

On the Structure of *for-to* and *for-less* Infinitives

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1 Introduction

The present paper is a brief critical review of the treatment of nonfinite complements in Huddleston and Pullum 2002 (henceforth: HP¹). Two outstanding features make HP a superior comprehensive grammar of English. One is its remarkable clarity of expression. Even more importantly, HP is truly exceptional in that it breaks with the long tradition of “description without argumentation.” Even though the goal of HP is “to describe the grammatical principles of Present-day English rather than to defend or illustrate a theory of grammar,” (p. 18) the authors make it clear that it is impossible to describe English without a theory of grammar because “to bring together the principles that all sentences conform to ... means developing a theory” (p. 19). As developing a theory naturally involves careful argumentation, it is only to be celebrated that “a significant amount of space is devoted here to arguing carefully that a particular analysis we have decided to adopt, within the framework of the theory we assume, is the right analysis” (p. 19). In what follows we will discuss some of HP’s central arguments for their analysis of English nonfinites.

2 The presence of *for*—begging the question

HP claim that “*to*-infinitivals with overt subject require the subordinator *for*” (p. 1178). The claim is repeated in a slightly different form, saying that “*to*-infinitivals containing a subject are always introduced by the subordinator *for*” (ibid.), which is incidentally more accurate, since HP do not recognize non-overt subjects in infinitives, therefore the adjective “overt” is redundant, and misleading, in the first stylistic variant of the claim. So, infinitives that are sometimes characterized as apparently subjectless in grammar are analyzed as truly subjectless in HP.

HP would like to argue that an NP and a following nonfinite VP constitute what they call a clause (equivalent in conventional generative terminology to a sentence) if and only if the NP + VP sequence is introduced by the complementizer *for*, otherwise such an NP is in construction with the matrix verb, and is not the subject of the infinitive. For example,

- (1) I arranged for John to meet my sister.

¹ For convenience, with plural subject–verb agreement *HP* denotes the authors; otherwise it always refers to the work.

and

- (2) I wanted John to meet my sister.

are assigned different structural representations. The string *John to meet my sister* is analyzed as a clause in (1), with *John* as subject, but not in (2). In the latter, *John* is claimed to be the object of *want*.

Unusually, the nonfinite VP which has no subject associated with it in (2) is still recognized as a clause—one without a subject. HP assume that subjects are not obligatory constituents of sentence structure in what they call “specific non-canonical constructions such as non-finites and imperatives” (p. 238). Technically, this amounts to saying that the Extended Projection Principle (cf. Chomsky 1981 and 1982) is assumed for most “canonical” finite clauses, but the requirement that sentences have subjects is suspended for nonfinites. The apparently unjustified exception that this rather unusual combination of assumptions makes for nonfinites has far too many peculiar consequences for us to discuss in any detail here. Perhaps it will suffice to point to two that seem most directly relevant. One is strange, the other is truly absurd, though partly hypothetical.

An odd, though expected, consequence of the general claim that nonfinites are clauses in conjunction with the assumption that subjects are not obligatory constituents of infinitives is that sentences like

- (3) She may like it.

are biclausal, [like it] being a (subjectless) clausal complement on *may* (cf. HP, p. 215). If this is combined with the standard assumption, apparently not adopted by HP, that modal auxiliaries, tense inflections, and infinitival *to* are of the same syntactic category (I for *Inflection*), then the absurd conclusion follows that even the simplest English sentences like

- (4) John drinks coffee.

are in fact biclausal, finite *-s* taking the subjectless clausal complement *drink coffee*.

A further general consequence directly jeopardizes some of the essential categorial and structural assumptions in syntax. Note that on the standard assumption that tense inflections and modals fall together in one category, we no longer have “finite VPs”, since all VPs are “nonfinite.” More accurately, the finite–nonfinite distinction simply no longer applies to VPs. The \pm Finite feature will be associated with I, the head of the sentence (in HP’s terminology, the clause), leaving all VPs “unmarked” for finiteness, as it no longer applies to them. The general consequence of this combination of assumptions is that the categories VP and “clause” fall together, since, the presence of a subject no

longer a requirement of the latter, the two become completely indistinguishable from each other. Therefore, HP are forced not to adopt the standard assumption that tense inflections, modals, and infinitival *to* are all realizations of the category I, otherwise syntax collapses. We shall not pursue these general issues any further here. Our immediate goals are (a) to determine the adequacy of HP's account of the empirical facts and, more importantly, (b) to evaluate the consistency or otherwise of the assumptions and the validity of arguments on which the account rests. Whatever the conclusions of that analysis, they will be directly relevant for the assumption about the exceptional non-obligatoriness of subjects in nonfinite clauses. The assumption will be either justified or refuted, depending on the adequacy or otherwise of the account it is intended to support.

