

The Use of the Infinitive in Latvian and Norwegian: the Contrastive Aspect

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Abstract. The article deals with the syntactic use of the infinitive in Latvian, which is a Baltic language, and Norwegian, which is Germanic. The contrastive analysis of the syntactic structures is based on the comparison of the deep and the surface structures of the sentence. It is concluded that Norwegian offers wider possibilities for the expression of the semantic roles of the agent, the experiencer and the patient in the surface structure. In Latvian, a great part of the corresponding propositions have to be expressed by subordinate clauses or participle constructions.

Introduction

The infinitive as a non-finite verb form is widely used in all Indo-European languages. First, it can denote action irrespective of agent and time. Therefore it is semantically close to nominals and can be used in several syntactic functions characteristic of nominal word forms. In such cases, the infinitive can often be substituted by a deverbal substantive. Second, as far as the infinitive is a verb form, it can form the primary or secondary predicative core of the sentence, i.e., it can be either a predicate or a semi-predicative component. Infinitive constructions can resemble a subordinate clause as well. Therefore sentences containing the infinitive can be on the border between simple and compound sentences. Non-finite clauses “are more compact and less explicit than finite clauses: they are not marked for tense and modality, and they frequently lack an explicit subject and subordinator” (Biber et al., 2000:198).

The syntactic functions of the infinitive have often been an object of discussion in Latvian linguistics (Kārklīš, 1978; Freimane, 1985). The authors of both Latvian and Norwegian grammar books usually pay attention to the syntactic environment of infinitive forms, or, to be more precise, to word forms usually preceding the infinitive. However, this doesn't say much about the syntactic structure of the sentence as a whole. It seems useful to analyse the deep semantic structure of the sentence, as compared to its realization in the surface structure. This is a new approach in Latvian linguistics and could also give a better understanding of sentence formation while studying Norwegian or Latvian as the second language.

The language material analysed in the article has been taken mostly from written sources – fiction and text-books.

Formal Differences in the Use of the Infinitive

If compared to Latvian, in Norwegian the use of the infinitive is much wider, partly because of the comparatively rich paradigm of participle verb forms in Latvian. Norwegian infinitive constructions are often translated with the help of deverbal nouns or separate predicative units – subordinate clauses – into Latvian.

There are three different infinitive forms in Norwegian instead of just one infinitive in Latvian:

1) Infinitive 1 *å lese* “to read” denotes an action simultaneous with the action expressed by the predicate:

N *Han øver seg i å lese.*
“He is practising reading.”

This is the only Norwegian infinitive having an equivalent in Latvian:

L *Viņš vingrinās lasīt / lasīšanā.*

2) Infinitive 2 or the perfect infinitive *å ha lest* “to have read” possesses the relative tense meaning, i.e., denotes an action prior to the action denoted by the predicate:

N *Han innrømmet å ha lest det.*
“He admitted to have read it.”

In corresponding Latvian sentences a participial clause or a subordinate clause should be used, because it is the only possibility to express the sequence of two actions in time:

L *Viņš atzina, ka ir to lasījis.*

3) The synthetic form of the passive infinitive *å leses* “to be read” is most often used after modal verbs:

N *Den boka bør leses.*
“That book should be read.”

It is also possible to use the analytic passive infinitive *å bli lest* “to be read”.

Norwegian as opposed to Latvian allows the use of the infinitive after a preposition. This possibility widens the use of the infinitive in Norwegian, insofar as a preposition expresses the semantic relations between the infinitive and other word forms of the sentence more precisely. The infinitive often expresses the meaning of cause, purpose, time, as well as other adverbial meanings. In Latvian, the corresponding meanings are expressed by participial constructions or subordinate clauses:

N *Du oppnår ingenting ved å oppføre deg sånn.*
L *Tā uzvedamies, tu neko nepadāksi.*
“You will not achieve anything behaving like that.”

N *De bruker mange krefter på å forklare det.*
L *Viņi tērē daudz spēka, lai to izskaidrotu.*
“They use a lot of energy to explain that.”

