SYNTACTIC VARIATIONS OF THE INFINITIVE IN MODERN ENGLISH

Allakhverdiyeva Farida Muhammadali
Candidate of Philological Sciences, Associate Professor
Azerbaijan University of Languages, Baku, Azerbaijan
ORCID iD: https://orcid.org/0009-0006-0534-1447

The infinitive in Modern English occupies a distinctive place within the verbal system due to its high degree of syntactic independence. Linguistic theories—from traditional grammar to generative syntax—consider the infinitive not merely as a verb form, but as a multifunctional syntactic unit capable of forming its own structural domain. The Infinitive took its origin from the verbal noun, which is the course of its development became verbalized, retaining some of its nominal character. Thus, in contemporary English the infinitive double nature: that of the noun and that of the verb. The Nominal character of the infinitive is observed in its Syntactic functions. The Verbal character of the infinitive is denoted in the fact that the infinitive of transitive verb can take direct object. The infinitive in Modern English is a non-finite verbal form that demonstrates a high degree of syntactic flexibility. Its ability to combine verbal and nominal features makes it one of the most structurally variable units in English grammar. The theory of its syntactic variations examines how the infinitive functions within different syntactic environments and what structural forms it may take. In contemporary English the infinitive has four forms.

Keywords: *the semantics of the infinitive, subject complement, infinitive constructions, functions of the infinitive, grammatical variability.*

СИНТАКСИЧНІ ВАРІАЦІЇ ІНФІНІТИВА В СУЧАСНІЙ АНГЛІЙСЬКІЙ МОВІ

Аллахвердієва Фаріда Мухаммадалі
кандидат філологічних наук, доцент
Азербайджанський університет мов, Баку, Азербайджан

Інфінітив у сучасній англійській мові посідає особливе місце в дієслівній системі завдяки високому ступеню синтаксичної незалежності. Лінгвістичні теорії — від традиційної граматики до генеративного синтаксису — розглядають інфінітив не лише як дієслівну форму, а й як багатофункціональну синтаксичну одиницю, здатну формувати власну структурну сферу. Інфінітив походить від віддієслівного іменника, який у процесі свого розвитку зазнав вербалізації, зберігши водночас деякі риси номінального характеру. Таким чином, у сучасній англійській мові інфінітив має подвійну природу: іменникову та дієслівну. Номінальний характер інфінітива виявля-

ється в його синтаксичних функціях. Дієслівний характер інфінітива проявляється в тому, що інфінітив перехідного дієслова може мати прямий додаток. Інфінітив у сучасній англійській мові є нефінітною дієслівною формою, що демонструє високий рівень синтаксичної гнучкості. Його здатність поєднувати дієслівні та номінальні ознаки робить його однією з найбільш структурно варіативних одиниць англійської граматики. Теорія його синтаксичних варіацій досліджує, як інфінітив функціонує в різних синтаксичних середовищах і яких структурних форм він може набувати. У сучасній англійській мові інфінітив має чотири форми.

Ключові слова: *семантика інфінітива, іменна частина складеного присудка, інфінітивні конструкції, функції інфінітива, граматична варіативність.*

Introduction. The infinitive in Modern English is a non-finite verbal form that demonstrates a high degree of syntactic flexibility. Its ability to combine verbal and nominal features makes it one of the most structurally variable units in English grammar. The theory of its syntactic variations examines how the infinitive functions within different syntactic environments and what structural forms it may take.

As mentioned earlier, the infinitive has a dual nature, that is, it possesses the characteristics of both a noun and a verb. Because of this, the infinitive may function in a sentence either as a noun or as a verb. Now let us focus specifically on each of these functions. The infinitive functions as a subject. In the function of a subject, the infinitive may appear either on its own or preceded by the formal word it, for example: To make no distinction between honesty and dishonesty would be quite unfair (J. Galsworthy). In the function of a subject, the infinitive can also be expressed with the formal word it. In such sentences, it acts as the formal subject. In this case, the infinitive usually follows an adjective or a noun.

When she and Mr. Rochester sang together, it was a delight to hear ("Jane Eyre", Charlotte Brontë). It was difficult to answer ("Jane Eyre", Charlotte Brontë). In such constructions, infinitives are typically used after the following adjectives: advisable, amazing, awful, bad, convenient, careless, correct, cruel, dangerous, desirable, difficult, nice, easy, foolish, funny, good, great, hard, helpful, important, impossible, interesting, intolerable, natural, necessary, nice, pleasant, possible, reasonable, ridiculous, silly, strange, surprising, terrible, unbearable, undesirable, unnecessary, unpleasant, unreasonable, useful, useless, wise, wonderful, wrong, etc.