A general claim HP make is that all nonfinites are clauses—as noted above, some with, some others without a subject, as in the following examples.

- (5) a. They arranged for the performance to begin at six.
 b. They expected the performance to begin at six.
 c. They intended (for) the performance to begin at six.

HP observe that “*for* is required after *arrange*, excluded after *expect*, and optional after *intend*” (1179). The absence of the complementizer *for* in the *expect*-sentence is taken by HP as evidence that “the infinitival clause has no subject” and that the post-verbal NP *the performance* is not the subject of the infinitival clause but the object of the matrix verb (1179). HP also claim that (5c) has two different structures depending on the presence vs. absence of the complementizer—when the complementizer is present, the nonfinite complement has a subject (*the performance*), when it is absent, it does not, and then the NP *the performance* is the object of the matrix verb, not the subject of the infinitive.

Clearly, the presence or absence of the complementizer *for* is considered crucial by HP in determining the constituent membership of the post-verbal NP. Interestingly, the same condition is not taken to be decisive about the category of the infinitive—it is assumed to be a clause, even when it contains neither a subject nor a complementizer, both otherwise standard constituents of clause structure, as in (5a). It is interesting to point, in passing, to a conclusion HP do not draw from the absence of a complementizer in (5b)—they do not conclude that *expect* has no nonfinite clause complement in (5b). The conclusion that is thus forced upon HP, though not discussed in any detail at all, is that *expect* in (5b) takes two separate complements—an NP, which is its object, and a nonfinite clause, which contains no subject. The syntactic relation of this subjectless nonfinite clause complement to the matrix verb remains obscure. Similar conclusions follow for the structure of the *intend*-sentence(s). When *for* is present, *intend* takes a single complement—an infinitival clause that has a subject and is introduced by a complementizer. When *for* is absent, the same verb takes two complements—an NP object and a subjectless nonfinite clause. Among other things, this raises some well-known general issues in connection

with the semantic interpretation of nonfinites, which we shall not discuss here (for a detailed discussion see Czeglédi to appear).

To summarize, before we move on, two conclusions are drawn by HP from the occurrence or otherwise of the complementizer *for*. From the presence of *for* HP infer that the post-verbal NP is the subject of the infinitival clause. From the absence of *for* HP infer that the post-verbal NP is not in construction with the infinitive, although the infinitival VP still constitutes a (subjectless) clause.

Setting aside the circularity of the argument for the moment, a missing premise is still required for the first conclusion to follow. The missing premise is that only clauses are introduced by complementizers. This premise is required because without this assumption nothing at all can be directly inferred about the syntactic category of the string of words following the complementizer *for* in (5a) and (5c), or about the constituent membership of the post-verbal NP. It is only with this required assumption, apparently rejected by HP, that one can infer that the material following *for* is a clause. If this is not assumed, the argument does not go through. We return to an additional problem with this argument directly, but let us first consider the second conclusion HP would like to draw.

The second conclusion HP (incorrectly) draw is this: When the complementizer *for* is not present, it is evidence that the post-verbal NP is not in construction with the infinitive. Notice, incidentally, that this conclusion remains invalid even if the missing premise mentioned above is adopted. The necessary, albeit false, assumption for this conclusion to follow is that a (non-null) complementizer is obligatory in clauses with lexical subjects.² Without that premise, apparently also rejected by HP, nothing at all can be inferred from the absence of *for* about the constituent membership of an NP followed by an infinitive. Crucially, two things do not follow from the absence of *for*, unless its obligatoriness is incorrectly assumed. Its absence does not entail that the NP VP sequence is not a clause, nor does it follow that the NP is not the subject of the nonfinite clause. As is well known, complementizers are in general optional elements of clause structure.³ Therefore nothing is entailed by their absence.

