

Evaluative *gon* in Memphis African American English

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Despite the massive amount of research on African American English (AAE) (Wolfram & Schilling 2016), there are many aspects of varieties of AAE that remain under-examined, including camouflaged forms, which bear surface resemblance to Mainstream American English constructions (Spears 1982; Wolfram 1994). Evaluative *gon* is one such camouflaged form (Moody 2011; Spears 1982). In narratives that refer to events that have already occurred (i.e. perfective events), *gon* (which can be realized as [gɔ̃] or [ɔ̃]) may be used to mark a surprising or unexpected event with an evaluative meaning, as in example (1), which comes from a 19 year old Memphis female.

(1) “He was like, ‘yes ma'am.’ She *gon* give him the right directions. I was so mad at her.”

Moody (2011) suggests that *gon* can be translated as ‘had the nerve to’. Evaluative *gon* shares a surface form with reduced future *gonna/gon*, but these constructions exhibit different syntactic and semantic properties (Moody 2011).

This study focuses on the use of evaluative *gon* in Memphis, TN. The data for this study come from interviews conducted by in-group members of the local African American community in 2001 (see Fridland 2003). This resulted in rich vernacular spoken data that is quite different from traditional sociolinguistic datasets, which often involve out-group fieldworkers. While mood and aspect constructions, especially camouflage constructions, such as *gon*, are rare in sociolinguistic interviews, this rich dataset provides a source to find such constructions. We take a primarily descriptive approach, using qualitative and discourse methods to explore the understudied camouflaged syntactic construction. Initial findings confirm Moody’s suggested meaning, but add new insight into this discursal use of the feature - such that it occurs as a narrative closing construction.