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Get My Syntax On
Heidi Lei¹*

Abstract
In this paper, I describe and analyze an instance of micro-syntactic variation in American English, a construction I refer to as get my X on. There is considerable flexibility in the construction, involving the types of determiners allowed, the phrasal verbs used, and most notably, the structure of the DP my X. In Standard American English, the X following a possessive pronoun is generally restricted to nouns. However, in this construction, X can be a lexical verb like sing, teach, or even celebrate. Some speakers of African American English accept only the bare verb, rejecting concrete nouns, verb-derived nouns, and gerunds, which are typically less marked for SAE speakers.

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1. Introduction
Get my X on is a construction with the meaning roughly equivalent to “begin to engage in X” where X indicates or relates to some form of action. (1) are some examples of the construction.

(1) a. Come get your dance on tonight at the Elk’s Lodge! [Facebook]
b. Here are some tips that personally help me to get my sleep on.
   c. Look at that…ready to get my grub on [Facebook]

Green (2002) analyzes this construction as having the general schematic structure shown in (2) below.

(2) get + possessive pronoun(one’s) + noun + on

It is often used as names, slogans, and song titles, as in (3):

(3) a. Get Your Freak On (song by Missy Elliot)
b. Get Your Roll On (song by Big Tymers)
c. Get My Drink On (song by Toby Keith)
d. Get Your Move On (moving company)
e. Dancing with the Stars: Get Your Dance On (video game)
f. Get your groove on. In four new colors (Apple’s website slogan for iPod Shuffle)
As far as I know, there has not yet been any systematic study of get my X on in the syntactic literature to date. This construction possesses interesting syntactic properties and exhibits considerable variation, especially in connection with the acceptability of different word forms standing in for X. In this paper, after a brief discussion of the first usages of get my X on, I document basic properties of the construction, including the variations in the determiners and phrasal verbs used in the construction, as well as the ability for X to take on a modifying adjective. Next, I analyze the different categories of words that can appear in the X slot, focusing primarily on forms that are unambiguous nouns and verbs along with forms that are ambiguous. Finally, I present judgments from speakers of African American English and Appalachian English and discuss the different constraints they impose on the construction.

2. First Usages

The construction was likely popularized by Missy Elliot’s 2001 title “Get Your Freak On.” The Oxford English Dictionary added the entry to get one’s freak on in its 2016 draft additions, citing examples as early as 1994. The Routledge Dictionary of Modern American Slang and Unconventional English includes an entry for “get one’s freak on” under the entry for freak with the dating 1998. Green (2002) suggests that the phrase get your groove on was a common phrase in the early to mid 1990s. The construction was quickly absorbed by pop culture, often seen in memes and pop songs. See Figure 1 for some examples of memes using this construction.

3. Basic Properties

The attestations presented in this section are taken from the web. As we will see below, the acceptability of the different variants of the construction varies across speakers.

3.1 Types of determiners allowed

The determiner in the construction is usually a possessive pronoun, most commonly your and my. First person plural our and third person possessives his, her, its, and their are also attested, as shown in (4) below.

(4)  a. Get over here so we can get our drink on.
b. . . . our fellow Texan is bound and determined to get his drink on.

c. At midnight, Cinderella can get her drink on.

d. After months of cold and rainy weather, the bar with a sophisticated patio is ready to get its drink on.

e. . . . let people get their drink on by helping them arrange with friends.

Besides possessive pronouns, definite and indefinite articles the and a can also be found in the construction, as shown in (5).

(5)  a. Hello, Paris!! Let’s get the eat on. [Facebook]
    b. We gon’ get a dance on [Tory Lanez “Do It for Me”]

Similarly, there are a few instances where demonstratives this and that, as well as quantifier some, are used, as in (6):

(6)  a. Baby lets get out of here from here where I can get that grub on [Trey Songz “Grub On”]
    b. “Sandra, find out who holds the keys to this man’s nephew, and let’s get this dance on.”
    c. Get in the mood to get this chill on with this super cool toy.
    d. Come out and get some eat on!!

We will see below that the acceptability of these kinds of sentences varies across speakers.

