

An Analysis of *to*-Infinitives as Clausal Subjects

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As Egan (2008: 100) notes, *to*-infinitival clauses as subjects appear to collocate with a very limited range of predicators. However, previous studies of *to*-infinitival clauses as subjects (e.g. Egan (2008), Duffley (2003)) do not explain the reason why *to*-infinitives as subjects are used with a very limited range of predicators. Therefore, the aim of this presentation is to account for this reason. In order to quote instances of *to*-infinitives as subjects, I have used the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). Most of the downloaded instances collocate with the matrix verbs *be*, *require*, *mean* as in (1). So why are *to*-infinitives as subjects used with very limited predicators? Sasaki (2018) claims that a *to*-infinitive like the one in (2) refers to a virtual event, but the virtual event corresponds to a certain future actual event and implicates a future event. This study also considers *to*-infinitives to be a type of virtual events. However, I claim that *to*-infinitives as subjects refer to a general event. For one thing, Langacker (2008: 438) claims that a *to*-infinitival clause “describes an event only in generalized fashion.” Additionally, a clausal subject is autonomous vis-à-vis the verb (cf. Langacker (1987: 236)) and is semantically less affected by the verb, as compared to the direct object in particular. It follows therefore that *to*-infinitives as subjects retain their generality, which is based on “virtuality” (Langacker (1999)), contrary to the case of *to*-infinitives as objects which are semantically affected by the matrix verb and often lose their generality as in (2).

- (1) a. *To walk* 26 miles is a very difficult goal to achieve.
b. *To achieve* this will require concessions on the part of both sides.
c. ...and *to love* nature means that you accept its force. (COCA)
- (2) He intends/wants to achieve the goal.

Therefore, the *to*-infinitives in (1), which function as a clausal subject, retain their generality and refer to a virtual event; the *to*-infinitival clause in (1b) might seem to imply a future orientation, but it still retains its generality, as compared to the *to*-infinitival clause in (2). It is therefore valid to claim that a verb takes a *to*-infinitive as the subject only when it is compatible with a *to*-infinitive functioning as a clausal subject that refers to a general event. For example, in (1a), the verb *be* connects the general event designated by the *to*-infinitival clause with the general judgment, i.e. *a very difficult goal*. Also, in (1b), *require* expresses what is necessary to bring about the general event designated by the *to*-infinitival clause, and in (1c), *mean* defines what loving nature in general means. However, such verbs are very limited. For example, because *to*-infinitives as subjects describe an event only in generalized fashion and their trajector is not specific, they are not appropriate for the clausal subject of *intend* and *want*, which expect their clausal subject to specify the one who entertains the volition, as in (2). This presentation will show the data from COCA in more detail, and specify why *to*-infinitives as subjects collocate with a very limited range of predicators.

References

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