It is nice to meet you.

It is useless to talk to him.

It is hard to be a doctor.

It was dangerous to stay there.

In these constructions, infinitives are mainly used after the following nouns: duty, fun, idea, mistake, pleasure, surprise, thing, time**.**

It's a good idea to invite John.

It is time to leave.

The core of the theory concerns the infinitive's ability to appear in multiple syntactic positions. Because it is non-finite, it cannot act as the main predicate, but it can participate in nearly all other structural slots. According to the views of E. M. Gordon and P. Krylov, in such structures the infinitive functions as a full subject. They state: "*In sentences with the formal subject it, the infinitive can fully perform the function of a subject. Here, the infinitive mostly depends on the verb it follows from a lexical point of view.*" (Gordon, 1973: 11, 186).

In modern English, however, in such sentences the infinitive is considered a logical subject. Because when we remove the formal subject it from the sentence and change the structure, we can easily see that the infinitive actually appears in the subject position.

"To save for college takes many years."

"It takes many years to save for college."

"To have good health is very important."

"It is important to have good health."

When the infinitive functions as a subject, the following points should be considered:

1. The infinitive is always used in the to-infinitive form.

2. All forms of the infinitive may function as the subject. However, the simple or non-perfect active infinitive is used more frequently.

3. When expressing the subject, the infinitive carries the main idea of the sentence.

4. In the function of a subject, the infinitive is mainly used in nominative sentences where the predicate is expressed by an adjective.

To be alone, to be free from the daily interests and cruelty would be happiness to Asano.

To doubt is almost to insult (Ch. Brontë).

To be walking through the fields all alone seemed an almost impossible pleasure.

To have seen her was even a more painful experience.

To be recognized, to be greeted by some local personage afforded her a joy which was very great.

To have been interrogated in such a way was a real shock to him.

It should also be noted that the infinitive in the function of the subject is mainly used in affirmative sentences (Ganshina, 1951: 106).

In the predicative function the infinitive is used with the particle to. In front of the infinitive, to be acts as a linking verb. In the sentence, it performs the role of the nominal part of the compound predicate. For example:

To think is to act and to act was to think (S. Leacock).

In the predicative function, the infinitive mainly explains the meaning of the noun. Therefore, in such sentences the infinitive is used only with certain abstract nouns, such as:aim — purpose, desire — wish, difficulty — difficulty, hope — hope, idea — idea, duty — duty, habit — habit, instruction — instruction, reason — reason, requirement — requirement, task — task, thought — thought, method — method, wish — wish, etc.His greatest desire was to finish the work on the dissertation.

My wish is to see you at my table, Nick (F. S. Fitzgerald).

In the predicative function, when the infinitive is used, the particle to may or may not be used, or it may drop into the second position. Dropping of the particle to is mostly found in sentences with the conjunctions and and or (Goksadze, 1998: 111), for example:My intention was to see her as soon as possible, to talk to her, to calm her.Your duty will be to teach him French and play with him.

His plan was to ring her up at once, or even call on her.

When the infinitive in the function of the subject complement is used in sentences defining an action, it replaces the predicative function with the verb to do, for example:

All he wants to do is to understand you.

Aim : Syntax is the branch of linguistics that studies how words combine to form phrases, clauses, and sentences. The aim of syntactic study goes beyond simply describing sentence structure—it focuses on revealing the underlying principles, rules, and mechanisms that govern how language is organized. The infinitive, expressing the manner of action, functions as part of a compound verbal predicate. In this function, the infinitive is used after modal verbs or after verbs expressing the beginning, continuation, or end of an action, for example:

She began to cry, poor thing (Maugham).

They continued to whisper.

It should be noted that after the verbs to begin, to continue, to start, to stop the gerund can also be used along with the infinitive, for example:

They began working.

They started working.

They stopped working.

The infinitive is also used as a component of the compound modal verb predicate.

Nothing (adds Mr. Pickwick) can exceed their good humour ("Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club" Charles Dickens).

Research Methodology : Research methodology in the study of syntactic variations of the infinitive refers to the set of scientific procedures, analytical tools, and theoretical frameworks used to investigate how the infinitive functions, varies, and behaves in different syntactic environments in Modern English.