3.2 $X$ may be modified by adjectives

An adjective could be used to modify $X$ in the object DP, as in the examples in (7).1

(7)  a. Get a good sing on to put me in a good mood.
    b. Official Son Oscar says if you want to get a good eat on, go with a bowl over the burrito.
    c. I can get a good eat on anywhere, anytime for any reason.

Note that in all the examples that I have found where an adjective is used, the determiner is the indefinite article $a$. It may be that only such indefinite determiners may be used in such constructions, or it is possible that other factors in the syntax or discourse may affect the grammaticality of determiners in these constructions. Future research into this could clarify the issue.

3.3 Phrasal verbs other than get on

Although get on is the most commonly used and most productive phrasal verb in the construction, other phrasal verbs with similar meaning such as keep on and turn on/off are also attested, as shown in (8).

(8)  a. Batten down the hatches and keep your chill on.
    b. This beautiful lady reminds me of my mother, always keep your dance on. [Facebook]
    c. . . . hoard up scrolling in search our prevailing lineup of the overall excellent places in Chicago to turn your eat on.
    d. “I’m getting my freak on” replied Rocky as he continued to dance.
      “Rocky, turn your freak off before you hurt somebody” said Adam.

1Emphasis is added by the author, here and below.
4. Variations in X

4.1 X as noun vs. verb

The inserted word X in the construction acts syntactically as a noun since it is preceded by a
determiner and serves as an object of the verb. However, since English is productive in the
conversion of morphologically simple nouns to verbs and vice-versa, it is often morphologically
ambiguous whether X is actually a noun or a verb. In the examples in (9), X appears to have a
strong verbal reading, but can nonetheless be independently used as a noun. For example, find as
in (9a) is mostly used as a verb (I can’t find my keys), but can also refer to the object being found
(the vase you bought is a real find).

(9)  a. gotta love shopbop.com for always helping me get my find on.
    b. Now I feel it’s time to go and get my try on [Heavy D “You Can Get It”]
    c. Baby get your shine on, shine on! [Florida Georgia Line “Get Your Shine On”]

There are instances where X is an unambiguous lexical verb, or have noun usages that are only
very rarely attested in other circumstances. The examples in (10) indicate it is possible that X is
analyzed to be a verb in some speakers’ grammars. In (10c–f), X has an overt verbal suffix such as
-ate and -fy.

(10) a. Getting ready to get my sing on. [Facebook]
    b. Get Your Teach On (name of a teacher’s conference)
    c. Ain’t no limit on the nuggets what I can get my appreciate on at.
    d. Today I felt the desire to write again. To get my advocate on.
    e. I’m done with my day and Imma get my celebrate on…
    f. I’m gonna get my satisfy on with a snickers.

There are also instances where a gerund is used even when the bare verb form has the same
reading, as shown in (11).

(11) a. I’m so ready to get my dancing on tonight! [Facebook]
    b. . . . drop the beat and get my grooving on [BlackSpace “919”]
    c. . . so I determined I’d need to move elsewhere to find a tavern and get my drinking
       on…

Note, however, that the bare verb form seems to be much more common.

Similarly, (12) shows instances where X can be an unambiguous noun derived from their
respective verb forms with nominal suffixes such as -ation and -y.

(12) a. I was trying to get my hibernation on but couldn’t get a good uninterrupted rest.
    b. I was able to discover all of my devices instantly and get my automation on.
    c. Very quickly I was able to get my communication on with people from all walks of
       life.

\footnote{2}{The sense in which this has a verbal reading is that the noun find generally refers to an object, but in (9a) it refers to the
action.}

\footnote{3}{Note that in (10f), satisfy is used implicitly passively or reflexively, which potentially renders the sentence unacceptable
for some speakers.}
d. Time to get my advocacy on  

Furthermore, although X is usually required to denote an action or activity given the meaning of the construction, some speakers find it acceptable to use concrete nouns denoting objects with an implied action (e.g. drink, eat, watch), such as the examples in (13),

(13)  
   a. Just waking up early to get my coffee on...  
   c. I’ll definitely stop in here again and get my burger on!  
   d. finally, time to get my movie on!

4.2 X as a transitive verb

When X is a lexical verb, its transitivity may affect the acceptability of the construction. For some speakers, transitive verbs are much less acceptable since the construction does not provide a slot for the object argument of verb X. However, the following examples in (14) are found with X being an obligatorily transitive verb:

(14)  
   a. Then I get my devour on. Just look at this majesty!  
   b. I think Wednesdays this month are a good day to get my thank on.  
   c. so I’m go ahead and get my reread on.  
   d. Got a few new things in, having to get my rearrange on.

