

# *Enough already!* On directive modal particles in English and Swedish<sup>1</sup>

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## **Abstract**

In non-standard American English, an innovative usage of *already* has emerged as the result of a translation borrowing from Yiddish. In this usage, *already* appears to have the properties of a Modal Particle, despite the fact that such a category has been argued to be essentially absent from English. It is shown that *already* and the Swedish Modal Particle *nångång*, share all of the relevant properties of a Modal Particle: They are phonetically weak elements, homophonous with lexical adverbial expressions, and strictly limited to the sentence final position. They scope over the entire proposition, are implicational, and only compatible with one particular kind of illocutionary Force, namely directive. Furthermore, they add expressive content, in particular that of impatience, and convey the expectation of immediate compliance on behalf of the hearer.

## **1 Introduction**

The Modal Particle (henceforth MP) is a phonetically weak element with clausal scope, which adds expressive content to the clause without altering its truth conditions (e.g. König 1977; Abraham 1980, 1991, 2000; Löbner 1989; Zimmermann 2011, 2016; Bross 2012; Degand, Cornillie, & Pietrandea 2013). In the restrictive approach of Abraham (1980, 2000), MPs exist in a very limited number of languages, including German, Dutch, West Frisian, Yiddish, and Mainland Scandinavian.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, according to the more liberal view of, for example, Zimmermann (2011), MPs represent a rather widespread phenomenon among the languages of the world. However, both these approaches concur on the point that MPs are quite restricted in a language such as English, where the equivalent “expressive functions” are conveyed with different means, such as intonation patterns (Waltereit 2001, Zimmermann 2011).

Interestingly, however, in non-standard American English, the adverb *already* is attested in contexts such as (1a-b):

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<sup>2</sup> This follows from the criterion that MP’s are limited in distribution to the sentence midfield, in a clause the edges of which are defined by V2 and OV word order.

- (1) a. this is so old, give it up already. try to remember bill clinton is NOT running for president. (Washington Post, comment field, 2016-10-12)
- b. Donald Trump Jr. offered some unsolicited career advice for women concerned about sexual harassment in the workplace: Just quit, already. (Huffington Post, 2016-10-14)

Not all English speakers accept the usage illustrated in (1a-b), and to some it is not easily interpretable. In the following, we argue that, for the speakers who do accept these examples, *already* in (1a-b) is a Modal Particle (henceforth MP). The paper is organized as follows: In section 2, we give a brief background to the MP analysis. The argument is built on comparative data: It is shown that *already* has the same interpretation and distribution as modal particle *nångång* in Swedish, which to our knowledge has not been thoroughly described in the literature. The striking parallelism between AmE *already* and Swedish *nångång* will be shown in section 3. The analysis follows in section 4.

## 2 *Already and nångång*

The usage of *already* in (1a-b) has been identified as a translation borrowing from Yiddish *shoyrn*, the earliest examples dating to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Feinsilver 1958:232, 1962:204; Safire 1998<sup>3</sup>). Today, such a pattern may be spreading, given the frequency with which it appears in AmE sitcoms and blogs.<sup>4</sup> The relevant usage of *already*, then, is an interesting example of how an MP can be borrowed and integrated into a language which does not otherwise make use of MP's. In other words, MP *already*, as in (1a-b), does not originate as a development of Standard English adverbial *already* illustrated in (2):

- (2) He already gave it up.

It is not trivial to define the relevant variety of AmE, or to identify the native speakers. The English variety attested in sitcoms, blogs, and comment fields may be very different from the L2 or heritage varieties in which the MP usage of *already* presumably first appeared. For the purposes of this paper, we argue on the basis of comparative evidence that MP *already*, as it is attested in television and on the net, has the same distribution as Swedish MP *nångång*.