Let us now return to a final problem with the arguments that center around the presence of *for*. It has to do with the category of *for* in the examples under discussion. HP assume that it is a complementizer. Notice, however, that this assumption is absolutely without any justification, unless it is independently shown that the structure of the material following *for* is sentential. If, for example, it is not shown without any reference to *for* that *the performance to begin at six* is a clause in (5a), then there is no justification at all for taking *for* to be a complementizer, rather than a preposition. The only way to derive the non-prepositional status of *for* in such examples is by jointly assuming that only

² Note that a weakened version of this assumption will not do (cf. p. 1179), because to stipulate that the complementizer is obligatory only in infinitival clauses (with non-null subjects) would only add to the exceptionality of the structure of infinitives, with very little left for a syntactic theory to explain about it.

³ To make things worse for the argument, gerundial clauses never contain a complementizer, a serious problem for the theory, to which we shall return briefly in section 4.

clauses may be introduced by a complementizer and that the material following *for* is a clause. The latter, however, must be demonstrated independently.

Note in this connection that, regardless of whether the clausal structure of the material following *for* is assumed or demonstrated, the argument based on the presence of *for* remains circular. It is because if you assume (or demonstrate) that verbal structures following *for* are clauses, you cannot derive this same assumption as a conclusion from the presence of *for* without circularity. Fatally for the argument, it involves jointly assuming that *for* is a complementizer (because otherwise it does not follow that the material that follows it is a clause) and that the material following this *for* is a clause (because otherwise it does not follow that the *for* that precedes that material is a complementizer). Clearly, such a pair of assumptions will yield neither of them as a conclusion without circularity. It is also clear that the circularity of this argument alone is sufficient to render invalid the argument based on the absence of *for*, since the latter is derivative on the former.

Finally, note a counterfactual prediction HP's theory makes. It is claimed that *for* is excluded in *expect*-sentences like (5b). This incorrectly predicts that we do not have sentences like

- (6) For the performance to begin at six was expected.

It is instructive that HP seem to feel the need to present "several pieces of evidence showing that [the post-verbal NP in *for-less* examples like (5b) above] syntactically belongs in the matrix clause" and that the NP and the nonfinite VP "do not combine to form a single constituent (a clause) but are separate complements of *expect*" (p. 1179). We now turn to the evidence HP present.

3 Passivization

Consider HP's data first (HP's [24i, ii, iii] respectively, p. 1179):

- (7) a. It was arranged for the performance to begin at six.
 b. *It was expected the performance to begin at six.
 c. The performance was expected to begin at six.

HP take the contrast between (7a) and (7b) in conjunction with the absence of *for* in the latter to be evidence that the post-verbal NP *the performance* does not form a constituent (a clause) with the nonfinite VP that follows it in (5b). The argument is that (7b), which involves extraposition of a clausal subject without a complementizer, is ungrammatical because the material extraposed is not a clause, since it is not introduced by *for*.

First, note that the in-situ counterpart of (7b) is equally ungrammatical:

- (8) *The performance to begin at six was expected.

Second, note that with the complementizer added, the sentence becomes immaculate, cf. (6) above.

Finally, observe the following contrasts:

- (9) a. That John will come is likely/expected.
 b. It is likely/expected that John will come.
- (10) a. *John will come is likely/expected.
 b. *It is likely/expected John will come.

Assuming, quite obviously, that *John will come* is a sentence in (9)–(10), two important conclusions may be drawn from the contrast between them. First, the clausehood of the matrix subject (*that [John will come]*) is totally independent of the presence or absence of a complementizer, with or without extraposition. Second, regardless of whether or not the subject clause is extraposed, the complementizer is obligatory, as it always is in subject clauses. Similar conclusions can be drawn from the contrast between (6) and (7b). What the ungrammaticality of the latter shows is not that the string *the performance to begin at six* is not a clause in (5b), (7b), and (8), contrary to what HP would like to derive, but that a complementizer is obligatory in infinitival subject clauses with a lexical subject.

Now consider the following contrast.

- (11) a. They wanted the performance to begin at six.
 b. *The performance was wanted to begin at six.

