

Masahiko Kanno: Syntax of the Infinitive in J. Gower's *Confessio Amantis* II

The Infinitive as Subject (The Predicate is either noun or adjective)

Briefly we have surveyed the infinitives as subject of nouns and adjectives in the previous paper.¹ In this section we will attempt to classify the infinitives as subject from the point of the forms. According to Jespersen's explanation, in the OE poetry there is no example of the to-infinitive as subject or as object.²

I. The infinitive as subject: The predicate is adjective.

i. The cases where we can not decide clearly whether the infinitive is dependent upon the adjective or not.

it is ful **hard to fiede**; (v, 2009)

It is riht **esi to comaunde**; (viii, 2159)

In the first instance as in the other we may read 'it (=to fiede) is ful hard', or 'it is ful hard to fiede' (the pause is being placed after 'it is').

ii. Omission of 'it'.

Also thei sein, **good is to save** (Prol. 470)

And natheles **good is to hier**e Such thing wherof a man lere (i, 453)

And over this **good is to wite**, (i, 3387)

Good is to be wel war therbi, (iv, 1462)

Upon the cause as I schal telle, Wherof **good is to taken** hiede. (vi, 564)

In the examples above, we have some uncertainty about the force of dependence of the infinitives on the adjectives. The formal reading is, in the example (i, 453), 'to hier... is good', while we have other reading, 'it (=for a noun-subject supplied from the context, in this example 'such thing') is good to hier'. Anyhow from the above quoted instances we may draw the conclusion that the expression 'good is to-infinitive' is idiomatic.

iii. The following examples are met with in Gower.

For good consail is **good to hier**e. (Prol. 156)

bot on the weie What hem befell is **long to seie**; (v, 3301)

Such love is **goodly forto have**, (viii, 3165)

In the above instances, as we have just examined, it is not always easy to decide whether the infinitive is dependent upon the adjective or it is the subject of that.

iv. In the following examples the infinitive is clearly the subject of the adjective. The adjective 'good' is denoting judgement rather than emotion, which is different from those in the above examples.

it was nocht **good To se** so mochel mannes blod (ii, 3283)

1 See *The Annual Proceedings of Gifu College of Pharmacy* (No.15, 1965) 54pp.

2 Jespersen, O. *A Modern English Grammar* V. 11. 1(2).

v. The cases where the infinitive is not placed in extaposition.

By this ensample a king mai lere That **forto yive** is in manere: (vii, 2131)

To love is every herte **fre**, (i, 752)

And whan that he the sothe wot, **To telle** his sorwe is **endeles**, (ii, 2756)

To telle of him is **endeles**, Bot this I seie natheles, (v, 4897)

vi. We can find only one example in which the infinitive without **to** is used as subject in Gower.

Strong thing it is to soffre wrong,

And **suffre** schame is more strong, Bot we have suffred bothe tuo; (v, 7377)

In this instance we may regard '**suffre**' in the second line as a disguised simple infinitive if we think that the force of '**to**' in the first line is slurred over the verb in the next line.

vii. The expression 'it is good+Accusative with Infinitive' is rare except for the impersonal construction. From the following examples we can draw a fact the when the noun or pronoun is used as subject of the infinitive, the infinitive is likely to become a simple infinitive. Such a phenomenon may be partly explained as a poetic licence, i. e. the limitation caused by the form 'octosyllabic couplet.'

For it is good **ye take kepe** Upon a thing which is me told. (ii, 1660)

Hou it is good **a king eschuie** The lust of vice and vertu **suie**. (vii, 5305)

viii. In the following example it is very doubtful to decide that 'for+noun' is the subject of the infinitive, the 'for' being as well considered qualifying the preceding adjective.