The infinitive used after a preposition is semantically very close to a nominal, which can be seen in the Latvian translation:

N *De levde av å fiske.*
L *Viņi pārtika no zvejošanas.*
“They lived on fishing.”

N *Jeg tjener mitt brød ved å fortelle.*
L *Es pelnu iztiku ar stāstīšanu.*
“I earn my living by telling.”

N *Han gjorde det uten å si et ord.*
L *Viņš to izdarīja bez vārda runas.*
“He did it without saying a word.”

The Deep Structure of the Infinitive Clauses as Compared to its Realization in the Surface Structure

The deep semantic structure reveals the situation described by the sentence. The deep structure of a definite sentence is called a proposition with the abstract semantic or thematic roles (e.g., agent, experiencer, patient, recipient) filled by definite lexical items (Saeed, 2000:14-15). One of the most characteristic features of infinitive constructions is that the agent or the experiencer of the action or the state is either not expressed at all in the surface structure or it is expressed by some syncretic word form combining several semantic roles. In this article, the formal realization of semantic roles in the surface structure will be analysed. Special attention will be paid to the semantic roles of agent and patient if the infinitive denotes an action, and to the semantic role of experiencer if the infinitive denotes a state.

I. The syntactic realization of agent (and experiencer):

1) Infinitive constructions with a zero form of agent;

These are very common in both languages. The agent is either generalized or understandable from the context or the situation of speech.

The infinitive can be used in the syntactic function of the grammatical subject. It just names the action without any link to the person performing it or to the time of action:

N *Å snakke norsk er vanskelig.*
L *Runāt norvēģiski ir grūti.*
“It is difficult to talk Norwegian.”

From a semantic point of view, the sentences express evaluation (good / bad, easy / difficult), modal meanings (possible / impossible) or emotional attitudes (interesting, pleasant, unpleasant etc.) (Adamec, 1973:50-53). The predicate both in Latvian and Norwegian can be a copula verb together with another infinitive, a noun or an adverb, if they express evaluative meanings. In Norwegian, a lexical verb can also be used as the predicate. This is not possible in Latvian, where a deverbal noun has to be used in subject position instead of the infinitive:

N *Å gå på alle møter tar mye tid.*
L *Iešana uz visām sapulcēm prasa daudz laika.*
“Going to all meetings takes a lot of time.”

N *Å arbeide gir følelsen av å bety noe.*
L *Darbs dod vērtības apziņu.*
“Work gives a feeling of being worthy.”

In Norwegian, the cataphoric pronoun *det*, which is semantically empty, is often used in subject position. The infinitive becomes the so-called extraposed subject. The

same possibility exists in Latvian, but it is not so widely used:

N *Det er lett å gå.*
L *Tas ir viegli – iet.*
“It is easy to walk.”

N *Det er ikke lurt å spise for mye på en gang.*
L *Tas nav prātīgi – ēst pārāk daudz vienā reizē.*
“It is not wise to eat too much at a time.”

The use of a pronoun depends on the information structure (or, alternatively, thematic structure) of the sentence. In Norwegian, in a sentence with a neutral word order, the subject stands first. If the information expressed by the subject is new to the hearer, the grammatical subject cannot stand in the first place. A cataphoric pronoun in the subject position is used when the content of the whole sentence is new and there is no given information at all.

The infinitive with a generalized meaning of agent can also be used in the syntactic function of predicate. If the predicate includes a copula verb, the construction is possible both in Latvian and Norwegian:

N *Å leve er å elske.*
L *Dzīvot ir mīlēt.*
“To live means to love.”

In Latvian, a bare infinitive can be used as predicate if it expresses modal meanings – order, prohibition, necessity, impossibility etc.:

L *Piecelties!*
“Stand up!”
L *Ierosinājumus sūst padomei.*
“Suggestions should be sent to the council.”
L *Vai tev palīdzēt?*
“Shall I help you?”

In Norwegian, this is possible only after the interrogative word *hvorfor* “why”:

N *Hvorfor gråte når man kan le?*
“Why should one cry if one can laugh?”

