

The Norwegian Infinitive Marker

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Abstract

Norwegian control infinitives are generally introduced by the infinitive marker *å*. The syntax of non-finite clauses introduced by *å* is similar enough to that of finite subordinate clauses for the infinitive marker to be analyzed as a complementizer. This would account for the characteristic *split infinitive*. However, the continued existence of non-split infinitives in Norwegian represents a problem for this analysis. Merging the infinitive marker in T rather than in C would allow for both split and non-split infinitives. The recently observed, but rather frequent, double infinitive marker, both preceding and following an adverbial, indicates that the infinitive marker is first merged in T and then internally merged in C without the deletion of the copy in T.

1 Introduction¹

The infinitive in Scandinavian, as in the other Germanic languages, may be used with or without an *infinitive marker*. The conditions on the use of the infinitive marker may differ somewhat among the various languages, and from one historical stage to another. In modern Norwegian, the infinitive marker *å* is used with control infinitives. Control infinitives are non-finite clauses with an unexpressed subject, *PRO*. Those clauses are CPs (Åfarli & Eide 2003), and the syntactic distribution is similar to that of finite clauses introduced by *at* ‘that’.

- (1) a. Eg kan ikkje lova at eg aldri skal gjera det igjen
I can not promise that I never shall do it again
‘I cannot promise that I will never do it again’
b. Eg kan ikkje lova å aldri gjera det igjen
I can not promise to never do it again
‘I cannot promise to never do it again’
- (2) a. Det er viktig at du ikkje betaler for mykje
it is important that you not pay too much
‘It is important that you do not pay too much’
b. Det er viktig å ikkje betale for mykje
it is important to not pay too much
‘It is important not to pay too much’

¹ I want to thank Kristin Hagemann and Elly van Gelderen for useful comments.

The internal syntactic structures of finite and non-finite CPs also look similar. The assumed structures of the subordinate clauses of (1a-b) are as in (3a-b) respectively.

- (3) a. CP[at_{TP}[eg_{VP}[aldri skal gjera det igjen]]]
 b. CP[å_{TP}[PRO_{VP}[aldri gjera det igjen]]]

According to this analysis, *å* is the complementizer of the non-finite clause, just like *at* in the finite clause. Treating *å* as a complementizer has become a standard analysis for Norwegian (Faarlund et al. 1997, Åfarli & Eide 2003, Faarlund 2007) and for Swedish (Platzack 1986, Beukema & Dikken 1989, Telemann et al. 1999). With *å* in C and the verb in V (or in *v*) a sentence adverbial will *split the infinitive*, as shown in (1b) and (2b). I will call this the *IM-in-C* analysis.

But this analysis does not take care of all the possible structures with infinitive marker in Norwegian. One recently observed pattern is what I will call *double infinitive marker*, as illustrated in (4), which indicates that the structure of infinitival CPs is more complicated than this.

- (4) NN oppmodar alle som skal søkje om å ikkje å sendeinn søknaden
 NN encourages all who shall apply to to not to send in application.DEF
 i siste liten
 in last moment
 ‘NN encourages all those who are going to apply not to submit their application at the last moment’ (kulturradet.no)

I will return to the double infinitive marker below. Before that we need to take a look at another, more traditional pattern, where the infinitive marker follows the adverbial, as in (5).

- (5) a. Eg kan ikkje lova aldri å gjera det igjen
 I can not promise never to do it again
 ‘I cannot promise to never do it again’
 b. Det er viktig ikkje å betale for mykje
 it is important not to pay too much
 ‘It is important not to pay too much’

This word order, the *non-split infinitive*, was the predominant one far into the 20th century, and was until recently (and still is in certain circles) prescriptively recommended. In contemporary speech it is very rare, but it is still not judged as ungrammatical by today’s speakers.² However, the non-split infinitive is a problem for the IM-in-C analysis.³ In order for the infinitive marker to function as a complementizer in C in sentences like (5a–b), the