Note also that these examples involve unambiguous verbs.

4.3 X as a stative verb

In most attestations, X is a dynamic verb since semantically the construction requires a continued or progressive action. A few examples, shown below in (15), are found where X is usually a stative verb.

(15)  
   a. So it is in the spirit of that rivalry that I’m here to get my hate on.  
   b. I never can quite get my dislike on on little kids like Joff or Robert A.  
   c. it was never updated and finally removed, that is why I don’t get my hope on...

In these examples, stative verbs are used to emphasize the emotions or to imply a dynamic interpretation, or to highlight the temporariness of the situation (Belli 2017). It is reasonable to postulate that although a bare verb form is used, X has similar constraints as the use of progressive aspect and performs a similar function when stative verbs are employed, as can be seen in (16).4

(16)  
   a. I dislike my roommate.  
   b. * I’m disliking my roommate.  
   c. I’m disliking my roommate more and more.

4Note, however, that some speakers do accept sentences like (16b).
5. Acceptability

Different groups of speakers accept different forms of the constructions to various extents. In the following sections, I discuss judgment results from an African American English speaker and an Appalachian English speaker, which showcase some distinct variations in the usage by different groups.

5.1 African American English

With regard to the variations in $X$, only the bare verb form of $X$ is accepted by an AAE speaker, while other forms including the gerund, the derived nouns, and the concrete nouns are all rejected, as detailed in (17).

\[(17)\]
\[
\begin{align*}
a. & \text{ get my sing on} \\
b. & \text{ get my celebrate on} \\
c. & \ast\text{ get my coffee on} \\
d. & \ast\text{ get my singing on} \\
e. & \ast\text{ get my celebration on}
\end{align*}
\]

Another sign that $X$ is not analyzed as a noun by speakers is that pluralization of converted verbs is strongly rejected, as shown in (18).

\[(18)\]
\[
\begin{align*}
a. & \text{ get my drink on} \\
b. & \ast\text{ get my drinks on}
\end{align*}
\]

While *drink* by itself exhibits ambiguity in its nominal status, the pluralized form *drinks*, an unambiguous noun, is not allowed in the construction.

For $X$ as a transitive verb or phrasal verb, its object could be supplied with a PP under certain circumstances. An aversion for PPs headed by *with* is shown in (19).

\[(19)\]
\[
\begin{align*}
a. & \text{ Get my hate on at them} \\
b. & \ast\text{ Get my care on for them} \\
c. & \ast\text{ Get my disagree on with them} \\
d. & \ast\ast\text{ Get my devour on with a cheesecake}
\end{align*}
\]

The indefinite article cannot be used as the determiner, even when an adjective modifies $X$, while using an adjective with the possessive pronoun is mildly more acceptable, as shown in (20).

\[(20)\]
\[
\begin{align*}
a. & \ast\text{ get a(n) eat on} \\
b. & \ast\text{ get a good eat on} \\
c. & \ast\text{ get my good eat on}
\end{align*}
\]

5.2 Appalachian English

The opposite pattern of acceptance is witnessed in the judgments by an Appalachian English speaker where it is more acceptable when $X$ is an unambiguous noun, as shown in (21).

\[(21)\]
\[
\begin{align*}
a. & \ast\text{ get my sing on}
\end{align*}
\]

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\(^5\)My sincere thanks to Nicole Holliday and Greg Johnson for providing judgments for this study.
b. get my singing on  
c. get my coffee on  
d. get my drinks on  
e. get my celebration on

The speaker commented that although (21a) could be used in an informal setting, it is less acceptable than (21b). This distinction suggests that X is indeed being analyzed as a noun for this speaker.

Although indefinite articles are generally less acceptable than possessives and demonstratives, they become more acceptable when an adjective is used, as in (22) below.

(22) a. get that eat on  
b. get a eat on  
c. get a good eat on  
d. * get my good eat on

While heavy DPs decrease the acceptability, object shift before the particle is obligatory.

(23) a. get a really amazing eat on  
b. * get on a really amazing eat

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