So that thensample of this histoire Is good **for every king to holde**; (vii, 3790)

Forthi this love in special Is good **for every man to holde**, (viii, 3106)*

So mai a man the sothe wite and knowe, That pes is good **for every king to have**:
(Praise. 288)

II. The Infinitive as Subject of Predicate Nouns.

The infinitive as subject of predicate nouns is classified as well as the infinitive as subject of predicate adjectives. Here we are going to investigate what kind of nouns are used as predicates. In the instances of adjective as predicate we can not classify in the same way, because the adjectives used as predicate are only **good, esi, hard**, etc.

gret deit **To sen** it was **a gret delit** The joie that the cite made; (vi, 1836)

entente And tolden it was **here entente To duellen** under his servise. (v, 2094)

sori lust It is **a sori lust to lyke**, (vii, 4461)

houndes kinde For as it is **an houndes kinde To berke** upon a man behinde, (ii, 1795)

gret mervaile That hem **to se** was **gret mervaile**: (v, 7248)

of mannes miht For it was nevere **of mannes miht** The Flees of gold **so forto winne**; (v, 3770)

nede It were thanne litel **nede** Among the men **to taken hiede** Of that thei hieren
Pseudo telle, (v, 1877)

ydel peine it were **an ydel peine To lerne** a thing which mai noght be. (iv, 2678)

pite	A tale of gret ensample I finde, Wherof it is pite to wite In the manere as it is write. (iv, 728)
gret pite	it was a gret pite To se so lusti on as sche Be coupled with so lourde a wiht: (v, 655)
schame	and take in mynde What schame it is to ben unkinde; (v, 5159) It is no schame of such a thew A yong man to be dronkelew. (vi, 105) it is schame forto hierre . (vii, 4343)
reson	So were it reson forto schewe The peril, er we falle thrinne: (v, 7344)
gret reson	What thing it liketh god to have It is gret reson to ben his; (v, 4264)
kinges riht	Bot evere it was a kinges riht To do the dedes of knyht; (vii, 3849)
gret routhe	Which is gret routhe forto hierre . (viii, 592)
sorwe	And thanne he seith, 'O, which a sorwe It is a man be drinkeles!' (vi, 56)
nyce sinne	So is it bot a nyce Sinne Of gold to ben so covoitous; (vii, 2802)
strong thing	Strong thing it is to soffre wrong, (v, 7377)
thing unresonable	It were a thing unresonable , A man to be so overseie, (viii, 2932)
time	Als wel yit wolde I take kepe Whan it were time to abide , (iv, 1688)
travail	It were a travail forto preche The feith of Crist, (v, 1941)
dedly vice	To slen it is a dedly vice , (vii, 3854)
vice	In hih astat it is a vice To go to lowe, (iv, 1035)
wonder	It were a wonder forto hierre : (ii, 1409) And for his poeple gret vengance He tok, which is to hierre a wonder . (v, 1658) It is a wonder forto hierre . (v, 2213)
wonder thing	It is a wonder thing to hierre , (v, 3954)
wonder wierde	And seith, it were a wonder wierde To sen a king become an hierde, (iii, 1819)
unworschipe	To yive a man so litel thing It were unworschipe in a king. (vii, 2129)

As the above examples show, the nouns used in this construction are mostly those which signify judgement and opinion, or simple but strong emotion, such as surprise, wonder and regret.

From our examination we can draw a conclusion that in Gower the uses of nouns as well as adjectives are limited and scanty of variety as compared with Chaucer.

The Infinitive as Predicate

The infinitive preceded by copula 'be' is used. This kind of infinitive denotes **necessity, obligation, fitness, futurity, possibility**, etc.

I. Examples in which the infinitive denotes necessity or obligation.

i. With **do**:

which is manyfold Foryetel, slou and wery sone Of every thing which **is to done**: (vii, 414)

Whan al is do that **was to done**, The king himself cam after sone. (ii, 1339)

Whan that he sih it **was to done**, His barge was for him arraied, (viii, 1626)

To this we can add the following example in which '**it was to done**' is used after the verb '**sihe**' in the passive sense.

And whan thei sihe **it was to done**, (viii, 1784)

'**be to do**' construction is seen in as-clause either with or without **it** (as a subject).

