



Positive *Anymore* Construction in American Dialects

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There are a few different ways *any more* is used in American English. The phrase *any more* can be an adverb–adjective construction, or it can be an adjective–noun construction. We see both constructions in the following sentences respectively:

(1)

- a. I can't eat any more pizza.
- b. I can't eat any more.

Additionally, *any more* is often used in comparative sentences such as *I don't like it any more than you do*. These usages are commonly spelled as two words and imply a meaning having to do with quantity.

However, there is another usage as an adverbial that is commonly spelled as one word and means, roughly, *any longer*. There is still debate as to the appropriateness of spelling this meaning as a single unit, though it is the more widespread treatment (*Merriam Webster's Dictionary of English Usage*, 1994 ed., s.v. “anymore”). For the purposes of this paper the usage will be spelled as a single word except where source material presents it as two words.

The adverb *anymore* is most commonly found in negative statements (*I don't go to the movies anymore*), questions (*Do they sell those anymore?*), or hypothetical statements (*If they sold shoes anymore, I would shop there*). These usages are acceptable in all standard American dialects and are found in most dictionary citations.

Declarative sentences that have the word *anymore* are almost universally sentences with a negative quality to them. This is because *anymore* is a negative polarity item (NPI) in English. NPIs in English follow various rules depending on the lexical item itself. Lawrence Horn found that the NPI *any* (including in the words *anyone* and *anymore*) must appear in an overtly negative context—that is, with a negation particle in the sentence such as *not* (1978: 156). These sentences also, universally, have *anymore* at the end of the sentence or clause.

Others have found that *anymore* can occur in implied negative statements, without an overt negative particle, such as in the sentence, *Few private owners have worthwhile collections anymore* (*Merriam Webster's Dictionary of English Usage*, 1994 ed., s.v. “anymore”).

However, there are some dialects that allow the adverb *anymore* to be used in a positive context, without any negative implication or particle, as attested in these instances:

(2)

- a. It's quite warm anymore.
- b. We still use that custom anymore. (Wentworth, 1944: 25)

There are even some dialects that allow *anymore* to be preposed, such as in the sentence: *Any more Mary is in good health*. (Wentworth,

1944: 25). In these dialects, *anymore* has taken on a meaning of *nowadays*.

Usage of the positive *anymore*, that is, declarative sentences with the adverb *anymore* contained within that have no negation particle or implication, has been remarked upon regularly in the journal *American Speech* since 1931 (Malone). The *Oxford English Dictionary* references an attestation from as far back as 1898. However, despite the fact that this construction has apparently been around for at least a century, the spread of its usage is unclear. In areas where it is used, it does not appear to be stigmatized socially, though it is more common in speech than in written prose (Youmans, 1986).

There is some debate as to where the positive usage originated, though the general consensus is that it originated in Ireland. The *Oxford English Dictionary* cites the usage as occurring in “chiefly Irish English” and North American colloquial. Crozier suggests that the usage comes from the Gaelic *faesta* which “in affirmative sentences means ‘from now on’ and in negative sentences ‘(not) any more’” (1984). However, there are some scholars that disagree with this origin theory and instead propose alternatives such as Welsh (Tucker, 1944) or German (Mencken, 1948).

Whatever population brought it to the New World, the usage has taken root in some areas but not in others. As mentioned previously, there has been commentary on it since 1931 in the journal *American Speech*. Attestations of the positive *anymore* in its pages and elsewhere cover a wide geographical range, including West Virginia (Krumplemann 1939; Malone 1931); Indiana (Gibbens 1944; Krueger 1965); Pennsylvania (Shields 1997; Tucker 1944); Connecticut (Menner 1946); Kentucky, Florida, Alabama, New Jersey (Moore 1946); Illinois (Carter 1932); Michigan (Ferguson 1932); South Carolina (McCain 1939); Ohio, New York, Maryland (Russell 1941); Nebraska, Iowa (Greet et al. 1943); Missouri (Youmans 1986); Texas, Tennessee, Oklahoma, Georgia, North Carolina, Wisconsin, Colorado (Cassidy

1985); Kansas, Utah (Labov 1972); and South Dakota, Minnesota, and North Dakota (Murray 1993).

However, many of these attestations are anecdotal only. They are not comprehensive studies to see whether the usage qualifies as a feature of the local dialect. The studies that have been done on the positive *anymore* indicate that it is definitely a feature of Missouri English (Youmans, 1986) and more generally heard in the Midwest (Murray 1993). Studies have also shown that it is also a feature of southeastern Pennsylvania English (Shields, 1997; Tucker, 1944).

