

Yu Guolin

**A NEW ENGLISH GRAMMAR**

*for College Students*

Vol. II

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新 编

**大学生英语语法**

(二)

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余国霖 编著

2

湖南大学出版社

## 内 容 提 要

本书系用浅近英语编写，难点附有汉译。在适当地吸取国内外某些语法学者最新研究成果的同时，对于传统语法，有因有革，着重解决教学中的实际问题，特别是经常遇到的疑难问题与惯用法问题。力图使语法内容符合现代英语的发展趋势和实际使用情况。其中有些内容，例如：否定的范围，动词和词汇意貌，一般语法规则和惯用法的相互关系，某些及物动词和不及物动词的互相转化，某些过去分词两种形式的用法对比，等等，国内已出版的一般语法书较少涉及，本书特辟专门章节，加以探讨。全书分上、下两册，共36章。语法条文，配有大量例句，重视语言的实践性，但不忽略理论的简要说明。各册并附有习题和答案。本书可作大学英语本科和专科英语语法教材，可供中学英语教师参考，并可供英语自学考生学习、应试和广大英语爱好者进修提高之用。本书为下册，计17章。

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\* Free, student's choice

# Chapter Twenty

## The Verb (IX)

### The Infinitive

#### 20.1 General Remarks

As has been pointed out in 12. 3, English verbs may take finite or non-finite forms. Those that can be used as predicate verbs by themselves are called finite forms, while those that cannot are called non-finite forms. So far we have dealt with the former. In this chapter and the next two, we will go on to treat the non-finite forms of the verb.

The non-finite forms are the infinitive, the gerund and the participles. The infinitive is usually, but not always, preceded by the particle *to*, which is called the sign of the infinitive. The gerund is regularly formed with the ending *-ing*, just like the present participle, but it is different from the present participle in use. There are two participles in English, the present and the past participles, also called the *-ing* and the *-ed* participles. The former is formed with the ending *-ing*, the latter may be regular or irregular according to whether it is formed with the ending *-ed* or not. In this chapter main attention is paid to the discussion of the infinitive.

## 20.2 Functions of the Infinitive

### 1) As subject

When an infinitive is used as the subject, it can be easily put at the beginning of a sentence, e. g.

*To say something is one thing, and to do it is another.*

*To live like this is to enjoy life.*

*To take a good look is better than to listen to a hundred reports.*

*Not to know what happened before one was born is always to be a child. (a proverb)*

*To know is not always to be wise. Many know a great deal, and are all the greater fools for it.*

But this is not very common. In modern English, it is more often to begin the sentence with *it* and to put the real subject behind, e. g.

*It's highly important to combine revolutionary sweep with practicalness.*

*It will take (us) three hours to do the work.*

*How long will it take to go back to your home town from here?*

*It's necessary to do it all over again.*

*It's better to leave him alone.*

*It's a shame to treat her like that.*

*It requires courage / patience / perseverance / constancy to do this kind of work.*

## 2) As object

As object, the infinitive is used after certain transitive verbs\*, such as *afford, arrange, ask, beg, care, choose, claim, consent, decide, decline, demand, desire, determine, expect, help, hope, learn, manage, need, offer, prefer, pretend, promise, refuse, seek, swear, threaten, venture, want, wish, etc.*

*Would you care to read this?*

*Do we need to make a fair copy of it?*

*I preferred to read rather than sit idle.*

*I managed to do it without his help.*

It is sometimes difficult to say, however, whether the infinitive is the object of the verb or a part of the predicate verb phrase, e.g.

*He began to write again.*

*The machine failed to work properly.*

Some grammarians prefer to regard the infinitive used here as the object of the verb, others consider the verb plus the infinitive to be a complex predicate. However, it doesn't matter at all whether it is called the one or the other. What is important in language learning is to follow the correct patterns of the verbs. For instance, some of the verbs should be followed by an infinitive, others by a gerund. Misuse of the one for the other may cause a big blunder. We say,

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\* For verbs that can be followed by a gerund, see 21, 3), (1), by either a gerund or an infinitive see 21, 3) (2).

I expect to go away tomorrow.

I propose to start early.

I hope to finish my work soon.

I wish to be alone.

But we don't say,

\* I expect going away.

\* I hope finishing my work soon.

\* I wish being alone.

We say,

I suggest going away tomorrow.

I propose starting early.

I looked forward to seeing the film.

But we don't say,

\* I suggest to go away tomorrow.