In modern English, the infinitive is widely used in the function of an object. We believe that this situation is related to the noun property of the infinitive. Thus, when the infinitive is used as an object, its noun property is more noticeable.

The infinitive is mainly used after the following verbs in the function of an object: to like, to love, to prefer, to refuse, to remember, to forget, to hesitate, to manage, to expect, to agree, to learn, etc.

He agreed to come at ten.

You will soon learn to read.

Mainly the non-perfect form of the infinitive is used after verbs of this kind.

However, there are also cases when the same verbs are used with the perfect form of the infinitive, for example,

I regret to have said it to you.

I remembered to have met him once.

In modern English, a group of verbs can be used with two objects. The first of these is a noun or pronoun, and the second is an infinitive: to advise, to allow, to ask, to beg, to command, to order, to permit, to tell, to recommend, etc., for example,

Tell him (Tom) to hurry.

I asked him (Tom) to keep an eye on the clock.

What would you recommend me to do.

N. Kobrina linguist notes that after the verbs to know, to show, to wonder, the infinitive acts as a conjunctive infinitive phrase (Kobrina, 1985: 117), for example

I didn't know what to do.

I know well enough where to stop.

Will you show me how to do it.

The infinitive is also used as an object after the following combinations: to be glad, to be grateful, to be proud, to be surprised, to be delighted, to be amused, to be afraid, to be furious, etc.

It was impossible to say yes, with Mrs. Reed sitting there, so I was silent ("Jane Eyre" Charlotte Bronte).

I am willing to excuse a thousand faults ("The Moon and Sixpence" Somerset Maugham).

I am glad to have seen you.

He was amused to hear it.

She is proud to have grown such a son.

Mother was furious to see them together again.

Sometimes, when the infinitive is used as an object, it is preceded by a formal it (introductory object). As a rule, the formal it is not translated into Azerbaijani, for example:

He found it difficult to translate the article. — O, məqaləni tərcümə etməyi çətin hesab etdi.

The infinitive is generally used with the particle to when functioning as an attribute. The infinitive defines various types of nouns, some types of pronouns, substantivized ordinal numbers, and other substantivized words in a sentence, for example:

Have you anything to offer me?

The best thing to do would be to go back.

As is known, in Azerbaijani, the attribute mainly comes before the word it defines. In English, however, the attribute can be in two positions, both before and after the word it defines. In modern English, the infinitive is widely used as a postpositive attribute.

I helped richer students with their lessons and I have two regular Indian girls to teach (P. Abrahams).

I don't think there is any need to tell him (P. Abrahams).

There is no reason to be surprised (P. Abrahams).

The urge to move was on her and she was fighting (P. Abrahams).

As seen from the examples, the infinitive in the postpositive attribute function is used after various types of nouns and defines them.

At the same time, it should be noted that the infinitive as a postpositive attribute can also be used after the following indefinite and negative pronouns: somebody, nobody, anybody, someone, no one, anyone, something, nothing, anything.

Let's look at the language facts.

There was nothing else to know (P. Abrahams).

There was nothing to be ashamed of, nobody could have seen him (P. Abrahams).

There was nothing to dispel the dark of the night (P. Abrahams).

I had something to pray to then, something that responded to the reality of my world (P. Abrahams).

Language facts show that the infinitive is frequently used after the mentioned pronouns as a postpositive attribute.

The infinitive as a postpositive attribute is also used after the first ordinal number and the substantivized adjective the last, for example:

He was always the first to enter the dining room and the last to leave.

Andrew was the last to be interviewed.

In some cases, the infinitive can also be used after nouns defined by the words last, the first, for example:

He was the first man ever to discuss the philosophy of science with Erik (Cronin).

She is the first actress to play this part on the London stage.

Dear Steve, your last letter to reach me was two months old.

The infinitive as a postpositive attribute is used after the following words indicating indefinite quantity: much, little, enough, no more, little more, a great deal, plenty, etc.

I have got a lot to be thankful for.

I thought you had quite enough to do looking after the house and so forth.

You are leaving me very little to say.

Rarely, the infinitive is used after the indefinite pronoun one as a postpositive attribute, for example:

If you, boys, want to go on I'm not the one to spoil the game.

He wasn't an easy one to make friends with.

N. A. Kobrina and other linguists note that the infinitive used in the function of an attribute can also approach the word it defines through a connecting word and preposition (Kobrina, 1985: 51), for example:

He had sought in vain for inspiration how to awaken love.

I had now an idea what to do.