Unfortunately, there have not been large-scale comprehensive studies on this usage. Therefore, it cannot be concluded that the positive *anymore* is isolated to the Midwest and Pennsylvania, nor can it be claimed that it is widespread with only anecdotal evidence. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to obtain a clearer picture of where the positive *anymore* is used.

1. Positive *Anymore* Usage is Scattered

The *Dictionary of American Regional English* cites the positive *anymore* usage as “scattered, but least frequent in N[ew] Eng[land]” (Cassidy, 1985). The anecdotal evidence present in various volumes of *American Speech* certainly supports this theory. Previous studies have focused only on specific states or regions. As mentioned before, it is definitely a feature of the Midwest, specifically Missouri and Pennsylvania. The most recent study was published in 1997 by Shields, though his was a more informal study that was isolated to Pennsylvania. For more scientific studies the timeline goes further back to Murray in 1993, who examined *anymore* as a feature of Missouri English, and Youmans in 1986, who examined it as a feature of Midwestern English. Labov states that “though we do not yet know the full geographic

distribution of this form . . . it is apparently spreading to other parts of the United States” (1991).

Hindle and Sag found that those who might accept the positive *anymore* would often display “bias to give sentences a lower rating than they deserve” for reasons other than the object of the study—for example, one subject might consider a sentence wrong because *anymore* ought to be spelled as two words rather than one, not because the usage or syntactic placement is incorrect (1973). This indicates that there may be people who use or recognize the construction that were missed in previous studies due to this bias.

If the most recent reliably scientific study is twenty years old, there is much room for repetition and expansion to ascertain what has changed in the intervening two decades. Certainly, the world and society have changed a great deal since 1993, and there is no reason to believe that language usage has not changed as well.

2. Positive *Anymore* Usage is Clustered in the Midwest

As mentioned previously, there have been relatively few studies on the *anymore* usage and most have been geographically narrow. It is very possible that the reason no one is doing wide-scale studies on the positive *anymore* is because it is not frequently used. Cassidy’s assertion of “scattered” usage is based on a small sample size, though geographically widespread (1985). Additionally, there is no evidence that the origin of the informers was taken into account in this survey. Given these weaknesses, and the strength of the evidence for clusters of usage, it is likely the spread is only minor.

Even in areas where it is acceptable, there are not overwhelming populations who acknowledge its use. Youmans’s survey found that

even among Missourians, only about half of the respondents indicated they could use the positive *anymore* in a statement, while much higher percentages indicated the traditional negative and interrogative usages (1986). Murray found similar numbers in his study of the Midwest—about half of respondents accepted some sort of positive *anymore* construction (1993). In both studies, the proposed *anymore* was less acceptable. Youmans found that preposing *anymore* in a negative context yielded the least acceptable construction.

Given that only about half of the people living in areas where the construction is used acknowledge it, there is very little evidence to suggest it has spread from the Midwest.

3. Methodology

The purpose of this study is to ascertain where the positive *anymore* has spread to. In order to do this, a survey was devised to find out who uses or recognizes the construction. The survey asked participants for demographic information including where they lived the majority of the time from the ages of 2 to 12. The location given for this data is defined as their dialect region. Participants were then asked to compose a sentence using the word *anymore*. The purpose of this question was to see whether any spontaneous usage of the positive *anymore* would appear. Then participants were asked to examine and answer questions about six sentences. The six sentences were sourced from Youmans's study for two reasons: first, data are more comparable with the same stimuli; second, some constructions are not native to the author's own speech, and thus attempting to create a construction that is not familiar might result in an invalid usage even to those to whom the positive *anymore* is acceptable. Direct questions were removed from Youmans's sentence set for this study since the focus is on statements only. The sentences used are as follows:

(3)

- a. I don't cry much anymore.
- b. Anymore those are worthless.
- c. I want to know who sells those anymore.
- d. I wonder if they show those anymore.
- e. Those are worthless anymore.
- f. Anymore I don't cry much.

Sentence 3a is the construction and usage of *anymore* that is acceptable in Standard American English and all dialects. This is the control question. All participants should acknowledge this as a valid construction. The survey then asked participants to answer four questions about each sentence as follows:

(4)

- a. Is this a sentence you could use in everyday speech?
- b. Is this a sentence you would never use?
- c. Is this a sentence you can comprehend?
- d. Do you consider this sentence to be "correct"?

Question 4b was designed as a check on question 4a, as those who answer positively that they could use the sentence in every day speech ought to answer negatively that they would never use the sentence, and vice versa. Question 4c is included to see whether even those who do not use the positive *anymore* can understand it. Participants answering 4d in the negative were asked an open ended question about what they consider incorrect about the sentence. This is to control or eliminate the bias mentioned previously by Hindle and Sag. A sample survey is included in Appendix A.