Before we proceed, consider that MP's in continental Germanic are normally homophonous with some other item (as for instance adverbs) which does have lexical content. While the MP is unstressed, the homophonous item can carry stress. Such pairs "...will hardly

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<sup>3</sup> "This use of *already* began to appear early in the century, (...) among immigrant Yiddish speakers living in New York who were just starting to talk English. By the 1930's it had become common usage among their children who no longer spoke Yiddish - a development that enabled it to entrench itself in the American language." (Safire 1988)

<sup>4</sup> However, the sociolinguistic dimension of this problem is not discussed here.

ever enter into the consciousness of the speaker as having anything in common with one another except their form” (Abraham 2000: 322).<sup>5</sup>

Whereas adverbial *already* in English can be stressed and appear both sentence-internally and sentence-finally (3a), MP *already* cannot carry stress and only appears in the sentence final position (3b):

- (3) a. Should we (ALREADY) get going (ALREADY)?  
 b. Should we (\*already) get GOing (already)?

That is to say, the MP occurrence of *already* typically has the intonation contour of (3b), with stress on the main verb. For the sake of clarity, we henceforth write the adverb in uppercase letters and the MP in lowercase letters, as in (3a-b).

Swedish MP *nångång* is homophonous with the adverbial expression *nån gång* ‘some time’, ‘in some occasion’, ‘once’. While the lexical expression can carry stress and appear in the sentence midfield, as in (4a), the MP is unstressed and obligatorily sentence-final (4b).<sup>6</sup>

- (4) a. Kan vi (NÅN gång) åka dit (NÅN gång)?  
 can we some time go there some time  
 ‘could we go there for once?’  
 b. Kan vi (\*nångång) ÅKa (nångång)?  
 can we nångång go nångång

For expository reasons, we signal this difference by writing lexical *NÅN gång* as separate words, even if such a choice does not follow Swedish orthographic conventions. Importantly, whereas the MP *nångång* is obligatorily distressed, the lexical impression can carry stress and be pronounced as two separate words. It does not have to be however; hence, the lexical *NÅN gång* and the MP *nångång* are sometimes indistinguishable.

It is of some relevance that English is compared with a Germanic SVO language such as Swedish, rather than German or indeed Yiddish, given that the choice between SOV and SVO crucially changes certain premises. Also, the distribution and interpretation of *already* is distinctly different from, for instance, its German cognate *schon* (Zimmerman 2016).

### 3 Distribution and Restrictions

English *already* and Swedish *nångång* are not acceptable in assertive clauses:

<sup>5</sup> Note, however, that Abraham argues for a “monogenetic” approach to the homophonous pairs, since this “saves one assuming two separate and unrelated entries in the lexicon ...” (Abraham 2000, p. 322). Such a hypothesis is difficult to maintain for standard English *already* and MP *already*, if the latter is not actually a development from the first.

<sup>6</sup> MP *nångång* has no clear equivalent in Standard English and will not be translated in the gloss.

- (5) a. \*He has arrived already.  
b. \*Han har kommit nångång.

That is to say that the surface structures of (5a-b) are acceptable only with the respective lexical readings, not with the MP readings.

Instead, the prototypical context for *already/nångång* is the imperative, as in (6a-b)-(8a-b):

- (6) a. Just call him already! (Scrubs)  
b. Bara ring honom nångång!  
just call him nångång
- (7) a. Just eat your dinner already! (Google)  
b. Bara ät upp nångång!  
just eat up nångång
- (8) a. Get off the phone already! (Google)  
b. Lägg på luren nångång!  
put on handset.the nångång

This observation extends to embedded imperatives (9a-b) and hortatives which may surface, for instance, as a consecutive clause (11a-b):

- (9) a. I'm going to get tough and tell some of you to get going already! (Google)  
b. Jag tänker säga till er att komma iväg nångång.  
I think say to you to get away nångång  
'I'm going to tell you to leave'
- (10) a. You should just come out of the closet and be openly gay already. (Seinfeld)  
b. Ni borde bara vara öppet gay nångång.  
you should just be openly gay nångång
- (11) a. So just tell me what I should do and stop giving me sermons so that I can hang up already! (Google)  
b. Säg bara vad jag ska göra så att jag kan lägga på nångång!  
say just what I shall do so that I can hang up nångång

Furthermore, the modal usage of *already/nångång* is frequently found in *yes/no*-questions (12a-b) and (13a-b), as well as in *why*-questions (14a-b) and (15a-b):

