The Syntactic Position of the Infinitive in the Sentence Structure

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ABSTRACT: A form of the verb not inflected for grammatical categories such as tense and person and used without an overt subject. In English, the infinitive usually consists of the word to followed by the verb. This article describes about the syntactic position of the infinitive in the sentence structure.

KEYWORD: infinitive, syntactic position, structure, verbals, non-finite, infinitival clause.

An infinitive is a verbal consisting of the word to plus a verb and functioning as a noun, adjective, or adverb. The term *verbal* indicates that an infinitive, like the other two kinds of verbals, is based on a verb and therefore expresses action or a state of being. However, the infinitive may function as a subject, direct object, subject complement, adjective, or adverb in a sentence. Although an infinitive is easy to locate because of the *to* + verb form, deciding what function it has in a sentence can sometimes be confusing.Infinitive is a linguistics term for certain verb forms existing in many languages, most often used as non-finite verbs. As with many linguistic concepts, there is not a single definition applicable to all languages. The name is derived from Late Latin infinitivus, a derivative of infinitus meaning "unlimited".

In traditional descriptions of English, the infinitive is the basic dictionary form of a verb when used non-finitely, with or without the particle to. Thus to go is an infinitive, as is go in a sentence like "I must go there" (but not in "I go there", where it is a finite verb). The form without to is called the bare infinitive, and the form with to is called the full infinitive or to-infinitive. Being a verb, an infinitive may take objects and other complements and modifiers to form a verb phrase (called an infinitive phrase). Like other non-finite verb forms (like participles, converbs, gerunds and gerundives), infinitives do not generally have an expressed subject; thus an infinitive verb phrase also constitutes a complete non-finite clause, called an infinitive (infinitival) clause. Such phrases or clauses may play a variety of roles within sentences, often being nouns (for example being the subject of a sentence or being a complement of another verb), and sometimes being adverbs or other types of modifier. Many verb forms known as infinitives differ from gerunds (verbal nouns) in that they do not inflect for case or occur in adpositional phrases. Instead, infinitives often originate in earlier inflectional forms of verbal nouns. Unlike finite verbs, infinitives are not usually inflected for tense, person, etc. either, although some degree of inflection sometimes occurs; for example Latin has distinct active and passive infinitives.

An infinitive phrase is a verb phrase constructed with the verb in infinitive form. This consists of the verb together with its objects and other complements and modifiers. Some examples of infinitive phrases in

English are given below – these may be based on either the full infinitive (introduced by the particle to) or the bare infinitive (without the particle to).

➢ (to) sleep

➢ (to) write ten letters

➢ (to) go to the store for a pound of sugar

Infinitive phrases often have an implied grammatical subject making them effectively clauses rather than phrases. Such infinitive clauses or infinitival clauses, are one of several kinds of non-finite clause. They can play various grammatical roles like a constituent of a larger clause or sentence; for example it may form a noun phrase or adverb. Infinitival clauses may be embedded within each other in complex ways, like in the sentence:

➢ I want to tell you that John Welborn is going to get married to Blair.

Here the infinitival clause to get married is contained within the finite dependent clause that John Welborn is going to get married to Blair; this in turn is contained within another infinitival clause, which is contained in the finite independent clause (the whole sentence). The grammatical structure of an infinitival clause may differ from that of a corresponding finite clause. For example, in German, the infinitive form of the verb usually goes to the end of its clause, whereas a finite verb (in an independent clause) typically comes in second position.

Following certain verbs or prepositions, infinitives commonly *do* have an implicit subject, e.g.,

➢ I want to eat them as dinner.

➢ For him to fail now would be a disappointment.

As these examples illustrate, the implicit subject of the infinitive occurs in the objective case (them, him) in contrast to the nominative case that occurs with a finite verb, e.g., "They ate their dinner." Such accusative and infinitive constructions are present in Latin and Ancient Greek, as well as many modern languages. The atypical case regarding the implicit subject of an infinitive is an example of exceptional case-marking. As shown in the above examples, the object of the transitive verb "want" and the preposition "for" allude to their respective pronouns' subjective role within the clauses.

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