

What Infinitival *To Can*(?t) Do

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There has been much debate over the status of infinitival *to*. Some call it a preposition, others a marker (Quirk 1985), a particle or functor (Radford 2004) or a subordinator (Huddleston and Pullum 2002). It has been labeled C (Postal and Pullum 1978), I (Chomsky 1981, Koster and May 1982), and V (Pullum 1982). Choosing the right label is one thing but what is more important are its properties.

When comparing it to an auxiliary, these two most often share the same position within the clausal structure, i.e. I(nflection) or T(ense). Reasons for this are persuasive because they both take an external argument and seemingly have the same position within the clause:

- (1) Mark decided that he **would** become a doctor.
- (2) Mark decided to become a doctor.

Another argument speaking for its treatment as a MOD/AUX is infinitival *to* indeed sometimes substitutes a finite MOD:

- (3) Peter persuaded Mary that she should give me her car.
- (4) Peter persuaded Mary to give me her car.

And both AUX and the infinitival marker *to* have the ability to express a tense even though in case of the infinitival *to* it is a nonfinite tense (Julien 2001).

- (5) Mark believes his father may have lied.
- (6) Mark believes his father to have lied.

However, there are just too many differences between MOD/AUX and the infinitival *to*, which speaks for a different category. If we consider the N.I.C.C.E.E. criteria we will find out that only some of them work, (ellipsis) and only partly. Corpus parsing also speaks against the similarity of *to* and MOD/AUX, where the former is labeled Verb.INF and the latter Verb.Modal and the three English AUX are treated separately.

Apart from the above-mentioned criteria that *to* does not follow, it has some properties that are quite unique: it appears in subordinate clauses only, it is semantically selected by certain lexical heads and it is sometimes optional without any apparent change in meaning (which manifests a lack of lexical content).

- (7) I managed to persuade her in a minute (to go to Paris alone).
- (8) I regretted to inform her about his untimely demise.
- (9) *I realized to have informed her about his untimely demise.
- (10) Jane always helps (to) wash the dishes.

The proposal of this paper is to consider all the properties the infinitival *to* has and rather than trying to fit it into an existing category or label, acknowledge its uniqueness and introduce a special category. The position needs to be lower than an I but it needs to be higher than a V and have the ability to take the external argument position of the infinitive.

The fact that the *to* infinitive has a subject, albeit mostly covert, speaks for the analysis on a higher level than just a V. The subject can become overt with the complementizer for introducing the semi-clause as both the topic and complement.

- (11) For him to do what he is saying would put the whole project in jeopardy.
- (12) They called for him to step down.

Concentrating on the syntactic properties of *to* proves to play a crucial role in uncovering related linguistic puzzles, such as *to* infinitives after causatives and verbs of perception in passive voice. Sheehan (2017) acknowledges: “that ECM complements can be passivized only where they include a T-related projection”. This is very closely connected to Wurmbrand’s (2014) covert *woll* feature which suggests a relative temporal independence of certain type of infinitives. Depending on the selecting head the infinitive can come in several sizes, the maximum phrase appears in control constructions and includes relative tense independence, passive voice, progressive and perfective aspect. It forms a bi-clausal structure.

- (13) John now regrets to have been being interrogated years ago.
 [infP Inf [PerfP Perf [ProgP Prog [voiceP Voice [VP VP]]]]]

The smallest projection that every *to* infinitive has then looks like this:

- (14) [InfP [SPEC.InfP Ø] [Inf' [Inf to [VP ...]]]]

This analysis would help in case of the semi-modals *ought to* and *be to* with the explanation resulting in a monoclausal unit. If the particle *to* was in the I position it would mean that there would be two I positions immediately adjacent within one clause, and that is not possible because each clause has exactly one IP and one I position (Chomsky 1986). Rather than that, there is only one IP and the infinitival phrase is its complement.

- (15) [IP[I][InfP [SPEC.InfP Ø] [Inf' [Inf to [VP ...]]]]]

The infinitival particle *to* is similar to a light verb *vP* (as in Chomsky 1995) in the respect that it is a verbal element with no lexical meaning, and it cannot stand on its own as it needs a lexical verb. However, it also needs some selecting item or a main clause. In both these cases the functional/grammatical meaning of *to* is significant, and it is that of an irrealis mood. This is especially apparent when the *to* infinitive appears in the position of a subject or topic in a sentence as a subordinate element.

- (16) To go there would be a mistake.

When it is a complement, however, the overall modality also depends on the selecting item as there are a few verbs and adjectives (e.g.: *happen*) that can override this irrealis (*woll*) feature.

The *to* infinitive does not fit into any of the labels or syntactic positions associated with other verbal items. It has a distinct grammatical function of an irrealis mood indicator and specific syntactic behavior of a complement, an adjunct or a subordinate clause in the function of a subject/topic, and therefore, it should have its own category.

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