The survey was distributed in two ways: a paper survey was passed around to students at Brigham Young University, and an online survey was propagated through Facebook and other social connections to a greater population. There was an incentive for participants—any who desired could submit their email address for a prize drawing of a ten-dollar Amazon gift card.

Once the raw data was collected, participants were divided into regions in order to compare usage between the Midwest and other

regions. For a definition of states in each region, see Appendix B. The regions were defined by examining traditional divisions of the United States and only modified to allow the same definition of “Midwest” that Murray used.

Presence of positive *anymore* will then be compared across regions using a chi-square test at a 0.05 level of significance.

4. Results

A brief summary of the data is provided here; full raw data is available in appendix C. There were 71 respondents total, 52 female, 19 male. The age range was 19 to 69 years old. One respondent was not a native English speaker. The count for respondents in each region is shown in table 1.

Region	Count
West	41
Southwest	7
Midwest	6
Southeast	9
Northeast	5
Other*	3

Table 1. Participant count by region.

*Participants who indicated they moved around too much to determine a specific region.

Table 2 indicates the raw counts for each question’s positive answer by sentence. For question 4b, the count is those who indicated they *could* use the construction. Please reference sentences and questions as designated in the methodology section. As there were no questions left unanswered by any of the participants, the inverse of the data (i.e. those who said *no* to question 4a) is found through simple subtraction of the counts in table 2 from the total number of respondents (seventy-one).

		Question			
		4a	4b	4c	4d
Sentence	3a	53	57	71	57
	3b	8	6	39	9
	3c	24	25	58	22
	3d	63	62	71	62
	3e	17	11	53	22
	3f	6	1	60	12

Table 2. Raw frequency counts by sentence and question.

As mentioned in the methodology, question 4b was designed as a check on 4a. Those who answered “yes” to 4a should also have indicated they *could* use the sentence. Therefore these counts will be averaged together for all sentences. Table 3 displays the average count and percent of participants to whom the sentence is usable. These percentage data are what most of the analysis hinges on. Graph 1 ranks the sentences in order of most acceptable to least acceptable according to these percentages.

Sentence	Average	Percent
3a	55	77.46%
3b	7	9.86%
3c	24.5	34.51%
3d	62.5	88.03%
3e	14	19.72%
3f	3.5	4.93%

Table 3. Average acceptability of sentences

Graph 1. Sentences in order of acceptability

5. Analysis and Discussion

The first obstacle to analysis presents itself with the responses to sentence 3a. This sentence is the control sentence, which ought to be acceptable to all participants, but only received 77.46 percent acceptance. It is unknown what caused so many individuals to reject this sentence. Confusingly, of the 53 individuals who indicated they could use sentence 3a, seven of them still indicated the sentence was incorrect. Of the 14 who indicated they would never use sentence 3a, five of them still considered it a correct construction. Among the 14 respondents who indicated sentence 3a was incorrect, three indicated the problem was with the usage of the word *much*, one indicated *anymore* should be followed by a comma, and five stated that *anymore* should be written as two words. However, if the open-ended composition question is taken into account we have the following additional facts to consider: of the 71 sentences composed, one was an interrogative, one was a compara-

tive, and four were usages of the adverb–adjective form of *any more*. The rest of the 65 sentences were declarative adverb uses of *any more*. All of these sentences were negative constructions—there were no spontaneous productions of the positive construction. This fact, coupled with the results of the comprehension of sentence 3a (100%), allows us to accept the basic premise that the negative *any more* construction is present and acceptable to all dialects.

The sentences containing the positive constructions were 3b–3e. Sentence 3f includes the preposed *any more* with a negative construction. Table 4 indicates count and percentages by region of the acceptability of any of the sentences 3b–3e. This indicates the level of acceptance for any of the positive constructions. The count of those within the region is given, as well as the sample size for that region, and then the percentage of individuals in that region who indicated acceptance of the positive *any more*. These are the numbers that we will run the chi-square test on.

Region	Count	Sample Size	Percent
West	40	41	97.56%
Southwest	7	7	100.00%
Midwest	5	6	83.33%
Southeast	9	9	100.00%
Northeast	3	5	60.00%
Other	2	3	67.00%

Table 4. Regional acceptance of positive construction

The first application of the chi-square test returned a “not applicable” result due to small sample size. In order to be able to continue analyzing the data, the percentages were input instead of the raw counts. This affects the reliability of the data since chi-square tests are not designed to compare percentages but rather proportions. However, it does give an idea of what may be happening in spite of the small sample size.