And therupon, **as was to done**, The dede body wel and faire Thei carie til thei come at Kaire, (ii, 2646)

The bisshop, **as it was to done**, Yaf him baptesme and Moris calleth; (ii, 936)

Bot ferst, **as it was forto done**, (vii, 196)

And as hem thoghte **it was to done**, Atteint thei were be the lawe And diemed forto honge and drawe, (viii, 1946)

ii. With **seche**:

The verb '**seek**' modified by a negative particle is often found in Gower.

My sorwe is thanne **noght to seche**: (ii, 44)

Tho was no sorwe **forto seke**. (vii, 5077)

This wofull chance how that it ferde Anon as Demephon it herde, And every man it hadde in speche, His sorwe was **noght tho to seche**; (iv, 873)

The trompe was **noght forto seke**: (vii, 3763)

Mi medicine is **noght to sieke** For thee and for suche olde sieke, (viii, 2367)

iii. With **drede**:

Tho knew this Emperour in dede That Cristes feith **was forto drede**, (ii, 3465)

Of Cristes word, who wole it rede, Hou that this vice **is forto drede** In thevangile it telleth plein, (vi, 975)

II. Examples in which the infinitive denotes fitness.

i. With **blame**:

Climestre was hire rihte name, Sche was therof gretli **to blame**, (iii, 1909)

So was sche wel the mor **to blame**. (v, 893)

Thei have, although thei be **to blame**, Attitled to here oghne name. (v, 881)

Now loke, hou they be **forto blame**. (v, 1220)

Mi Sone, thou schalt understonde, That such delit is **forto blame**. (viii, 164)

ii. With **wite**:

'**To wyte**' is used predicatively. It means 'to blame, blameworthy, in fault, cupable'.

'Ha fol, how thou art **forto wyte**'. (i, 2214)

And natheles yet som men wryte And sein that fortune is **to wyte**, (Prol. 529)

Now tell me if you thenketh awht That I therof am **forto wyte**. (i, 2770)

1 This instance is recorded as the second quotation in the OED. (s.v. **Seek**, v. 19. b.)

Thus for to moche or for to lite Fulofte I am miself **to wyte**. (iii, 581)

With **rewe**:

And that is gretly **forto rewe** In special for Cristes sake, (Prol. 164)

In holy cherche of such a slitte Is **for to rewe** un to ous alle; (Prol. 338)

And that is **forto rewe** sore, For alway siththe more and more The world empeireth every day.
(Prol. 831)

Bot certes it is **forto rewe** To se love ayein kinde falle, (viii, 2016)

vi. With **preise**:

He blameth that is noght to blame And preiseth that is noght **to preise**: (Prol. 538)

And that he wot of good aprise To teche it forth, for such emprise Is **forto preise**; (i, 81)

Aboute a kyng good counseil is **to preise** Above alle othre thinges most vailable; (Praise. 141)

v. With other verbs:

So may it proeven wel be this, A mannes Senne is **forto hate**, (Prol. 926)

Medea thanne knew and wiste Hir medicine is **forto triste**, And goth to Eson ther he lay,
(v, 4153)

What man that wolde him wel avise, Delicacie is **to despise**, (vi, 1151)

What is **to take** lawe on honde, Bot if the jugges weren trewe? (vii, 2700)

The leste harm is **forto chese**. (v, 716)

The phrase 'that is to sein' can be analyzed as denoting either fitness or possibility. 'That is to sein' is used to introduce a more explicit or intelligible re-statement of what immediately precedes, or a limiting clause necessary to make the statement correct.