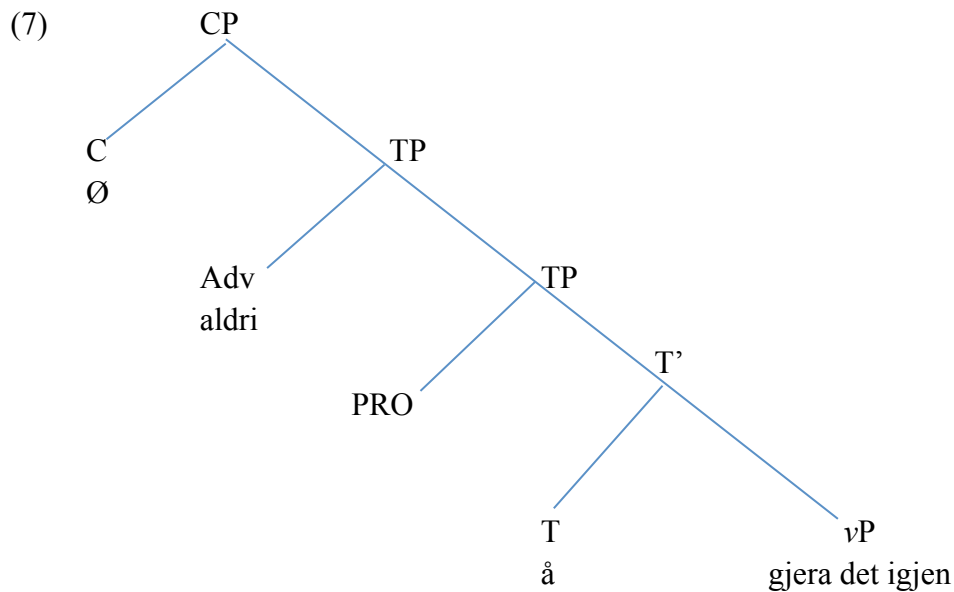
² A Google search for *prøve ikke å* (‘try not to’) yields 11 200 hits; *prøve å ikke* (‘try to not’) yields 315 000 hits.

³ Åfarli & Eide (2003) are of course aware of this, and suggest a solution along the same lines as the one discussed below. Faarlund (2007) sees it as reflecting an earlier historical stage. That view will not be pursued here.

adverbial would need to be merged in Spec,CP. Such an analysis is not very satisfactory, since a similar adverbial placement is excluded with the finite complementizer *at*.

- (6) a. *Eg kan ikkje lova aldri at eg skal gjera det igjen
 I can not promise never that I shall do it again
 b. *Det er viktig ikkje at du betaler for mykje
 it is important not that you pay too much

The contrast between (5) and (6) breaks down the parallelism between the infinitive marker *å* and the complementizer *at*. Rather than being in C, the infinitive marker in (5a–b) must be in a position below the adverbial. This must be a head position above *v*, namely T^0 .



The analysis in (7) seems plausible, since T^0 is also the location of a finite verb, and the infinitive marker is in complementary distribution with a finite verb. By syntactic criteria, the infinitival construction in (7) is still a CP: the clauses in (5) fill the same syntactic positions in the matrix clause as those in (1b) and (2b).

2 Two analyses

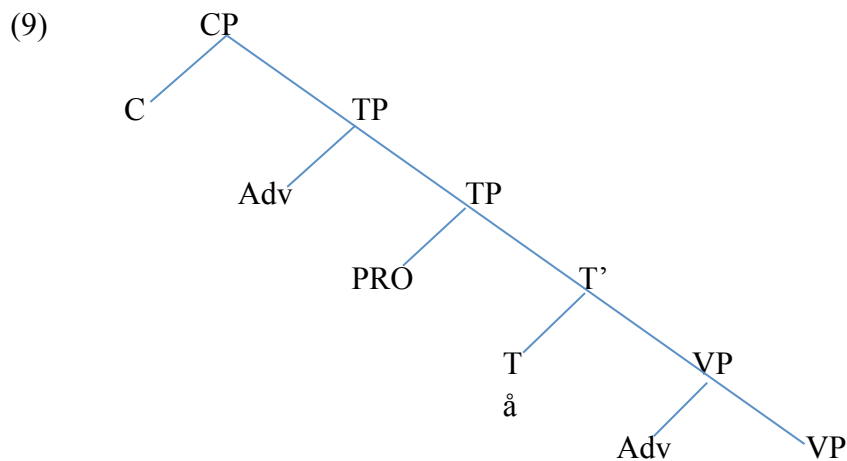
In finite subordinate clauses, a sentence adverbial may precede or follow the subject. Both orders are possible whether or not the subject is a full DP or a pronoun.

