion

As we have seen, positive *anymore* is a very interesting phenomenon to look at. This particular use of *anymore* is still under study by many linguists as there are still many hypotheses and no theory validated by all linguists about it. First, it would be intriguing to keep investigating whether we are talking about a pan-dialectal *anymore* or not, whether that semantic-sameness exists or not. Other aspects that I find most interesting to research about this construction in future studies are the syntactic restrictions that operate on it. It would be fascinating to observe whether *anymore* will undergo any change into an unrestricted adverb or not because it would not be surprising if *anymore* followed the historical path of other *any*-forms like *anyhow*. Still, we will have to wait some decades to see whether it happens or not. Moreover, it would be essential to figure out which the contextual conditions that determine speakers’ linguistic intuitions are considering that participants answer more accurately when they are given sentences within an extra-linguistic context. However, it would be also interesting to learn how they make decisions about *anymore* when such context is not given, this is: the semantic restrictions that operate on positive *anymore*. I find especially intriguing the sentences that are not valid for Negative speakers even if they include restrictive words. It would be interesting to recognize what those sentences need for Negative speakers to find them valid.

Finally, even though we will also have to wait some decades to find out, it should be up for further study the movement of positive *anymore* from Canada towards the U.S. and whether it is, in fact, disappearing or not. It would be a good idea to keep an eye on this phenomenon throughout the years to see whether it stays and settles (and keeps spreading towards other areas of the U.S) or, on the contrary, it fades progressively and this phenomenon that started so long ago finally is no longer used in the English-speaking world.

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