HP correctly observe that “passivisation doesn’t provide a necessary condition for objects”, and, therefore, they conclude, incorrectly, that (5b) and (11a) must be assigned the same structure, in which the post-verbal NP is the object of the matrix verb, the residue of the complement being a subjectless infinitival clause (p. 1179). Part of the argument is that the contrast between (7c) and (11b) is not, in itself, conclusive evidence that they have different structures. This is correct. But notice that this alone is absolutely no evidence that they have the same structure, as HP would like to assume. If there is independent evidence either way, it cannot be ignored. The relevant facts, curiously ignored by HP, are represented by the following examples.

- (12) a. They arranged for the students to attend the lecture.
 b. They arranged for the lecture to be attended by the students.
 c. *They arranged the lecture to be attended by the students.
 d. *They arranged the students to attend the lecture.
- (13) a. They expected the students to attend the lecture.
 b. They expected the lecture to be attended by the students.

- (14) a. They intended (for) the students to attend the lecture.
 b. They intended for the lecture to be attended by the students.
 c. They intended the lecture to be attended by the students.
- (15) a. They wanted (for) the students to attend the lecture.
 b. They wanted for the lecture to be attended by the students.
 c. They wanted the lecture to be attended by the students.

Several structural properties are clear from these examples. One is that the post-verbal NP and the nonfinite VP that follows it can be freely passivized (with two irrelevant exceptions, to which we will return directly). This is strong evidence that the NP and the infinitive that follows it form a clausal constituent in all of them, contrary to HP's ill-derived conclusion. Secondly, it is also clear from the examples in (12), (14), and (23) that the passivizability of the material following the matrix verb is independent of the presence or absence of the complementizer *for*. In structures where *for* is optional, passivization is possible either with or without it, cf. (14) and (23). Where *for* is obligatory, both the active and the passive *for-less* structures are ungrammatical, cf. (12). This clearly shows that the presence or absence of *for* is totally independent of the clausehood or otherwise of the material that follows it. It may be required, as in (12), it may be optional, as in (14) and (23), or it may be forbidden, as in (13), but this has nothing to do with the category or constituent structure of NP *to*-VP sequences. It is required, optional, or forbidden for independent reasons. Therefore, crucially, its absence is no evidence at all for the non-clausehood of the post-verbal NP *to*-VP sequence. It is puzzling that in the relevant context HP make no reference to data of the kind just discussed, though similar facts and their parallelism with passive finite clauses are not only observed but taken as evidence for constituent structure elsewhere (cf. p. 1183).

HP (incorrectly) assign the same structure to *want*-sentences like (15) and *expect*-sentences like (13a) or (5b). They also claim that the latter have the same structure as *persuade*-sentences like

- (16) a. They persuaded the students to attend the lecture.
 b. *They persuaded the lecture to be attended by the students.

As the contrast between (13b) and (16b) clearly shows, that is not correct. HP's general conclusion is that "there is no construction where the sequence NP + *to*-infinitival, with no preceding *for*, behaves as a subordinate clause, a single constituent" (1181). As we have seen, this conclusion is quite clearly both invalid and false.

4 Cases overlooked

HP seem to have overlooked some important empirical facts, including, interestingly, some cases they otherwise discuss. One of these is *there*-infinitives in sentences like

- (17) It's essential for there to be no misunderstanding on this point. (p. 1183)
- (18) I intended there to be more time for discussion. (p. 1232)
- (19) We mustn't allow there to be any repetition of this behaviour. (p. 1234)

(17) is quoted as evidence that, because “NPs following *for* [in such sentences] are the same as those which occur as subject of finite main clauses,” including, importantly, “dummy *there*,” which “occurs freely here,” *for* must be analyzed as a complementizer (pp. 1182–83). This is correct. In a slightly simplified paraphrase, the argument is that if the presence of *there* is treated as independent evidence that *there to be no misunderstanding on this point* is a clause in (17), then the *for* that introduces it must be a complementizer. What does this argument tell us about the constituent structure of infinitives and the category of *for* that may introduce them? Before drawing the fairly obvious conclusion, consider some important empirical facts that HP overlook. Clauses like the one just discussed occur freely as complements without *for*, as the following examples, as well as (18) and (19) above, show.

- (20) They expect there to be no misunderstanding on this point.
- (21) They want there to be no misunderstanding on this point.