- (8) a. Eg håpar at Alfred ikkje seier noko
 I hope that Alfred not says anything
 ‘I hope that Alfred won’t say anything’
 b. Eg håpar at ikkje Alfred seier noko
 I hope that not Alfred says anything
 ‘I hope that Alfred won’t say anything’

- c. Eg håpar at han ikkje seier noko
 I hope that he not says anything
 'I hope that he won't say anything'
- d. Eg håpar at ikkje han seier noko
 I hope that not he says anything
 'I hope that he won't say anything'

The verb remains *in situ* in subordinate clauses, therefore the subject is the only overt manifestation of the TP. This means that there is also an adverbial position below TP in Norwegian subordinate clauses; a sentence adverbial may be adjoined to TP *or* to *vP*.

If the same is possible in non-finite clauses, *å* in T^0 would account for both split (1b), (2b), and non-split (5a,b) infinitives. With the adverbial adjoined to *vP*, we get split infinitive, as in (1b) and (2b); adjoining it to TP yields a non-split infinitive, as in (5a,b). I will refer to this as the *IM-in-T analysis*.



An argument in favor of this analysis is the fact the infinitive marker *å* appears not only with control infinitives, but even in raising constructions.

- (10) a. Kritikerne synes å like boken
 critics.DEF seem to like book.DEF
 'The critics seem to like the book'
- b. Ho ser ut til å elske kattar
 she sees out to to love cats
 'She seems to love cats'

The clause from which the subject is raised cannot be a CP, since the C would then block movement. The only position for *å* in (10a-b) is T.

- (11) kritikerne synes_{TP}[kritikerne å vP[like boken]]

An alternative analysis would be to assume that the infinitive marker is merged in T, and that it can next be internally merged in C. That way the infinitive will be split by both high and low adverbials. Call this the *copy analysis*.

Since the subject (PRO) is invisible, there is no way of empirically determining whether the IM-in-T or the copy analysis is the correct one for Modern Norwegian. From a theoretical perspective, the copy analysis may seem less appealing, since it requires one extra merge operation. On the other hand, there may be a historical argument in favor of the copy analysis.

3 A diachronic perspective

In Old Norse, the structure of infinitival clauses is again different (Faarlund 2004, 2007). Old Norse has V-to-T raising in both finite and non-finite subordinate clauses, as shown in (12a,b) and (13a,b), respectively.

- (12) a. ef herra Sigvatr er eigi í dalinum
 if lord Sigvat is not in valley-the
 ‘if Lord Sigvat is not in the valley’ (DN II.100)
- b. ef konungr bannaði eigi
 if king forbade not
 ‘if the King did not forbid it’ (Eg 190.21)
- (13) a. at láta eigi skera hár sitt
 to let not cut hair his
 ‘not to have his hair cut’ (Eg 6.13)
- b. at ágirnask ekki Svía-konungs veldi
 to covet not Swede-king’s power
 ‘not to covet the power of the Swedish king’ (Hkr II.118.9)

This means that there is no room for the infinitive marker, *at*, in T⁰. As we see, the adverbial follows the verb, and is therefore in a low position in both finite and non-finite clauses. (There are a few rare instances of a sentence adverbial preceding the verb in finite subordinate clauses, but adverbials in the low position is by far the predominant pattern in Old Norse.) On the basis of these data, the infinitive marker might be analyzed as a prefix or proclitic on the verb, as in West Germanic. There are, however, several arguments in favor of analyzing the infinitive marker as a separate word in C (Faarlund 2007, 62–63):