Each region was compared with the Midwest in a two-proportion chi-square test. To support the hypothesis, there needs to be either no significant difference between the Midwest and whichever region it is being compared against or a significant difference in favor of the other region. In order to reject the hypothesis and accept the null hypothesis that the usage is still clustered in the Midwest, the difference must be significant in favor of the Midwestern region.

Table 5 indicates the comparisons with the chi-square value, p-value and the result for that comparison with the Midwest.

Table 5. Chi-square results for regional comparisons.

A first glance at this information would indicate that usage has spread from the Midwest significantly to other regions. However, p-values such as these usually indicate invalid data. The issue is mainly due to the small sample size, but if we look back at table 3 we remember that sentence 3d was acceptable to nearly 89 percent of the population, even more than the control sentence 3a (as written). This sentence may be acceptable to a large portion of the population for other reasons and could be skewing the data. If we remove this piece of data and recalculate we find the chi-square results in table 6.

Table 6. Chi-square for regional comparisons without sentence 3d

These data indicate that comparing the Midwest with each region of the West, Southwest, and Southeast proves no significant difference between them. When the Midwest is compared with the Northeast and Other populations, the Midwest does have a significantly higher usage of the positive *anymore*. This table seems to support Cassidy's assertion that the usage is scattered but is least used in New England.

A chi-square test was then run on the cumulative data from all regions (except the Midwest) as compared to the Midwest. Again data from sentence 3d were left out. Once again, the data were normalized to compensate for the small sample size but in a slightly different manner. The total population of participants outside the Midwest was 65, while only six were from the Midwest. The Midwestern number of users, in this case, was taken as a proportion of 65 so that both populations equaled 65, with the Midwest expressed as a percentage and the rest of the regions combined expressed as a pure count. Doing a comparison this way, we arrive at a chi-square value of 1.74 and a p-value of 0.1872. This means there is no significant difference in usage of the positive *anymore* inside the Midwest as compared to outside the Midwest. However, the applicability of this data is limited, once again by the sample size and by the fact that it was normalized in order to run

the statistical analysis in the first place (that is, percentages were used to compare between widely dissimilar sample sizes).

Just to see what kind of numbers occur without any normalization, a chi-square test was run between the West and the rest of the country. Once again, these are the data excluding sentence 3d. This is the only comparison that yields sample sizes large enough to be directly comparable without resorting to percentages. The numbers compared are in table 7.

	West	Elsewhere	Totals
Users	24	16	40
Non-users	17	14	31
Totals	41	30	71

Table 7. Raw counts of the West compared to elsewhere

Running a chi-square test on these data yields a chi-square value of 0.19 and a p-value of 0.6624. This indicates that there is no significant difference in the usage of the positive *anymore* inside the West as compared to outside the West.

6. Conclusion

The data tend to support the hypothesis that the usage of the positive *anymore* is scattered and not clustered in the Midwest. However, there are issues with the data significant enough to make any outright declaration less than reliable. Thus, we are forced into an inconclusive finding. At this time there is not enough data to prove whether or not the positive *anymore* usage remains clustered in the Midwest.

The biggest limitation of this research is the sample size. With only 71 respondents and a preponderance of those who grew up in the West, the data are skewed very heavily. Greater sampling size from other regions would render the data more accurate and thus any statistical analyses more reliable.

A secondary limitation is in the need to define usage by region. In a larger sampling size the data can be broken down and compared by state or cumulatively by region. With the limited number of participants there was no choice but to divide by region.

Additionally, something caused a large percentage of the respondents to reject sentence 3a *I don't cry much anymore* when the construction is one that ought to be acceptable in all dialects. It is possible that many respondents were focused more on the pragmatic or semantic properties of the sentence and rejected it on that basis. Without priming individuals to think about the way they use *anymore* it may be hard to avoid this particular problem. One solution might be for future studies to rearrange the order of the sentences.

7. Future Work

Another study that determines the usage of *anymore* needs to be done on a far larger scale with significant populations in each state in order to come to a firm conclusion. Additional work can also be done to determine the acceptability of preposing *anymore* in sentence structures; the data in this study were not divided between preposed sentences and end-usage sentences.

It is possible, given the age of previous research on this topic, that the usage might be dying out and only extant among older populations. Though age demographics were collected in this study, they were not analyzed; similarly, gender as it relates to this usage was not analyzed. Further studies would also need to take into account race; all respondents in this study were Caucasian.

The positive *anymore* construction has a long history of usage in various areas, but where exactly this usage currently extends is unknown and wide open for exploration.

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APPENDIX A