They had no knowledge of how to live on.

He's no information about when to start.

It is clear from all the above that in modern English the infinitive as a postpositive attribute has a wide and varied range of uses.

Y. M. Gordon and I. P. Krylova note that in phraseological units the infinitive can be used as a prepositive attribute. This situation manifests itself in the following combinations (Kobrina, 1985: 122):

What to do- advice

This never to be-forgotten day

A much to be longed — for place

An ever to be-remembered occasion.

The infinitive is also widely used in the function of an adverbial modifier. The infinitive can be used in the sentence in the functions of adverbial modifiers of purpose, manner, comparison, result and condition.

The infinitive in the function of an adverbial modifier of purpose:

Lanny reached down to pick up his cases (P. Abrahams).

It should be noted that before the infinitive used in the function of an adverbial modifier of purpose, "in order", "so as" can be used, for example:

Soames put on his coat so as not to be cold (J. Galsworthy).

I went there in order to help him.

The infinitive as an adverbial modifier of result is used with the adverbs "enough", "too", "so", for example:

He is not strong enough to go back to his own place (S. Maugham).

She was so (too) kind to accept my proposal.

The infinitive in the function of an adverbial modifier of comparison is used with the word "than", for example:

He knew better than to rely on.

The use of the infinitive as an adverbial modifier of condition has only been highlighted by E. M. Gordon, P. Krylova, A. Kobrina and E. A. Korneyeva.

To hear him talk, you would think he is a celebrity.

The infinitive is also used as parenthetical words, and in this case the infinitive is mainly used as part of word combinations. O. Musayev called these words introductory words (Close, 1979: 238).

1.Needless to say

"Needless to say, a people without history is like wind on the buffalo grass".

2.To begin with

"To begin with, you need to brush up your French".

3.To tell the truth

"Mrs. B: Why are you so particularly fond of talking to Miss H.? Needless to say, she is a pretty woman. But everybody knows what a fool she is.

Mr. N: To tell the truth, I like to see her talk,"

"To tell the truth, we never know the love of our parents for us till we have become parents".

4. To be frank

"To be quite frank, I don't really like her".

"Mother: Oh, Jane, what a careless girl you are! The cup which you broke this morning was a favourite of your grandmother.

Jane: Oh, Mummy, to be frank, I am so glad! I was afraid it was a new cup.

5. To be sure

"He was terribly slow, to be sure, and spoke as if he was half asleep or drugged".

6. To be more precise

"To be more precise, I wouldn't call it awful, but it wasn't very well written".

7. To crown it all

"His house burned down, his car was stolen and, to crown it all, he lost his job".

8. To make the matters (things) worse

"To make matters worse, it began to rain and soon we got wet to the skin".

9. To make (cut) a long story short

"To cut it short, she failed to do it".

"To make a long story short, they acquired a reputation of being a formidable opponent".

10. To put it in a nutshell

"To put it in a nutshell, he tried to give a sympathetic ear at all times".

11. To put it mildly

"To put it mildly, the doctor was either a charlatan or a shrewd old rogue".

12. To put it more plainly

"To put it more plainly, if there's anything you want to see, just drop by".

13. To say the least

"To say the least, she lacked tact in expressing her views".

14. To say nothing of

"The effort required was immense, to say nothing of the cost".

15. So to speak

"That was, so to speak, another gift for you".

16. Strange to say

"Strange to say, he has never been in the theatre".

17. To sum it up

"To sum it up, I completely lost control of the situation".

18. To cap misfortune

"To cap misfortune, the postman brought him five returned manuscripts".

19. To be fair

"To be fair, he wasn't entirely to blame".

Conclusion. The nominative features of the infinitive in English are much fewer and more limited than its verbal features. We would like to note that the verb, as well as the infinitive, has an important role in verbal communication. Its verbal features should always prevail over its nominative features.

Literature

Azar B. S., Stacy A. H. Basic English Grammar. Washington : Georgetown University Press, 2006. 552 p.

Barabash T. A. A Guide to Better Grammar. Moscow, 1975. 340 p.

Blokh M. Y. A course in theoretical English Grammar. Moscow, 1983. 383 p.

Carter R., Mc Carthy M. Cambridge Grammar of English. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2005. 984 p.

Casagrande J. B. Language Universals in Anthropological Perspective. *Universals of language* / ed. J. H. Greenberg. 2nd ed. Cambridge, Mass : MIT Press, 1966. P. 279–298.