A similar use of the infinitive can be found in the subordinate clause of object in Latvian:

L *Es nezinu, ko darīt.*
“I don’t know what I should do.”
L *Mēs domājām, kā to izdarīt.*
“We were thinking about how we should do that.”

These constructions are regarded as subordinate clauses in Latvian grammar because they are introduced by a subordinator. These kinds of subordinate clauses have a modal meaning just like simple sentences with the infinitive as a predicate. In Norwegian, corresponding sentences contain the finite form of the modal verb *skulle*:

N *Jeg vet ikke hva jeg skal gjøre.*
“I don’t know what I should do.”
N *Vi lurte på hvordan vi skulle gjøre det.*
“We were thinking about how we should do that.”

A generalized meaning of agent is possible if the infinitive stands after a noun:

N *Kunsten å skrive er svært gammel.*
 L *Māka rakstīt ir ļoti sena.*
 "The art of writing is very old."

N *Det er grunn til å tvile.*
 L *Ir pamats šaubīties.*
 "There is a reason for doubt."

In traditional grammar this infinitive is considered to be an attribute.

2) Infinitive constructions with a syntactically realized semantic role of agent:

a) the sentence is mono-propositional;

Both in Latvian and Norwegian the infinitive is often used after a modal verb or a verb with the phasal meaning (e.g., the meaning of the beginning or the end of an action). The agent gets the syntactic function of the subject, and the infinitive is a part of the compound verbal predicate. The infinitive coinciding with the subject of the head verb is traditionally termed "subjective" infinitive (Ambrazas et al., 1997:554):

N *Jeg vil snakke med deg.*
 L *Es gribu runāt ar tevi.*
 "I want to talk to you."

N *Hun begynte å gråte.*
 L *Viņa sāka raudāt.*
 "She started to cry."

The use of the infinitive is possible also after many lexical verbs containing modal semantic elements. The semantics of these verbs is richer than that of pure modal verbs; therefore they can also be used independently – without a following infinitive. In Latvian such verbs are, e.g., *gatavoties*, *taisīties* "to get ready; to be going to", *nodomāt*, *nolemt* "to decide", *mēgt* "to be used to", *nevīžot* "not to deign", *dergties* "to feel disgusted", *patikt* "to like", *mācēt*, *prast* "to be able to", *iemācīties* "to learn" etc. Verbs with similar semantics are followed by the infinitive also in Norwegian:

N *Når har du tenkt å reise?*
 L *Kad tu domā braukt?*
 "When are you planning to leave?"

N *Egentlig skulle en rekke å bli kjent med alle mennesker i hele verden.*
 L *Kaut varētu paspēt iepazīties ar visiem cilvēkiem plašajā pasaulē.*
 "I wish one could manage to get acquainted with all people in the wide world."

In the sentence, many verbs can obtain such a modal semantic element and be followed by an infinitive. This use of the infinitive seems to be widening in Modern Latvian:

L *Izaugusi tepat jūrmalā, viņa kopš bērnības pierada justies kā zivs ūdenī (L. Brīdaka).*

"She had grown up here at the seaside and since her childhood got used to feeling like a fish in the water."

L *Filmas skatīties viņš atzina tikai svētdienās un savus ieradumus reti kad mainīja (I. Grebзде).*
 "He preferred to watch films only on Sundays and seldom changed his habits."

L *Skolēni priecājas parādīt zināšanas ("Diena").*

"The pupils are happy to show their knowledge."

In Latvian, the agent or experiencer can obtain the dative form in the surface structure. In contemporary Latvian syntax these datives are considered to be grammatical subjects as well:

L *Viņam vajadzēja steigties.*
 "He had to hurry up."

L *Viņam gribējās ceļot.*
 "He wanted to travel."

The semantic role of the experiencer can be expressed by a prepositional phrase or a dependent case form in Norwegian:

N *Det å arbeide er å leve for latviere.*
 "To work means to live for Latvians."

N *Det smertet ham dypt å snakke om saken.*
 "It was very painful for him to talk about that."