That is to sein of the Planetes. (vii, 637)

and if noght so, **That is to sein**, if that he be Toward hisselven large and fre (vii, 2018)

The remenant was forto seke, **That is to sein** of foure mo, (viii, 128)

A similar construction is used. ('**That is to sein**'=means)

For Couste in Saxoun **is to sein** Constance upon the word Romein. (ii, 1405)

The firste point **is for to seye**, Whan that a thief schal stele awaye The holy thing from holy place. (v, 7017)*

III. Examples in which the infinitive denotes futurity or possibility.

Of depe ymaginaciouns And strange interpretaciouns, Problemes and demandes eke, His wisdom **was to finde and seke**; (i, 3069)

For his fortune **is to deceive** And **forto change** upon the whel His wo with othre mannes wel: (ii, 2350)

Thi dees **ben** every dai **to caste**, Thou nost what chance schal betyde. (iv, 1778)

And wissbeth that his body **were To fiele** that he fieleth there. (iv, 2886)

IV. Examples in which the infinitive is used as complement.

When the infinitive has become wholly substantivized, it is used as an ordinary noun in the predicate.

The ferste of hem, so as I rede, Was Morpheus, the whos nature Is **forto take** the figure Of what persone that him liketh, (iv, 3038)

For wisdom **is** at every throwe Above alle other thing **to knowe** In loves cause and elleswhere. (vii, 15)

And for thou saist that thi desir Is **forto witen** overmore The forme of Aristotles lore, (vii, 606)
And over this thei seiden more The cause why thei comen fore Was **forto seche** and **forto finde** Appolinus, (viii, 991)

Bot al his desir Is ferst **to seilen** unto Tharse. (viii, 1114)

The Infinitive in Questions

The infinitive is used in a kind of condensed indirect question. It is of fairly frequent occurrence. No instances have been found with simple infinitive.

I. Type: **what to thinke**: This construction is often preceded by **ne wiste...nevere, nyste**, etc.

Wherof in wommanysshe drede Sche wok and nyste **what to rede**; (i, 913)

So wiste he nevere **what to sein**; (i, 2324)

Hire herte was so sore aflyht, That sche ne wiste **what to thinke**, Bot drouh hire to the water brinke, (v, 5438)

But this construction does not necessarily be preceded by the verb in negative.

Was non so semlich of persone, Of visage and of limes bothe, If that he hadde **what to clothe**. (viii, 708)

The king hem axeth **what to rede** Of such matiere as cam to mouthe, (vii, 3958)

2. Type: **what is to done**:

The hevene wot **what is to done**, (Prol. 141)

And he, which knew **what is to done**, This noble clerk, with alle haste (viii, 1184)

So wot I nocht miself **what is to rede**. (viii, 2279)

And not if I to wel or wo Schal torne, that is al my drede, So that I not **what to rede**. (viii, 2180)

He not **what is to be** felawe, (i, 1244)

Bot **what is** afterward **to done** Avise thee, for this I sih. (vii, 2638)

Bot of hem tuo a man mai liere **What is to be** so sibb of blod: (viii, 1702)

Lo thus, mi Sone, myht thou liere **What is to love** in good manere, (viii, 2009)

The following instances may be explained either as co-existence of the type 1 and type 2, or as the elipsis of **is**.

Min herte is sory forto hier, Bot only for I wolde lere What is to done, and **what to leve**.

(iii, 2203)¹

For I therto mi wit afaite To se the times and awaite What is to done and **what is to leve**:

(iv, 1157)

3. Type: **hou to make**:²

Thei speken faste of thilke Ston, Bot **hou to make** it, nou wot non After the sothe experience. (iv, 2581)

And thus was take the querele, **Hou to destruye** this Mirour. (v, 2066)

Bot nou to speke of the secoude, Which Aristotle hath also founde, And techeth **hou to speke** faire, (vii, 1501)

And Raphael in compainie Hath tawht him **hou to ben** honeste, Asmod wan nocht at thilke feste, (vii, 5358)

forto-infinitive is found.

So fell this clerk into poverte And wiste nocht **how forto ryse**; (v, 7134)

4. Type: **what was best to done**:³

Upon his word hire herte afflihte Thenkende **what was best to donne**, (ii, 766)

He tolde him upon this matiere, And axeth him **what was best to done**: (i, 994)

And in his thoght was curious To wite **what was best to do**: (i, 1524)

In the above examples **what** is the logical object of the infinitive.