- (12) a. Can you guys start caring already? (Google)  
b. Kan ni börja bry er nångång?  
can you start bother you nångång  
'can you start bother'
- (13) a. Can we go already? (According to Jim)  
b. Kan vi gå nångång?  
can we go nångång

- (14) a. It's been five years. Why can't we just move on already? (How I met your mother)  
 b. Varför kan vi inte bara gå vidare nångång?  
 why can we not just go ahead nångång
- (15) a. Why can't you do it already? (Google)  
 b. Varför kan du inte göra det nångång?  
 why can you not do it nångång

This may be taken to indicate that *already/nångång* are indeed compatible with the interrogative, but that is a misleading impression. *Already/nångång* are always directive in the sense of Searle (1975): In (12)-(15), the speaker expresses some wish with which the hearer is expected to comply. In fact, such constructions are subject to syntactic restrictions indicating that they do not have interrogative status. *Already/nångång* cannot combine with wh-questions other than *why*. (16a-b) are unacceptable under the relevant reading of *already/nångång*.

- (16) a. \*What are you doing already?  
 b. \*Vad gör du nångång?

As is generally the case with MP's, *already/nångång* are strictly limited to one particular illocutionary force. Moreover, consider that *already/nångång* scope over the entire proposition and, hence, are incompatible with information focus on single arguments as in (16a-b).

Furthermore, the apparent *why*-questions only appear in the negative: All of (17a-b) and (18a-b) are unacceptable in the relevant readings.

- (17) a. \*Why are you doing it already?  
 b. \*Varför gör du det nångång?
- (18) a. \*Why is he coming here already?  
 b. \*Varför kommer han nångång?

That is to say that, in (17a-b) and (18a-b), we can only access the lexical readings of ALREADY and *NÅN gång*. It is licit to speculate that this restriction stems from the presuppositional content of the directive (it is presupposed that the event has not taken place).

Lastly, what appears to be a difference between *already* and *nångång* is the fact that *already* can appear in elliptic utterances, i.e. in exclamations such as (19a-b). The equivalent example (20) is not acceptable in Swedish:

- (19) a. Enough already! Ted, that button's mine! (How I met your mother)  
 b. Alright already! I didn't have friends. (The Simpsons)
- (20) \*Nog nångång!  
 enough nångång

Farrell Ackerman (p.c.) points out to us that under given circumstances an utterance such as (20) is acceptable in his AmE variety:

(21) Who is coming already?

The relevant context of (21) is one in which the hearer is supposed to tell me who is coming tonight but does not come to the point. I can express impatience by uttering (21), in which, however, *already* does not scope over the *wh*-question: *Just tell me already (who is coming)*.

#### 4 Analysis

From the above examples, it is clear that *already/nångång* add expressive content, that is, the attitude of impatience and annoyance. The implication is that the eventuality, *e*, has not yet taken place but should have done so, in the speaker's opinion. Note, for instance, that *already/nångång* are not compatible with the directive in a case in which the speaker encourages the hearer to *continue* to do something. Imagine a context in which I ask the hearer to continue to take a week off work now and then. Such a directive cannot be expressed as in (22a-b) (even if I am impatient about it):

- (22) a. \*Continue to go on a holiday already.  
 b. \*Fortsätt att åka på semester nångång.  
     continue to go on vacation nångång

Arguably, this is so because of the implication that *e* has not yet begun. We conclude that the *already/nångång* construction is at the same time directive, expressive, and implicational.

The analysis, thus, needs to incorporate a couple of basic intuitions: First, the illocutionary Force of the clause is specified DIRECTIVE. Second, it must be assumed that an aspectual feature is projected in the structure, relating to the notion of immediacy. A salient property of *already/nångång*, namely, is that such items imply that the speaker expects immediate compliance from the hearer. This can be shown by putting *already/nångång* in comparison to expressions such as English *for one time's sake/for once*, and the Swedish equivalent *för en gångs skull*, which do not share such a property. A speaker who knows that his or her child is having an exam next Monday, can say (23a-b) on Thursday:

