

Overt subjects of infinitives and *for-to* in the history of English

Thomas McFadden — Universität Stuttgart

The distribution of *for* in Present-Day English infinitives has commonly been taken to support the theory of syntactic Case. In several contexts, *for* is obligatorily present with an overt subject (1a) and obligatorily absent without one (1b), suggesting that *for* appears to license overt subjects. However, I will argue on the basis of diachronic and comparative evidence that the alternation in 1 reflects a surface fact about PDE, not a deeper principle of grammar. The development of the *for-to* infinitive from late OE to Early Modern English militates against the idea that *for* plays a role in the licensing of overt subjects. That the particular constellation of facts we end up with in (standard) PDE suggests otherwise is essentially coincidental.

Infinitives with *for-to* begin to show up in late OE, as purpose adjuncts, but crucially without overt subjects (2). During ME, such subjectless *for-to* infinitives become extremely common, and lose the restriction to purpose semantics (see Pak, 2006, for statistics). In Late ME, overt subjects first begin to appear, but not where we might expect them. They come in front of *for* (3) or even without *for* (4). Around the same time, we also get some of the first instances of overt DPs between *for* and infinitival *to*, but with a special semantics such that *for* and the DP could be interpreted as belonging with the matrix predicate (5). Indeed, these have usually been taken to be matrix arguments controlling PRO in the infinitive, but Garrett (in press) shows that they are better analyzed as subjects of the embedded clauses. Subsequently, the semantic restriction is lost, and *for* spreads from this environment to its modern distribution.

The appearance of *for* without overt subjects is unexpected and weakens the Case-theoretic approach to its distribution. Still, such patterns are found in several modern dialects, and accounts have been offered which allow for such variation while maintaining Case theory (e.g. Henry, 1992, on Belfast English). A more serious puzzle is what licenses the overt subjects in *for*-less infinitives like 4. The attestations are too numerous to be dismissed as errors or anomalies. Using the PPCME2 (Kroch and Taylor, 1999), I have found 14 clear examples, including 8 by Chaucer alone, and no parallel examples with overt *for* in the relevant texts. One could propose a special Case-licensing mechanism for infinitives at this stage of the language – e.g. a null version of *for* or a special variety of non-finite T – but this would be pure stipulation and would undermine the attractive simplicity of the standard story relating *for* to overt subjects. The biggest problem for Case theory, however, would be to explain why such mechanisms are not available in PDE. Note crucially that the OE case system was already long dead by the time of Chaucer (Allen, 1995), so we can't attribute this to differences in the morphology.

In fact, comparative data suggest that the real anomaly is found in PDE – the co-occurrence of a 'prepositional complementizer' with overt subjects in non-finite clauses. Many languages allow overt subjects in non-ECM infinitives, with nothing like *for* or other plausible Case-licensors present. Consider e.g. AcI in Modern Irish (6a) and Latin (6b), and overt nominative subjects in Tamil adjunct infinitives (6c). To be sure, overt subjects are impossible in many non-finite clause-types cross-linguistically. I will argue, however, that explanations based on the idea that DPs require explicit licensing by Case or some equivalent mechanism are misled. I will propose instead that this be handled the other way around, in terms of explicit selection for a non-overt DP, i.e. PRO. This accounts in particular for the otherwise surprising fact that overt DPs and PRO freely alternate in a wide range of environments, crucially including all non-selected, non-finite clause-types in PDE, e.g. those in 7. I will propose that the suggestive distribution of PDE *for* is actually due to restrictions on complementizer deletion. Support for this comes from the striking parallels with *that* discussed by Pesetsky and Torrego (2001). Most notable is the fact that *for* becomes impossible when the embedded subject is *wh*-moved (the COMP-trace effect in 8) – an operation which should have no effect on its Case-licensing needs.

- (1) a. It is unpleasant *(for) John to be sick.
 b. It is unpleasant (*for) PRO to be sick.
- (2) se kyng hit dide for to hauene sibbe of se earl Angeow (Visser, 1963)
 ‘The king did it in order to have peace from the Early of Anjou.’
- (3) For it es a velany, a man for to be curyously arrayed apon his heuede with perré and
 precyous stanes (Pak, 2006)
 ‘For it is a disgrace for a man to be strangely adorned on his head with jewels and
 precious stones.’
- (4) The thridde grevance is a man to have harm in his body. (CMCTPARS,310.C1.941)
 ‘The third grievance is for a man to be bodily injured.’
- (5) for hit were shame for me to se three knyghtes on one (Garrett, to appear)
 ‘for it would be a shame for me to see three knights against one...’
- (6) a. Níl iontas é mac mí-nádúrtha a thógáil. (McCloskey, 1985)
 is-not wonder him son un-natural raise:INF
 ‘It is no wonder that he should raise an unnatural son.’
 b. Est inūsītātum rēgem reum capitis esse. (vanden Wyngaerd, 1994)
 is extraordinary king:A answerable:A head:G be
 ‘It is an extraordinary thing for a king to be tried for his life.’
 c. [rāman sītāv-ai kaṇḍu-piḍikk-a] hanumān lankai-kku po-n-ān (Sarma, 1999)
 R-N S-A see-catch-inf H-N L-D go-past-3sm
 ‘Hanuman went to Lanka [in order for Rama to find Sita].’
- (7) a. Barry/PRO having no hot sauce, we went to the store. [gerundival adjunct]
 b. For Barry/PRO to have no hot sauce was an embarrassment. [subject infinitive]
 c. Me/PRO drink hot sauce from the bottle? No way! [root bare infinitive]
- (8) a. I would prefer for you to drink the hot sauce.
 b. Who_i would you prefer (*for) t_i to drink the hot sauce?
 c. I believe that you drank the hot sauce.
 d. Who_i do you believe (*that) t_i drank the hot sauce?

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