(i) Neither in manuscripts before 1400 nor in philological editions of them is the infinitive marker *at* ever joined to the verb, so we never find, for example, **atvera* ‘to be’ as a single word. Prepositions, on the other hand, are frequently joined to the first word of the complement, as in *þar alande* ‘there in-country’ (*Konungs skuggsjá*, p. 39b of the manuscript). In standardized spelling this would be *þar á landi*.

ii) When two infinitival phrases are coordinated the infinitive marker is not repeated in the way that prefixes usually are (as in, for example, *rewrite and rephrase*, not **rewrite and -*

phrase), see (14). (This is not an argument against a clitic status of the infinitive marker, but it argues against its status as a prefix).

- (14) þat var siðr konungs, at rísa upp snimma um morna ok klæðask
 that was habit king's to rise up early in morning and dress.REFL
ok taka handlaugar, ganga síðan til kirkju ok hlýða óttu-song
 and take handwashes go since to church and hear morning-song.
 'That was the King's habit, to get up early in the morning, get dressed and wash his hands and then go to church to hear the matins' (Hkr II.81.21)

(iii) Following the words *en* 'than' and *nema* 'except, unless', the infinitive marker is not expressed, as shown in (15). This is because *en* and *nema* are also complementizers occupying the C-position. Thus there is no place for the infinitive marker, which would also be in C.

- (15) Kjartan kaus heldr at vera með konungi en fara til Íslands
 Kjartan chose rather to be with king than go to Iceland
 'Kjartan chose to stay with the king rather than go to Iceland' (Laxd 129.17)

(iv) In raising constructions equivalent to those in (10) above, Old Norse regularly lacks the infinitive marker, indicating that it cannot be in T.

- (16) þótti honum hon vel hafa gert
 seemed him.DAT she well have done
 'She seemed to him to have done well' (Hkr III.391.18)

Based on these empirical observations, it seems clear that the infinitive marker in Old Norse is a regular complementizer merged in C.⁴

If the alternative analyses sketched above are seen as the result of a change from the Old Norse pattern, it is no longer obvious which one is the more plausible. The IM-in-T grammar of Modern Norwegian would involve a complete change of category of the infinitive marker, which may be difficult to explain. A change to the copy grammar is less dramatic, since it would involve "only" an extra internal merge operation.

⁴ There are, however, some instances of argument phrases preceding both the infinitive marker and the verb in Old Norse:

- (i) ok ætlaði brullup sitt at gera í Nóregi
 and intended wedding his to do in Norway
 'and intended to hold his wedding in Norway' (Hkr II.428.5)
 (ii) ek hafða nú ætlat sexskip ór landi at hafa
 I had now intended six ships from country to have
 'I had now intended to take six ships out of the country' (Hkr II.201.19)

These may be remnants of an earlier OV pattern, where the infinitive marker was a marker of the infinitive, rather than a complementizer, as suggested by Falk (2010).

4 Double Infinitive Marker

The copy grammar also finds support in constructions with the double infinitive marker, which was illustrated in (4) above, repeated here.

- (17) NN oppmodar alle som skal søkje om å ikkje å sendeinn søknaden
 NN encourages all who shall apply to to not to send in application.DEF
 i siste liten
 in last moment
 ‘NN encourages all those who are going to apply not to submit their application at the last moment’ (kulturradet.no)

This could be an error, but a Google search for “å ikke å” (‘to not to’) gave a multitude of hits, some even from official and presumably edited documents, such as (17) and (18d). As can be seen from (18d-h), the double infinitive marker is not restricted to the negation.

