

## The Infinitive Built Prepositionally\*

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### Abstract:

This paper aims at analyzing the role of the preposition when it is used together with non-finite forms of the verb. We will examine the following aspects: the mixed features of the infinitive (substantival and verbal), the types of prepositions which can be combined with the non-finite forms of the verb (lexical, semi-lexical and functional), the ability of the preposition to generate a prepositional syntactic group, the setting/non-setting of a thematic role, the syntactic positions held by the infinitive with preposition. If the rule says that the preposition has a case government, we ask ourselves what happens to it in the presence of non-finite forms of the verb. Therefore, one of the discussed topics is the obstruction of the case government/practising it under the substantival features of the non-finite forms.

**Keywords:** preposition, case, infinitive, prepositional group, thematic role

### Introduction

According to today's grammar, the infinitive, the supine, the gerund and the participle are not viewed as "moods" any more, but as non-finite forms of the verb. It is also accepted that they reveal mixed features – characteristics which belong to several word classes. We will examine them one at the time.

The infinitive has two forms in the Romanian language – the so-called long infinitive, which was inherited from Latin and which is used as a noun (*auzire, mânca, vedea* etc. – *hearing, eating, seeing*, etc.), and the short infinitive, a late form, which was created on the field of the Romanian language and was built from the free morpheme "a" ("to" – a preposition without meaning), the root of the verb and conjugation morphemes (-a, ea, -e, -i, -î). Due to the fact that it lost its verbal value, the long infinitive is not of interest for our study. Next, we will examine the features of the short infinitive. The first interesting aspect is the fact that this verbal form has the functional, abstract preposition "a" ("to") in

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its structure. In the traditional grammar it is recognised as preposition and, as a result, the structures in which it is combined with other connectors are considered compound prepositions: *pentru a, de a, fără a, prin a, la a* (to, without, by, about). There are papers in which “a” (“to”) has different interpretations: “dividing morpheme of prepositional origin” (Constantinescu-Dobridor, 1974: 197), preposition with value of modal prefix (Iordan and Robu, 1978: 475), mark or morpheme of the infinitive (Bejan, 1995: 201). The association between the non-finite form and the preposition is one of the symptoms of placing it in the noun class, although the conversion has not been fully realised. In contrast, the finite forms of the verbs cannot be associated with prepositions.

In today’s grammar, “a” (“to”) is seen as a mark of the infinitive, “a free proclitic morpheme (not blended)” (GBLR, 2010: 290). Still of a substantival nature is the capacity of the infinitive to hold syntactic positions that are particular to this class of words: *A citi e important – To read is important.* (subject), *Dorința lui era de a cunoaște – His desire was to know.* (predicative), *Are a spune multe despre aceasta. – He has a lot to say about this.* (direct object), *Se gândește la a păstra locuința. – He is thinking about keeping the place.* (prepositional object), *A plecat fără a anunța. – He left without saying a word.* (adverbial of manner), *Luptă pentru a ajunge la mal. – He is fighting to get to the shore.* (adverbial of purpose), *A început prin a se prezenta. – He started by introducing himself.* (instrumental adverbial), etc. We can easily notice that, in most of the previous statements, the infinitival group is connected to the external centre through a preposition. The following morpho-syntactic features are of verbal nature: the grammatical category of time (*a merge – to go*: present infinitive, *a fi mers – to have gone*: perfect infinitive), the association with pronominal clitics (*a-și aminti, a vă spune, a te depăși – to remember, to tell, to outrun*), the capacity of having an identical or different subject to the centre-predicate of the statement (*Înainte de a sosi la Arad, trenul a oprit în cinci stații. – Before getting to Arad, the train stopped in five stations. Pentru a învinge ai noștri, ai tăi trebuie să piardă. – In order for ours to win, yours have to lose.*). Furthermore, this verbal form can be regent for syntactic positions: direct object (*Pentru a citi cartea, am depus efort. – To read the book, I made an effort.*), indirect object (*To give presents to three of the children seemed a nice gesture to me. – To give presents to three of the children seemed a nice gesture to me.*), prepositional object (*Începeau a se pregăti de drum. – They started getting ready for the road.*), adverbials (*A sosi duminica aceasta e indicat. – To arrive on Sunday is advisable., Fără a se îndrepta spre*

*noi, ne-a salutat. – Without looking at us, he said “hello”.*, *A fugi mai repede înseamnă a face efort. – Running faster means making an effort.*). Very rarely, the infinitive has autonomy in communication, materializing as predicate: *A nu se arunca nimic pe fereastră! – No throwing things out of the window. A nu se face gălăgie în timpul examenului. – No making noise during the exam.*

From the previous information, it is revealed that the infinitive is situated at the border between noun and verb, showing characteristics that belong to both classes of words.