The infinitive in both languages is often found after nouns and adjectives used as predicates. Their meaning is rather close to modal or other verbs mentioned before. Many of them have derivational links with verbs: *spēja* *izturēt* "possibility to endure", *nodoms* *palīdzēt* "intention to help", *sapnis* *dejt* "a dream to dance", *solījums* *atnākt* "a promise to come", *vēlēšanās* *strādāt* "a wish to work", *bailes* *nokavēt* "a fear to be late", *priecīgs* *palīdzēt* "happy to help", *spējīgs* *izturēt* "able to endure". In Norwegian, this use is widespread, as far as it is possible to use infinitive after a preposition:

N *Jeg har lyst til å spørre deg om det.*
 "I would like to ask you about that."

N *Han er flink til å danse.*
 "He can dance well."

It is worth mentioning that most often the nouns and adjectives are part of the predicative core of the sentence, which means that the modal meaning emerges in the sentence and is not necessarily a part of the semantics of the noun or adjective itself:

N *Han var glad for å se henne.*
 L *Viņš bija priecīgs viņu redzēt.*
 "He was happy to see her."

N *Vi har den siste tiden hatt for vane å treffe hverandre der etter mørkets frembrudd.*
 L *Mums pēdējā laikā ir bijis paradums satikties tur pēc tumsas iestāšanās.*
 "We have lately had a habit to meet each other after dark."

Therefore it can be stated that the infinitive does not describe the noun, it is rather a part of the "predicative complex" of the sentence and should not be regarded as an attribute (Kārklīšs, 1978:50-51; Гак, 2000:391).

b) the sentence is polipropositional:

- The agent of the action denoted by the infinitive is simultaneously the agent of another proposition;

This kind of infinitive is widely used after motion verbs and expresses the meaning of purpose. The agent of both actions is expressed by the grammatical subject of the sentence. The infinitive is the adverbial modifier of purpose:

N *Han er kommet for å hjelpe oss.*
 L *Viņš ir atnācis mums palīdzēt.*
 "He has come to help us."

N *Han bøyde seg for å lukte på blomsten.*
L *Viņš noliecās pasmaržot puķi.*
“He bent to smell the flower.”

- **The agent of the action denoted by the infinitive is simultaneously the patient of another proposition;**

The infinitive denotes an action performed by the grammatical object of the finite verb-form. This infinitive is traditionally termed “objective” infinitive (Ambrazas et al., 1997:554).

Both in Latvian and Norwegian this kind of infinitive is widespread after the so-called causatives:

N *Han forbød henne å røyke.*
L *Viņš aizliedza viņai smēķēt.*
“He forbade her to smoke.”

N *Det fikk ham til å føle seg glad.*
L *Tas lika viņam justies priecīgam.*
“This made him feel glad.”

In Norwegian, the infinitive can be used after verbs of feeling *høre* “to hear”, *kjenne*, *føle* “to feel”, *se* “to see”. In Latvian, (“a”) participle is used in corresponding constructions:

N *Jeg ser ham komme.*
L *Es redzu viņu nākam.*
“I can see him coming.”

N *Jeg hørte noen snakke der ute.*
L *Es dzirdēju kādu ārā runājam.*
“I heard someone talking outside.”

- **The agent of the infinitive does not denote any semantic role of the other proposition;**

This is a peculiar construction in Norwegian which does not have equivalents in Latvian. The sentence has a two-level deep semantic structure: the event itself and somebody’s judgement about this event. The agent or experiencer of the action or state denoted by the infinitive is the grammatical subject of the sentence. It is worth mentioning that the subject and the predicate (the finite verb form) do not belong to the same proposition and do not form a semantically sufficient predicative unit. Instead, the grammatical subject and the infinitive belong to the same proposition:

N *Han sies å være rik.*
“They say that he is rich.”

N *En setning kan sies å beskrive en hendelse.*
“It can be said that a sentence describes an event.”

N *Det synes å ta lang tid.*
“It seems to take a lot of time.”

Some Latvian constructions with a participle are structurally similar:

N *Det siste sifferet så ut til å være 6.*
L *Pēdējais cipars likās esam sešinieks.*
“The last number seemed to be 6.”