5. Type: **how it was forto done**:⁴

And seide **hou it was forto done**: (viii, 1925)

II. With Noun

It is no **schame** of such a thew **A yong man to be dronkelew**. (vi, 105)⁵

And thanne he seith, 'O, which **a sorwe** It is **a man be drinkeles**!' (vi, 56)⁶

Lo now, my Sone, **what** it is **A man to caste** his yhe amis, (i, 379)

III. With Verb

It **helpeth** nocht **a man be bore**, If goddes Sone were unbore; (v, 1747)

Thei **wene it be** a Paradys (i, 502)

that is goddes myght, Which whan men **wene** most upright **To stonde**, schal hem overcaste (Prol. 655)

1 'What' may be substantive rather than interrogative and it means **something**.

2 The earliest instance of the construction in the OED is from a 1300 **Cursor M.** 3151. Consail me, fader, **how to live**... (see OED. **how**, adv. 9.)

3 This example is recorded in the OED.

4 This construction is found in the 13th century. 1297 **R. Glouc.** (Rolls.) 9249. To loke **wat were best to do**. (OED)

5, 6 J. Zeitlin. **The Accusative with Infinitive and Some Kindred Constructions in English**, N. Y. 1908. p.85.

The examples 1, 2 are quoted by Zeitlin.

Accusative with Infinitive

The so-called construction of an accusative with infinitive is used. This construction appears after the verbs of causation, perception, and the impersonals. Some of them were surveyed in the previous paper. In this section the striking constructions will be investigated. Kenyon includes the construction '**it sit one to-infinitive**' among the accusative with infinitives.¹ We meet with the following example where the substantive is of dative origin.

It sit **to every man livende** To be Pitous, (vii, 3170)

The construction of an accusative with infinitive may be classified as follows.

I. With Adjective

Forthi **good** is, whil a man may, **Echon to sette** pes with other And loven as his oghne brother; (Prol. 1048)

Forthi **good is a king to triste** Ferst to himself, (vii, 3937)

bot it is noght **kinde A man** for love his wit **to lese**: (vii, 4298)

It is to be noted that the infinitive in the following examples is a simple infinitive.

For it is **good ye take** kepe Upon a thing which is me told. (ii, 1660)

Hou it is **good a king eschuie** The lust of vice and vertu **suie**. (vii, 5305)

Also the following example is worth noticing.

Wher it be **betre for the lond A king himselve to be wys**, (vii, 4150)

It may be useful to add some more similar examples.

So that thensample of this histoire Is **good for every king to holde**; (vii, 3790)

Forthi this love in special Is **good for every man to holde**, (viii, 3106)*

So mai a man the sothe wite and knowe, That pes is **good for every king to have**: (Praise. 288)

Historical Infinitive

Chaucer's **and she to laughe, it thoughte hire herte brest** (TC ii 1108) is quoted as an instance of the historical infinitive, while on the other hand this construction may be regarded as an ellipsis of the finite form **began**. An example of probable historical infinitive is met with in Gower. This construction may be elliptical.

men sterten out and weren ware Of this feloun, and **he to go**, And sche began to crie tho,
(viii, 1392)²

1 T. F. Mustanoja. **A Middle English Syntax, Part I**. p. 526 ff.

He cites the following as an instance of accusative with infinitive.

wher as I **se** my lady **stonde** (Prol. 23)

hym thoughte he **felte** his herte **blede** (Ch. TC i 502)

See L. Kellner's **Historical Outlines of English Syntax**, p. 251.

2 T. F. Mustanoja, **op. cit.** p. 538.

Haven levere

We can find four examples where the infinitive with **to** or **forto** comes after '**haven levere**'.