- (23) a. Do your homework over the weekend for once!  
 b. Gör din läxa över helgen fören gångs skull!  
     do your homework over weekend.the for one time's sake

Consider that *already/nångång* could not have been used in such a context:

- (24) a. \*Do your homework over the weekend already!  
 b. \*Gör din läxa över helgen nångång!  
     do your homework over weekend.the nångång

Arguably, this restriction stems from the fact that *already/nångång* are in conflict with a time expression which does not imply that *e* immediately follows the time of the utterance. To be more precise, we are comparing two different interpretations: On the one hand, there are expressions describing that the speaker expects the immediate occurrence of *e* (or the immediate beginning of it, if *e* has extension). On the other, there are expressions describing that the speaker expects at least one occurrence of *e*, though not necessarily an immediate one. In Swedish, the MP *nångång* corresponds to the former reading, while the second one can be conveyed by the lexical expression *NÅN gång*.

Suppose, then, that the MP structure of such clauses hosts a Force Projection defined as DIRECTIVE and an Aspect Projection corresponding to the feature of immediacy, dominating the VP:

(25) [<sub>ForceP</sub> Directive [CP... [<sub>AspectP</sub> Immediate *already* [VP (XP)]]]]

For present purposes, the analysis disregards the TP, assuming that the directive clause is tenseless, and does not define a subject position given that the subject is inherently 2<sup>nd</sup> person.

In order to derive the word order, we assume that the VP containing the verb and possible complements (XP in (25)) is raised above the AspectP, so as to make the MP's *already/nångång* appear in final position.

(26) [<sub>ForceP</sub> Directive [CP... [VP] [<sub>AspectP</sub> Immediate *already* [~~VP~~] ]]]

It is licit to speculate that such raising is focus-driven. Focal stress invariably falls on the VP and, furthermore, the MP *already/nångång* co-occur with a preverbal focusing element, typically English *just* and Swedish *bara* 'only', as in (27a-b) (also, see (1b), (6a-b), (7a-b), (10a-b) for instance).

- (27) a. Just hit me already! (*Anger Management*)  
 b. Bara klipp till mig nångång  
     only hit to me nångång

Considering that such elements impose a focus reading on the following constituent, suppose that *just/bara* signal the presence of a Focus Phrase on top of the VP layer, following a line of thought originating in Brody (1990:207). The lowest VP moves up to this Focus Phrase, thus appearing to the left of the MP *already/nångång*:<sup>7 8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Admittedly, given this analysis, there is an affinity between MP *already* and the adverbial ALREADY. If the approach of Lee (2008) is assumed, adverbial ALREADY introduces polarity focus, contrasting the described *e* with a possible alternative *e*. We will not enter into that discussion here.

<sup>8</sup> One prediction of the structure in (28) is that it should not be possible to add MP *already* to a directive in which a lexicalized 2<sup>nd</sup> person subject is focused. That is to say, in *DO it already!*, the VP has raised to the pre-VP focus field, and therefore *YOU do it already!* should be ruled

(28) [<sub>ForceP</sub> Directive [CP... [<sub>FocusP</sub> *just* [VP] [<sub>AspectP</sub> *already* [~~VP~~] ]]]]

The structure in (28) captures the intuition that such derivations encode at least Force, Focus, and Aspect.

## 5 Conclusion

In non standard American English an innovative usage of *already* has emerged as the result of a translation borrowing from Yiddish. In this usage, *already* appears to have the properties of a Modal Particle, despite the fact that such a category has been argued to be essentially absent from English. It has been shown that *already* and the Swedish Modal Particle *nångång*, share all of the relevant properties of a Modal Particle: They are phonetically weak elements, homophonous with lexical adverbial expressions, and strictly limited to the sentence final position. They scope over the entire proposition, are implicational, and only compatible with one particular kind of illocutionary Force, namely directive. Furthermore, they add expressive content, in particular that of impatience, and convey the expectation of immediate compliance on behalf of the hearer.

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out as a conflict between focus domains. The same restriction is expected to appear if an argument is focused within the VP: While *Just believe me already!* is predicted to be well-formed, *Believe ME already!* is expected to be deviant. At present we ignore whether these predictions are accurate.



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