### **Types of Prepositions That Can Be Associated with the Infinitive**

In the generative grammar it is suggested a taxonomy of the preposition, which is different of the classical one. Viewed as belonging to the major grammatical categories (together with the verb, the noun and the adjective), the class of preposition is characterized by disparity, due to the fact that in its paradigm there are both items with lexical value (prepositions with meaning, capable of setting a thematic role, creators of proper prepositional groups) and elements of functional nature (prepositions that help expressing the idea of case and building the syntactic function of direct object, morpheme prepositions, markers of non-finite forms of the verb). The semi-lexical prepositions are situated among these major subcategories and are requested by the syntactic-semantic matrix of a centre of an external group. Some prepositions are always lexical (for example *datorită, mulțumită, grație – through, thanks to, due to*), others can have a double value (*asupra – on, about*) or even triple value (*de, la, a – of, by, at, to*).

The number of prepositions/prepositional phrases that can be associated with the infinitive is limited to only a few: *de, în, pentru, fără, la, până, prin, spre, în afară de, în loc de, fără de – of, by, in, for, without, at, until, through, towards, beside, instead of, without*.

**Note:** according to recent theories, the following groups of words *înainte de, departe de, aproape de, dincoace de, dincolo de, alături de* (*before, away from, close to, beyond, across, alongside*) do not represent prepositional phrases, but adverbs which dominate prepositional groups (*GALR, GBLR*). This means that, in a statement like *Înainte de a răsări soarele, apărură câteva raze roșiatice. (Before the rising of the sun, a few red rays had appeared.)*, the term *înainte de* (*before*) represents an adverb that forms an adverbial group, subordinated to the verb *apărură* (*had appeared*), while the infinitive, that fulfils the function of adverbial of time, has the adverb as external centre ([<sub>GAdv</sub>Înainte<sub>GPrep</sub>[*de a răsări*]] *soarele, apărură câteva raze roșiatice. –* [<sub>AdvG</sub>Before<sub>PrepG</sub> [*the rising of*]] *the sun, a few red rays had appeared.*).

### The Prepositional Group Made up of Preposition + an Infinitive as Dominated Term

Prototypical, the prepositional group is made up of a lexical preposition, followed by a nominal, to which it imposes grammatical constraints – of case (accusative, genitive, dative), of articulation and thematic role. There are contexts in which the preposition (lexical/semi-lexical/functional) directs an infinitive. The structure deserves a detailed analysis – the problems raised by it are the following: what kind of constraints does the preposition impose upon the non-finite verb form? What happens to the case government of the preposition if the verb belongs to a non-case class of words? What is the role of the preposition in such structures? Does it always generate a prepositional syntactic group or the construction has a different nature? Does the preposition impose or not a thematic role upon the infinitive (taking into account the fact that this has specific noun features)?

The prepositional group is “an component of the statement made up of a preposition with a group centre status and another element that depends on it (usually belonging to the level of the preposition.)” (*GALR II*, 2005: 124). The grammatical restrictions that it enforces on the non-finite verb are few. We can talk about restrictions in terms of word order – the position occupied by the infinitive in relation to the preposition with a group centre status is always the same: *Pentru a vedea adevărul nu ai nevoie de ochelari.* (*To see the truth you do not need glasses.*), *\*A vedea pentru adevărul nu ai nevoie de ochelari* (*\*See to the truth you do not need glasses.*). In Romanian, the preposition does not change its place in questions, as it happens, for example, in English. The questions keep the following word order - preposition + infinitive: *Pentru a vedea adevărul ai nevoie de ochelari?* (*To see the truth you need glasses?*). Another defining feature of the prepositional group, which is applicable to the analysed situation, is the fact that, in Romanian, the prepositional group forms a syntactic island, protected from different syntactic operations. In other words, this type of prepositional group does not allow the insertion of other terms between the two elements – the group centre and the dominated term: *Încercarea de a bate recordul a eșuat.* (*The attempt to beat the record was not successful.*), *A participat fără a fi fost chemat.* (*He participated without being invited.*), *Pentru a reuși este nevoie de efort.* (*To succeed you need to make an effort.*). Through this tight cohesion, the prepositional group with an infinitive as dominated term is totally different from the prepositional structures with a nominal, which allow the insertion of terms between the centre preposition and the dominated term. We will refer to the same sentences: *De multă vreme n-a mai călătorit.* (*He has not travelled for a*

long **time**.), *Vine fără elegantul său partener.* (He is coming **without** his elegant **partner**.), *Pentru toți acești jucători, victoria este un stimulent.* (For all these **players** victory is an incentive.). The preposition can be associated with both the present infinitive and the perfect infinitive: *Încercarea de a fi bătut recordul a eșuat.* (The attempt **to have beaten** the record failed.), *Încercarea de a bate recordul eșuează,* (The attempt **to beat** the record is failing.).

The problem concerning the case government of the preposition in constructions with the infinitive is, in general, overlooked by the Romanian grammars. There are a few grammarians who talk about obstructing the prepositional government (Drașoveanu, 1997; Neamțu, 2006–2007). On the other hand, some authors claim that when they accompany the infinitive form of the verb, the elements seen traditionally as prepositions are actually conjunctions and, implicitly, the non-finite verb forms act as predicates (Dimitriu, 1969).

