

Bettelou Los, *The rise of the to-infinitive*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. Pp. xvi + 335.

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This book, which describes the emergence and spread of the *to*-infinitive in Old and Middle English, is a welcome addition to previous studies dealing with the history of English complementation patterns. The theoretical framework adopted is Government and Binding Theory, with some excursions into the Minimalist Program. Bettelou Los claims (22) that the exposition does not assume an up-to-date knowledge of generative theory, as she has tried to keep the material presented accessible to a wider audience. However, this is true only of the data-oriented chapters in parts II and III, as opposed to the more theory-dependent chapters in parts IV and V, some of which may prove difficult for readers not familiar with generative grammar, especially as many of the Minimalist concepts are not explained at the outset.

The book is based on Los's doctoral dissertation and a series of articles published between 1998 and 2003. It consists of six parts divided into eleven chapters. The introduction in chapter 1 (so titled) expounds the main changes concerning the infinitive in Old and Middle English, namely (i) the massive increase in the frequency of the *to*-infinitive in Middle English (ME), with the bare infinitive restricted more and more to relatively few contexts, and (ii) the rise of new structural types in ME, such as passive *to*-infinitives or so-called Exceptional Case-Marking (ECM) constructions (as in *They believe John to be a liar*). The traditional view has tended to interpret (i) in terms of a gradual encroachment of the *to*-infinitive upon the domain of the bare infinitive, while the changes in (ii) have been linked by Lightfoot (1979) and later generative studies to a change in the categorial status of the OE infinitive from noun to verb. Los's aim is to check whether these assumptions can be confirmed or not in the light of the evidence retrieved from a large collection of Old and Middle English electronic corpora.

Chapters 2–6 investigate the distribution of bare and *to*-infinitives in OE. It has often been claimed that the *to*-infinitive first started to replace the bare infinitive as a purpose adjunct, but chapter 2, 'The expression of purpose in Old English', convincingly shows, *contra* Callaway (1913) and others, that by the time of the earliest OE records, the bare infinitive was no longer used to express purpose, except in slavish translations from Latin and in a few idiomatic expressions. Los further shows that in OE the *to*-infinitive occurs as an argument in basically the same constructions as in present-day English (PDE) and is in direct competition with the bare infinitive only after a subset of intention verbs, such as *fon* 'attempt' or *wenan* 'hope, expect', and a few verbs of commanding and permitting, such

as *bebeodan* ‘command’ or *biddan* ‘ask’. It thus follows that the increase in *to*-infinitives from late OE onwards may have taken place not just at the expense of the bare infinitive, as has often been claimed, but also of some other structure.

Los’s detailed investigation reveals that the structure in question is the subjunctive *that*-clause. *That*-clauses matched the distribution of the *to*-infinitive, as both occur as purpose adjuncts and as arguments of (i) monotransitive subject control verbs with meanings like ‘intend’ or ‘try’; (ii) ditransitive object control verbs of persuading, urging, commanding and permitting; and (iii) ditransitive subject control verbs with meanings like ‘promise’. Competition between both types of clause can be observed already in late OE. Comparing the numbers of *to*-infinitives and subjunctives in the same syntactic environments in several corpora of OE and early ME allows Los to show that the subjunctive clause in all its functions is replaced by the *to*-infinitive in the transition from OE to ME, contrary to the traditional view that the increase in *to*-infinitives occurred at the expense of the bare infinitive. However, Los grants that it seems likely that ‘the massive increase in *to*-infinitives in e[arly]ME that resulted from the competition with the finite clause is bound to have affected the position of the bare infinitive’ (298) in late ME, but as her investigation stops at 1350 this is an issue left to future research.

Chapter 7, ‘The category of the *to*-infinitive’, discusses the categorial status of the *to*-infinitive in OE. Los concurs with Mitchell (1985) and all OE specialists in the view that the OE infinitive is not a noun but a verb, since it lacks such typically nominal characteristics as the ability to govern a genitive object or be preceded by a preposition other than *to*. Lightfoot’s (1979) assumption that the OE infinitive is still a noun is therefore incorrect. With regard to the status of the *to*-infinitive clause itself, Los argues that it is a Complementizer Phrase (CP), on the basis of evidence such as its obligatory clause-final position, which in OE is characteristic of full-blown CPs, or the fact, already mentioned above, that it had entered into competition with the finite subjunctive clause and was ousting it in a number of environments. From this Los concludes that the *to*-infinitive must have been reanalyzed by OE speakers as a non-finite subjunctive.

Chapter 8, ‘The changing status of infinitival *to*’, explores the implications of the analysis of the *to*-infinitive as a subjunctive equivalent. Following Pullum’s (1982) account of PDE infinitival *to* as a non-finite modal, Los proposes to check infinitival *to*, the inflectional subjunctive and the modal verbs in OE and PDE in the same functional projection (namely, Tense (T)), as this captures the fact that they all express similar functional information. In other words, the position of infinitival *to* has not changed throughout the recorded history of English: ‘it heads the projection that hosts the subjunctive ending in OE and the modal verbs in ME’ (233).