\* I look forward to see the film.

This is because verbs like *expect*, *hope*, *wish* are to be followed by an infinitive while verbs like *suggest*, *look forward to* by a gerund, and *propose* by either the one or the other. Unless a person recognizes how a verb is used in a certain pattern, he may be tempted, by analogy, to construct wrong sentences. For instance, suppose he has learned the pattern,

He likes to play chess.

He learned to speak French.

Perhaps by analogy he would say,

\* He dislikes to play chess,

\* He knows to speak French,

instead of

He dislikes playing chess.

*He knows how to speak French.*

Such cases of misapprehension are not uncommon. In order to avoid numerous possible errors like these, it is necessary for a student who learns English as a foreign language to spend some time on the verb patterns. This will enable him to use verbs in accordance with usage.

3) As predicative

*To be good is to be happy.*

*To do that would be to cut the foot to fit the shoe. ...削足适履。*

*The letter is to be handed to him in person.*

*What we should do now is to collect more first-hand information.*

*To represent him as a man of stainless virtue is to make him ridiculous.*

4) As attribute

(1) As an attribute the infinitive often relates the noun it modifies to an action. In this case two groups of sentences may be noticed.

A. *He was the first man to learn the happy news.*

*There are few people to believe this nonsense.*

*We need someone to voice the feelings of the masses.*

*He is not a man to do anything by halves.*

*He is a poor old man soon to become a*

*burden* to his family.

B. We have two classes *to attend* every morning.

I won't come because I have some urgent matter *to attend to* this evening.

Xiao Li's algebra lesson was *a hard nut to crack*.

Mr. Parker's tests are not something *to be sneezed at*.

There are still two more items *to include* in the programme.

What do you think is the right thing *to do*?

This is not a good *place to rest in*.

He is the best man *to discuss the matter with*.

In group A, the infinitive takes the noun it modifies as its logic subject, while in group B, it takes the noun it modifies as its logic object.

(2) An infinitive is often used to define a noun preceding it.

The *desire* to acquire a good pronunciation is natural enough in a beginner.

Being a cadre, the old peasant felt a pressing *need* to acquire literacy.

We will start a *campaign* to increase production and practise economy.

She spares no *effort* to improve her teaching method.

He showed no *inclination* to leave.

There is no *reason* (for us) to get conceited  
and arrogant.

**8) As adverbial**

As an adverbial the infinitive chiefly indicates,

**(1) Purpose**

He got up *to ask a question*.

He is working late *to make up* for his absence yesterday.

*To have a good pronunciation* you have to study phonetics conscientiously.

*To be a teacher of the people*, one must first learn from them.

The idea of purpose is sometimes emphasized by adding *in order* or *so as to* the infinitive,

We started early *in order to arrive before dark*.

Let's hurry *so as not to be late for the meeting*.

Unite the overwhelming majority of the people *so as to isolate the handful of enemies*.

**(2) Result**

What have I said *to make you so angry?*

He is old enough *to know better*.

We still have enough time (or, time enough) *to do the work*.

Thus they parted *never to meet again*.



Sometimes the idea of result is expressed by adding *only*, or *too* to the infinitive, e. g.

The enemy troops rushed there *only to be ambushed*.

He raised our expectations *only to disappoint them*.

I returned home *only to find everybody gone*.

He was *only too* pleased to let them go.

Instances are *too* numerous to list.

He's *too* much of a coward (*too cowardly*) to fight.

Note, Care must be taken to distinguish between the (*only*) *too ... to* and *too...to* structures as used in the following sentences.

1. I was *only too glad to come*.
2. He is (*only*) *too anxious to meet you*.
3. He was *too tired to go any farther*.

In the 1st sentence, *too ... to* does not imply a negative meaning because judging by the context *too* means "very". So the whole sentence may be paraphrased as "I was very glad to come". In this case *too* can be preceded by *only* and the infinitive *to come* is used to modify *glad*. The same is true with the (*only*) *too ... to* structure used in the 2nd sentence, while in the 3rd sentence, the implication of the *too ... to* structure is different. The structure here implies a negative meaning because judging by the context *too* used here means "in a higher degree than is allowable or required." So the whole sentence may be paraphrased as, "He was tired to such a degree that he couldn't go any farther." In this case *too* is not to be preceded by *only* and is closely related with the infinitive phrase *to go any farther*.

### (3) Cause

I'm very glad *to hear of your success*.

She is ashamed *to tell us of her mistakes*.