The thematic role applies only to the nominal: considering the noun features of the non-finite form does the preposition impose such a role in the presence of the infinitive? It is obvious that the meaning of the preposition/prepositional phrase extends to the group which determines the differentiation of certain syntactic positions: the preposition can show the purpose (*Aleargă pentru a ajunge la destinație.* – He is running **to get to** the destination.), the lack of something (*Mănâncă fără a mesteca.* – He eats **without chewing**), the opposition (*În loc de a citi, doarme.* – **Instead of reading**, he is sleeping.), the limit (*Până a crește cât tine, mai durează!* – **To get as tall as you are** takes time.).

#### Types of Prepositional Groups with the Infinitive

The classification we want to make has the type of preposition – group centre – as criterion. We will therefore distinguish between prepositional groups with a lexical centre, groups with a semi-lexical centre and groups with a functional centre.

Most of the analysed structures have as centre a lexical preposition or a prepositional phrase, a fact which is revealed by the meaning imposed on the dominated infinitive by the connector, thus deciding the syntactic function of the group: the preposition *pentru* (*for*) indicates the purpose and together with the non-finite verb makes up an adverbial of purpose (*Participă la concurs pentru a se impune în fața celorlalți.* – He is participating in the contest **to outrun** the others.); the preposition *fără* (*without*) has a negative meaning and it can only dominate an adverbial of manner or an adverbial of concession: *Fără a lupta, tot a câștigat.* A câștigat **fără a lupta.** (**Without a fight**, he still won. He won **without a fight**.). More restrictive are the phrases which, due to the

powerful semantics, dominate the terms that can fulfil only one syntactic function: *în loc de* (*instead of*) – oppositional adverbial (*În loc de a citi, a hotărât să facă o plimbare. – Instead of reading, he has decided to take a walk*), *în afară de* (*besides*) – cumulative adverbial (*În afară de a juca tenis, mai face și alte sporturi. – Besides playing tennis, he also practises other sports.*).

Subcategorized prepositional groups (the group centre is represented by a semi-lexical preposition) have mandatory status. They can be subordinated to the verb (*Activitatea lui **constă** în a analiza dosarele candidaților. – His activity **consists** of analysing the candidates' files. Valoarea unui artist **reșidă** în a crea ceva inedit. – An artist's value **lies** in creating something new.*), to the adjective (*Este **capabil** de a pricepe. – He is **capable** of understanding. Criteriul este **util** pentru a face diferența dintre categorii. – The criterion is **useful** to make a difference between categories.*), to the adverb (***Înainte** de a porni aparatul, citește instrucțiunile! – **Before** turning on the machine, read the instructions.*).

#### Syntactic Functions Held by the Infinitive with Preposition

When it comes to syntactic functions of the infinitive built with a preposition, we notice that generally these are owed to the substantival characteristics of this non-finite form. Thus, the infinitive has the functions of: subject – only with the morpheme/functional preposition “a” (*to*) – *A **munci** înseamnă reușită. (To work means success.*). The linguistic standards do not allow the proper prepositional construction – *E bine de a vedea... (It is good to see...)*, predicative – *Încercarea lui era **de a urca** pe Everest. (His attempt **to climb** the Everest...)*, verbal attribute – *Mișcarea **fără a face** zgomot a determinat succesul operațiunii. (The movement **without making** any noise has determined the success of the operation.)*, object complement – *Îl credeau **a fi** integru. (He was thought **to be** honest.)*, direct object – *Știe a analiza textul. (only after certain verbs – He knows **to analyse** the text.)*, prepositional object – *Nu sunteți capabili **de a vă afirma**. (You are not capable **of imposing** yourselves.)*, adverbial of time – *Spală-te pe mâini înainte **de a mânca**. (Wash your hand **before eating**.)*, adverbial of manner – *Nu pleca **fără a spune** adevărul! (Don't leave **without telling** the truth!)*, instrumental adverbial – *Expunerea lui a început **prin a preciza** limitele experimentului. (His presentation started **by specifying** the limits of the experiment.)*, adverbial of relation – *Părea pricepută **în a-i încurca** pe ceilalți. (She seemed skilled **in confusing** the others.)*, cumulative adverbial – *În afară **de a scrie** povești, creează și poezii. (Besides writing stories, he also creates poems.)*, oppositional adverbial – *Departa **de a o susține**, ei au combătut-o continuu. (Far from*

*supporting her, they were always against her.*), adverbial of concession – *Chiar fără a privi spre ei, tot a știut că este invidiată (Even without looking in their direction, she still knew she was envied.)*.

### Some Final Reflections

In Romanian, the infinitive, which is a non-finite form of the verb, is generally built with a preposition. On the one hand, there is a functional preposition with a grammatical role, which has become a marker-morpheme of the infinitive *a (to)*; this preposition has a fixed position – it always comes before the verb and it can establish connections with other prepositions of different nature (lexical, semi-lexical), making up a prepositional group together. Regardless of the type of the group-centre preposition, the infinitive obstructs the case government of the dominating term, due to the fact that the verb is a word class without the grammatical category of the case. In the present study we have distinguished between prepositional groups with a lexical centre and groups dominated by semi-lexical items in order to show the difference in their syntactic behavior. In terms of syntactic functions fulfilled by the infinitive with preposition, we have noticed that they reveal nominal features of this non finite form.

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