Los further argues that in OE, *to* behaved largely as ‘a clitic or even a bound morpheme’ (230), since no material could intervene between *to* and the infinitive, and *to* could not be dropped from the second or subsequent conjuncts in a sequence of coordinated *to*-infinitives. From ME onward, second conjuncts appear freely without *to*, and split infinitives (for example, Wyclif, *Matthew* 5, 34: *Y say to you, to nat swere* ‘I say to you, do not swear’) become possible, thus suggesting that *to* has degrammaticalized and is no longer a clitic or prefix but a free word. Degrammaticalization changes are generally considered to be ‘unnatural’ and hence very uncommon, but Los accounts for the degrammaticalization of infinitival *to* by linking its development from OE to ME to that of the inflectional subjunctive. The hypothesis is that the change in the morphological status of infinitival *to* from clitic to free morpheme

was triggered by the behaviour of the finite counterpart of infinitival *to*: the finite subjunctive, which was increasingly coming to be expressed by a free form (a modal verb) raising to T⁰ overtly, rather than by a bound form (a subjunctive ending), raising to T⁰ covertly. The overt movement of *to*, then, would bring it in line with the rest of its paradigm: the modal verbs. (230)

Chapters 9 and 10, entitled ‘The rise of *to*-infinitival ECM’ and ‘Innocent bystander: the loss of the indefinite pronoun *man*’, respectively, examine two apparently unrelated developments that took place in ME, namely the emergence in the fifteenth century of the *to*-infinitival ECM-construction after verbs of thinking and declaring, and the loss of the indefinite pronoun *man* ‘one’. Concerning the ECM-construction, Los acknowledges the traditional view (Warner 1982) that verbs like *believe* came to allow *to*-infinitives under Latin influence, but suggests that the introduction of the new construction was also promoted by the loss of verb second (V2). OE is a V2 language, but V2 is gradually lost in the ME period, and this process had consequences for the organization of Theme/Rheme material (that is, of given versus new information). The ECM-construction after *believe*-verbs – which in both ME and PDE is almost invariably passive (as in *Many of these actors are assumed to be Americans*) and has the infinitival subject functioning as unmarked (given) Theme – became acceptable for this reason, that is, English needed new strategies to move noun phrases (NPs) containing given information into subject position. A similar explanation is proposed in chapter 10 for the decline of the ultra-indefinite pronoun *man* ‘one’, whose main role had been to provide a contentless subject functionally equivalent to a passive. With the changes in information structure resulting from the loss of V2 and the generalization of subject-verb order, subject NPs became an important device to maintain textual cohesion. *Man* was too contentless to play this

role, and English preferred the use of impersonal (agentless) passives, which increasingly took over the function of *man* in many clauses. The book ends with chapter 11, in which Los provides a ‘Summary and conclusions’.

Los’s book is rich in empirical facts and provides an in-depth analysis of important aspects of OE and ME syntax – two features that make it a valuable addition to the personal library of anyone interested in the history of English. Some objections could be raised, though. The first objection concerns Los’s views on the way in which the infinitive, originally a nominalization of a verb, was recategorized from N to V in prehistoric times. She envisages (18–19, 192ff., 299) a scenario where the nominalizing suffix on the *to*-infinitive (represented by *-enne* in recorded OE)

competed so successfully with the other nominalizing suffixes that it eventually accepted any V-stem as input. From this point on, learners analysed it as inflectional rather than derivational morphology and hence no longer category-changing ... The recategorization, then, may well have been abrupt rather than the long-drawn-out process it is usually thought to be. (18f.)

This is all highly implausible: verbal and nominal categories are distinguished on the basis of properties such as the type of object they each govern (in OE, accusative phrases in the case of verbs, genitive phrases in the case of nouns), so that speakers will not start reanalyzing deverbal nouns as verbs simply because they happen to contain a very productive suffix. Changes in word class do not take place overnight (Haspelmath 1998: 327ff., 1999: 1045), and Los could have paid more attention to the evidence afforded by other well-known categorial changes, such as the development in relatively recent times of the English gerund from a noun of action into a part of the verb system.

With regard to the organization of the book, parts II, ‘The *to*-infinitive as GOAL’, and III, ‘The *to*-infinitive as THEME’, should have been conflated and given a more appropriate title, such as ‘The distribution of the *to*-infinitive in OE’. This would have been the logical place for the sections dealing with the competition between *that*-clauses and *to*-infinitives, which now appear in part IV, ‘Syntactic status’. Finally, there are quite a few typos, stylistic errors and disconnected sentence fragments. For instance, in the very first paragraph of the conclusions, we not only find a misspelling of ‘preposition’, but there appear to be one or two lines missing altogether:

[a]lthough the rise of the *to*-infinitive ... is an instance of grammaticalization, ... a close examination of extant OE texts clearly shows that this process was already completed at the earliest recorded stage. *To* must have [?] as is also strongly suggested by the

homophony of infinitival *to* and the proposition *to* but it has already developed into an infinitival marker in OE. (297)

Moreover, the examples (2a-c) in chapter 2, which all date back to the nineteenth century, cannot be said to illustrate usage in early Modern English (1500-1700). Table 2 in appendix 2 contains several errors and provides information that does not coincide with the information given earlier in the volume (75ff.) for the same set of verbs. Closer attention to bibliographical detail would also have been desirable: the reference to Jespersen 1927 (6) is not documented in the list of references, and the correct title of Jespersen 1940 is *A modern English grammar on historical principles*, not *A modern English grammar* (324). Finally, the volume would have benefited from a more detailed subject index than the two pages provided and should have included a name index and an index of verbs and their occurrences.

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