As the argument suggests, and as these *for*-less data show, the clausehood (or otherwise) of infinitives is independent of the presence of *for*. In addition, the argument quite clearly, and correctly, implies that for us to conclude anything about the category of *for* in sentences like (17) and, in general, in sentences where *for* introduces infinitives, we must first establish the constituent structure and category of the material that follows it. Therefore, any attempt to reverse the argument by inferring anything about the constituent structure of infinitives from the presence or absence of *for* leads to the kind of circularity we discussed in detail in section 2.

A possible reason why HP apparently ignore the circularity of the arguments centering around the presence or absence of *for* in infinitival complements might be the insufficient amount of attention paid to infinitives (and gerunds) with expletive subjects. As is well known, pleonastic *there* is obligatory in the infinitives above, as well as in gerunds and finite clauses of

essentially the same structure, which is the chief motivation for the general requirement that sentences must have subjects (first proposed in Chomsky 1981 and later identified as the Extended Projection Principle in Chomsky 1982). This requirement is not adopted by HP, who assume instead that nonfinite clauses may occur with or without a subject, as already noted. Beyond the superficial appearance of some apparently subjectless infinitives and gerunds, this assumption remains without any motivation. Worse still, it is in conflict with the fact that pleonastic *there* is obligatory in the infinitives discussed above.

In addition to the resulting descriptive inadequacies and inconsistencies we have noted, which are more or less directly related to this unmotivated (but forced) assumption HP adopt, we finally note a problem the assumption creates for the analysis of gerunds. If, in absence of the requirement that sentences have subjects, the central argument in the analysis of nonfinites is that an NP preceding a nonfinite VP is a constituent of the matrix clause unless it is preceded by a complementizer, the analysis of gerunds in sentences like

(22) I don't mind / hate / resent / saw / caught you drinking beer.

becomes extremely troublesome, as gerunds, with or without a lexical subject, are never introduced by a complementizer.

Since arguments based on the presence or absence of *for*, considered decisive in determining the structural position of post-verbal NPs in infinitives, are inapplicable in the analysis of gerunds, whatever problems their structural analysis presents must be resolved differently. Indeed, HP turn to a different set of empirical facts and regard some familiar facts differently in their analysis of gerunds, which renders the argumentation partially inconsistent. For example, the possibility or otherwise of passivization around the matrix verb or/and in the complement, largely ignored in the analysis of infinitives, is taken as evidence of constituent structure in the treatment of gerunds. In the analysis of infinitival complements on *want* in sentences like (23a), for instance,

- (23) a. They wanted the students to attend the lecture.
 b. They wanted the lecture to be attended by the students.
 c. *The students were wanted by them to attend the lecture.

the availability of the embedded passive in (23b) and the non-existence of the matrix passive in (23c) are dismissed as irrelevant to the problem of whether the NP *the students* is the object of the matrix verb or the subject of the embedded sentence in (23a). On the other hand, in the analysis of gerunds, the existence of (24b) with a passive clause complement,

- (24) a. I resented Kim mistreating my cat.
 b. I resented my cat being mistreated by Kim.
 c. *Kim was resented mistreating my cat.

the non-existence of the matrix passive in (24c), and the fact that (24ab) are synonyms are quoted as “the familiar kind of evidence” that supports the structural analysis, as well as semantic interpretation, on which the post-verbal NP *Kim* is the subject of the complement clause rather than the object of the matrix verb in (24a) (cf. pp. 1204–05). Clearly, no part of the facts represented in (23–24) may be ignored in a consistent account of the structure of English infinitives and gerunds.

5 “A shoulder on which for you to weep”

Before we conclude, it is appropriate to make a final brief note of a descriptive point in connection with nonfinite relative clauses and the way they are treated in HP. Apparently because it is incorrectly assumed that infinitival relative clauses never contain *for*, HP claim that they “cannot contain an overt subject” (1264). This is factually not correct, as the expression chosen for the title of this section and some more examples below demonstrate.

- (25) As Smither has no record on this issue on which for you to squeal like a spoiled child pointing a finger...
- (26) a permanent and invariable general basis on which for you to act in future
- (27) something for writers to reflect on
- (28) It will make our community a safer and healthier place in which for us to live, and a more conducive environment for college students to learn.
- (29) That is a useful point at which for us to conclude.

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