Close R. A. A Reference Grammar for students of English. Moscow, 1979. 352 p.

Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English / ed. J. B. Sykes. 7th ed. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1987. 1258 p.

Ganshina M., Vasilevskaya N. English Grammar. Moscow : Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1951. 434 p.

Geisler Ch. Relative Infinitive in English. Uppsala, 1995. 235 p.

Goksadze L. An Advanced Course in Current English Grammar. Tbilisi, 1998. 320 p.

Gordon E. M., Krylova L. P. The English Verbals. Moscow, 1973. 144 p.

Gordon E. M., Krylova L. P. A Grammar of Present-day English. Moscow, 1974. 334 p.

Gruzinskaya L. A. English Grammar. Moscow, 1955. 250 p.

Ilyish B. A. History of the English language. Leningrad : Izdatelstvo, 1973. 351 p.

Ilyish B. A. The Structure of Modern English. Leningrad, 1971. 365 p.

Iofik L. L. Readings in the theory of English Grammar. Leningrad, 1981. 210 p.

Jespersen O. A Modern English Grammar on Historical Principles. Part V : Syntax. London : George Allen & Unwin, 1961. 500 p.

Kaushanskaya B. L., Kovner R. L. and others. Grammar of the English language. Leningrad : Izdatelstvo, 1973. 415 p.

Khaimovich B. A., Rogovskaya B. A. A Course of English Grammar. Moscow, 1967. 298 p.

Kobrina E. A., Korneyeva E. A., Ossovskaya M. I., Guzeyeva K. A. An English Grammar: Morphology. Moscow, 1985. 288 p.

Leech G., Svartvik I. A. Communicative Grammar of English. M., 1983. 304 p.

References

Azar, B. S., & Stacy, A. H. (2006). *Basic English grammar*. Georgetown University Press.

Barabash, T. A. (1975). *A guide to better grammar*. Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya.

Blokh, M. Ya. (1983). *Teoreticheskaya grammatika angliyskogo yazyka* [Theoretical English grammar]. Vysshaya shkola. [in Russian].

Carter, R., & Mc Carthy, M. (2005). *Cambridge grammar of English*. Cambridge University Press.

Casagrande, J. B. (1966). Language universals in anthropological perspective. In J. H. Greenberg (Ed.), *Universals of language* (2nd ed.). MIT Press.

Close, R. A. (1979). *A reference grammar for students of English*. Prosveshcheniye.

Ganshina, M., & Vasilevskaya, N. (1951). *English grammar*. Foreign Languages Publishing House.

Geisler, C. (1995). *Relative infinitive in English*. Uppsala University.

Goksadze, L. (1998). *An advanced course in current English grammar*. Tbilisi University Press.

Gordon, E. M., & Krylova, L. P. (1973). *The English verbals*. Mehdunarodnye otnosheniya.

Gordon, E. M., & Krylova, L. P. (1974). *A grammar of present-day* English. Practical course. Vysshaya shkola.

Gruzinskaya, L. A. (1955). *Grammatika angliyskogo yazyka. Dlya sredney shkoly* [English grammar. For secondary school]. Uchpedgiz. [in Russian].

Ilyish, B. A. (1971). *The structure of modern English*. Prosveshcheniye.

Ilyish, B. A. (1973). *History of the English languag*. Prosveshcheniye.

Iofik, L. L., Chakhoyan, L. P., & Pospelova, A. G. (1981). *Readings in the theory of English grammar*. Prosveshcheniye.

Jespersen, O. (1961). *A modern English grammar on historical principles: Part V, syntax*. George Allen & Unwin.

Kaushanskaya, V. L., Kovner, R. L., Kozhevnikova, O. N., Prokofyev, E. V., Raynes, Z. M., Skvirskaya, S. E., & Tsyrlina, F. Ya. (1973). A g*rammar of the English language* (4th ed.). Prosveshcheniye.

Khaimovich, B. A., & Rogovskaya, B. A. (1967). *A course in English grammar*. Vysshaya shkola.

Kobrina, E. A., Korneyeva, E. A., Ossovskaya, M. I., & Guzeyeva, K. A. (1985). *An English grammar: Morphology*. Prosveshcheniye.

Leech, G., & Svartvik, I. A. (1983). *A communicative grammar of English*. Prosveshcheniye.Sykes, J. B. (Ed.). (1987). *The concise Oxford dictionary of current English* (7th ed.). Oxford University Press.

Стаття надійшла до редакції 30.11.2025 року