I. It is worth noticing that in the following example the indicative present is used instead of the past.

This knyht **hath levere forto dye** Than breke his trowthe and forto lye In place ther as he
was swore, (i, 1524)¹

II. In the following examples the past subjunctive **had** (=would have) is used idiomatically with adjective in the comparative.

For in good feith yit **hadde I levere** In my simplesce **forto die**, (ii, 2418)

For er I sunge such a crede, I **hadde levere to be** lewed; (iii, 378)

For in good feith yit **hadde I levere**, Than to coveite in such a weie, **To ben** for evere til I
deie As povere as Job, (v, 2502)

A similar construction '**would lievest**' is used in Gower.

thou schalt seie, That alle wommen **lievest wolde Be** Soverein of mannes love: (i, 1607)²

Haven to (or forto)

The construction **haven to** is met with in Gower. **Haven to** means to be under obligation, to be obliged. The earliest instance is recorded from 1579 in the OED.³

For therof **have I nocht to done**: (Prol. 483)

Thogh I therof **have nocht to done** (ii, 65)

In the following examples **Haven to** denotes 'the duty to be done'. Bot I am drecched to the
fulle Of love, that I **have to kepe**, That nou I lawhe and nou I wepe, (iv, 2896)

The Priest Thoas, which of Minerve The temple **hadde forto serve**, (v, 1831)

To every man behoveth lore, Bot to noman belongeth more Than to a king, which **hath to
lede** The people; (vii, 1711)

And thus above him alle stod The king upon his Regalie, As he which **hath to justifie** The
worldes good fro covoitise. (vii, 2010)

Wherof men oghte ensample take The goods lawes to avance With hem which under governance
The lawes **have forte kepe**; (vii, 3018)

Mi worthi liege lord, Henri be name, Which Engelond **hast to governe and righte**,
(Praise. 358)

1 This instance is recorded in the OED. See **Have**, 22. b.

2 This instance is recorded in the OED. The OED explains as follows. The advb. use originated chiefly from the misinterpretation of phrases like **I had as lief**, **I had liever**, in which **would** appears instead of **had** as early as the 13th. c.

3 For the minute explanation see Jespersen's **A Modern English Grammar V**. p. 203.

The Infinitive after About

The infinitive is used after **about**.¹ It may express purpose, complement, or a future idea. The following example is met with in Gower.

And preith to hem that **were aboute To take** of hire the vengance, (iv, 3606)

Select Bibliography

- Bihl, J. **Die Wirkungen des Rhythmus in der Sprache von Chaucer und Gower**, Heidelberg 1916.
- Brunner, K. **Die Englische Sprache I. II, Ihre Geschichtliche Entwicklung**, Halle 1948.
Abriss der Mittelenglischen Grammatik, Halle 1948.
- Curme, G. O. **Syntax**, Boston 1931.
- Franz, W. **Die Sprache Shakespeares in Vers und Prosa**, (in Japanese) Shinozaki Shorin 1958.
- Jespersen, O. **A Modern English Grammar V**, London 1954.
Essentials of English Grammar, 1952.
- Kellner, L. **Historical Outlines of English Syntax**, Japan 1956.
- Kenyon, J. S. **Syntax of the Infinitive in Chaucer**, New York 1909.
- Mätzner, E. **Englische Grammatik**, Berlin 1885.
- Mossé, F. **Manuel de l'Anglais du Moyen Age I. II**, Paris 1959.
- Mustanoja, T. F. **Middle English Syntax**, Part I. Helsinki 1960.
- Onions, C. T. **An Advanced English Syntax**, London 1924.
- Sweet, H. **A New English Grammar I, II**. Oxford 1952.
- van der Gaaf, W. **Transition from the Impersonal to the Personal Construction in Middle English**, Heidelberg 1904.
- Zeitlin, J. **The Accusative with Infinitive and Some Kindred Construction in English**, New York 1908.

1 OED. s. v. **About**. A. 11. **To be about (for) to do**: to be engaged in, to be busied in preparation for, to be scheming. c1386. Chaucer Knt. T. 284.