II. The syntactic realization of patient:

- 1) **The patient of the action denoted by infinitive denotes just one semantic role;**

Constructions like these are very common both in Latvian and Norwegian. From the grammatical point of view, the patient is expressed by the dependent component of the verb phrase:

N *Han var villig til å følge henne.*
L *Viņš piekrita viņu pavadīt.*
“He agreed to accompany her.”

- 2) **The patient of the action denoted by the infinitive simultaneously denotes the patient of another proposition;**

A verb phrase has its kernel structure and transformed structure. The name of the patient, which is usually the dependent component of the phrase, is transformed into the grammatically independent component of the verb phrase. Such transformations are widespread in Norwegian. In Latvian, the corresponding content is expressed by a relative clause having the infinitive as predicate:

N *Jeg leter etter ei bok å lese for barna.*
L *Es meklēju grāmatu, ko lasīt bērniem.*
“I am looking for a book to read for the children.”

N *Hun hadde ingen å spørre til råds.*
L *Viņai nebija neviena, kam lūgt padomu.*
“She didn’t have anyone to ask for advice.”

In Norwegian, prepositional phrases can also undergo such transformations. Then the preposition moves to the end of the sentence:

N *Vi venter på en tiger å ta bilde av.*
“We are waiting for a tiger in order to take a photo of it.”

N *Hun måtte ha en å betro seg til.*
“She needed someone she could trust.”

A pronoun or another word with general lexical semantics can be used instead of the noun. In Latvian, such sentences form a borderline between simple and compound sentences (Kārklīšs, 1964:72-77):

N *Jeg har mye å fortelle fra den reisen.*
L *Man ir daudz ko stāstīt par to ceļojumu.*
“I have much to tell about the trip.”

N *Det var ikke annet å gjøre.*
L *Nebija nekā cita ko darīt.*
“There was nothing else to do.”

- 3) **The patient of the action denoted by the infinitive is grammatically realized as the subject of the sentence:**

Norwegian constructions with a patient of the infinitive as a grammatical subject do not have equivalents in Latvian.

- a) **Constructions with an adjective as the predicate;**

N *Boka er lett å lese.*
“The book is easy to read.”

N *Merkur var ofte vanskelig å få øye på.*
“Usually it was difficult to notice Mercury.”

- b) **Passive infinitive as the predicate;**

N *Det kunne ikke gjøres.*
“It was impossible to do that.”

N *Han skulle stanses.*
“He had to be stopped.”

- c) **Active infinitive with passive meaning as the predicate;**

N *Ingen gutt var å se.*
“No guy could be seen.”

N *Politiet er aldri å stole på.*
“You can never rely on police.”

Conclusions

It can be concluded that there are several similarities, as well as many differences in the use of the infinitive in the two languages. Many relations between word forms in the sentence are expressed by the infinitive in Norwegian and by participles or subordinate clauses in Latvian. This can partly be explained by the existence of a rich paradigm of verb forms in Latvian. On the other hand, Norwegian offers wider possibilities to compress the deep semantic structure of the sentence in a mono-predicative surface structure, i.e., a simple sentence. That is the reason why Latvian subordinate clauses often correspond to Norwegian infinitive constructions.

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Gretinamojo bendraties vartojimo latvių ir norvegų kalbose aspektas

Santrauka

Šiame straipsnyje nagrinėjamas sintaksinis bendraties vartojimas latvių, t. y. baltų kalbų grupės ir norvegų, t. y. germanų kalbų grupės, kalbose. Gretinamoji sintaksinių struktūrų analizė yra grindžiama giluminių ir paviršinių sakinio struktūrų lyginimu. Išvadose teigiama, kad norvegų kalba siūlo platesnes agento, eksperiencio ir patiento semantinių vaidmenų išraiškos paviršinėje struktūroje galimybes. Latvių kalboje daug tokių teiginių turi būti pateikiami šalutiniais sakiniais ar dalyvinėmis konstrukcijomis.

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