- (18) a. Topp 20 råd for å ikke å bli svindlet i sommerferien
 Top 20 tips for to not to be cheated in summer-vacation.DEF
 ‘Top 20 tips for not being cheated during the summer vacation’ (Kleiven blogg)
- b. Trenger unnskyldning for å ikke å drikke på byen
 need excuse for to not to drink on town.DEF
 ‘[I] need an excuse for not drinking out on the town’ (VG Debatt)
- c. Ordfører Ls prinsipp er å aldri å gi seg
 mayor L’s principle is to never to give himself
 ‘Mayor L’s principle is never to give up’ (facebook.com)
- d. For mange som har slitt, å plutselig å føle at de er uvurderlige
 for many who have struggled to suddenly to feel that they are invaluable
 ‘For many who have been struggling, suddenly to feel that they are invaluable ...’
 (Klassekampen 8.11.2014)
- e. Da er det å bare å glede seg til høstkolleksjonen kommer
 then is it to only to rejoice oneself to autumn-collection.DEF comes
 ‘Then all there is to do is look forward to the arrival of the autumn collection’
 (facebook.com)
- f. Arbeidsplassen tjener mer på å faktisk å ha folk på jobb
 work-place.DEF earns more at to actually to have people on job
 ‘The employer earns more by actually keeping people on the job’
 (nestorutvikling.no)
- g. eg har tenkt å kanskje å laga ein enkel standar treningsplan
 I have thought to perhaps to make a simple standard training-plan
 ‘I intend perhaps to make a simple standard work-out plan’ (nb-no.facebook.com)

- h. Ønsker du å garantert å bli rik, så bør du starte
 want you to guaranteed to become rich then should you start
 i dekkbransjen
 in tire-business.DEF
 ‘If you want to be guaranteed to get rich you should start in the tire business’
 (hegnar.no)

It is unlikely that we are dealing with two different but homophonous lexical items here. There is no difference in meaning depending on whether the infinitive marker appears in C or in T, or in both, so there can be only one infinitive marker in the numeration. It is also difficult to see this as a case of agreement or “attraction”, since there is only one verb in each clause. The only way to account for the double infinitive marker, will be to assume copying of the infinitive marker from T to C, as with the copying analysis suggested above to account for the split infinitive, but now *without the deletion of the lower copy*.

Cross-linguistically, copying without deletion is not an unknown phenomenon. One well known case is colloquial German, which allows for an intermediate *wh*-trace in C to be phonetically realized, if it is monomorphemic (Nunes 2001, Hornstein et al. 2005: 246):

- (19) Wen glaubt Hans, wen Jakob gesehen hat?
 who believes Hans who Jakob seen has
 ‘Who does Hans believe that Jakob saw?’

Another case is presented by Vata, a Niger-Congo language, where a verb may be fronted to a focus position, but still pronounced in its T-position (Koopman 1984, Nunes 2004).

- (20) li à li-da zué saká
 eat we eat-PAST yesterday rice
 ‘We did eat rice yesterday’

A common type of construction in Mandarin may perhaps be given a similar analysis. Here the verb is repeated if it takes both a direct object and a manner adverbial.

- (21) Ní xiě zì xiě de hén hǎo
 you write character write DE very well
 ‘You write (characters) very well’

One way of accounting for (21) within the VP-shell analysis would be to assume that the verb is copied from V to *v* without deletion of the lower copy.

- (22) $v_P[ní \ v[xiě \ v_P[zì \ v[xiě \ de \ hén \ hǎo]]]]$

If this is a general option across languages (albeit heavily constrained), it is not unlikely that this also may turn up in Norwegian infinitival constructions, leading to the double infinitive

marker. The Norwegian data in (17–18) support the movement analysis of the infinitive marker.

5 Conclusion

The variable placement of the sentence adverbial in non-finite clauses in Norwegian, leading to the well known variation between a split and a “non-split” infinitive, can be generated by (at least) two different grammars: one with the infinitive marker always in T^0 , and one with movement (internal merge) of the infinitive marker to C. Although the latter is less economical, it is more plausible in light of diachronic data. And above all, it can also account for the newly observed phenomenon of a double infinitive marker, which can be analyzed as a case of copying without deletion.

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