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A study of infinitive structures in European languages

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The article views a typology of infinitive structures in English, German, Russian, Polish, Spanish and French, which is highly significant for evolving linguistic typology and universals of language. The metalinguistic instrument for contrasting the basic infinitive structures is language etalon. Cross-linguistic coincidence with the structures of language etalon corresponds to one of the four types, such as universals, frequentals, marginals, unequals. The criterion of selecting linguistic representations to match the etalon is the prototype as the most characteristic way of expressing meaning in a concrete language. The hypothesis of the investigation consists of two indissolubly united parts: 1) the structural type of language affects its capacity for employing infinitive, 2) employing infinitive results from the tendency to compress text. By way of affinity with the etalon, the contrasted languages may be arranged from left to right in the following order: English → French → Spanish → German → Russian → Polish.

Keywords: infinitive, marginal, frequental, function, language of contrast, language-etalon, universal, unigual.

A contrastive study of European languages representing various degrees of genetic affinity is instrumental to evolving a theory of linguistic typology.

The subject under study is devoted to the functional potential of the infinitive in a set of the family of Indo-European languages localized on the territory of Europe: English (E.), German (G.), Russian (R.), Polish (P.), Spanish (S.) and French (F.).

These languages make up three well-known groups of the above-mentioned family each representing a couple of genetically more closely-related tongues, such as the Germanic group (English and German), the Slavonic group (Russian and Polish), the Romanic group (Spanish and French). This principle of selection allows the authors to envisage probable correlation between the origin of the contrasted languages and the represented structural types, as well as to disclose various types of cross-linguistic affinity with reference to the functional potential of the infinitive.

A contrastive study of the infinitive as one of the most disputable phenomena in linguistics due to its diffusive nature [2, p. 109] can make a substantial contribution to the theory of the infinitive, particularly to the study of its relations with the major parts of speech building up the sentence.

The factual material of the study is provided by equivalent sentences containing the infinitive in various syntactic functions to build up a *language etalon* (metalanguage). The language etalon is related by derivability to each of the languages of contrast that represent it (*lingua repraesentans*). This etalon functions as an invariant of all linguistic representations “to measure the distance between the linguistic realization of a type and an ideal type” [5, p. 94].

It is evident that there is more than one way to express meaning; therefore, a concrete linguistic representation may take the form different from the infinitive, as this form may happen to be more typical for this language system. The non-use of the infinitive in any of the equivalent sentences is interpreted as *variation*, either strong or weak. *Strong variation* suggests the use of a lexical substitution of the infinitive in the shape of a finite verb form or verbal noun. Weak variation suggests grammatical substitution of the infinitive in the shape of a gerund or participle. Besides, this contrastive study applies the notion of “partial variation” that suggests ambiguity with reference to the etalon: in one context linguistic representation may correspond to the etalon, while in another one it may show lexical or grammatical variation.

Linguistic representation of each section (model) by the languages of contrast matches one of the four possible types: 1) *universal* (infinitive in all representations), 2) *frequental* (infinitive in a majority of representations), 3) *marginal* (infinitive in a minority of representations), 4) *uniqueal* (infinitive in one representation only).

The truly objective criterion for selecting linguistic representations making up the etalon is *prototype* that stands for a linguistic form to express content by the commonest way intrinsic in a certain language. The theory of prototypes argues that every language is characterized by prototypes as “the best forms”, or “the central objects of a category” as against its “peripheral objects” [6, p. 448]. For instance, there is no need for structural change to translate the Russian sentence ПИТЬ ЭТУ ВОДУ БЕЗОПАСНО into either English, or German, or Spanish; cf.: E. *it is safe to drink this water* = G. *es ist sicher, dieses Wasser zu trinken* = S. (el) *beber esta agua es seguro*. However, translated into Polish, the sentence will take a verbal noun that is more typical for this language: P. *picie tej wody jest bezpieczne*. The preferred embodiment, *ceteris paribus*, will be a variant of linguistic representation that contains the infinitive, or at least the gerund, in contrast to a variant with a finite verb form in a subordinate clause, absolutely normal as it may be. Thus, both variants being equal, the non-finite verb structure is the choice variant as it best fits the etalon; cf. two English translations of the Russian sentence: R. *прежде чем ВЫКЛЮЧИТЬ свет, расстели постель* → 1) *before turning off the light, spread your bed*; 2) *before your turn off the light, spread your bed*.

Applying the abovementioned methodology makes it possible to establish isomorphic and allomorphic correlations between the languages of contrast and thus verify the hypothesis

that suggests 1) interrelation between the spread of infinitive structures in a language and the structural type of a language, 2) interrelation between the spread of infinitive structures in a language and a tendency for compressing text.

The functional typology of the infinitive includes the following signs of the metalinguistic lexicon to describe the etalon structure: the sign = stands for correspondence of a linguistic representation with the etalon infinitive function; the sign {} stands for non-correspondence of a linguistic representation with the etalon infinitive function; the sign → stands for intralinguistic variant; A = attribute, N = noun, Num-col – collective numeral, Num-ord = ordinal numeral, O = object, O-com = complex object, P = predicate, p = predicative, Prn = pronoun, S = subject, S-com = complex subject, S-inf (infinitive as subject), S-for = formal subject, V = verb, V-aux = auxiliary verb, V-mod = modal verb, V-asp = aspectual verb, V-lin = link verb, V-per-1 = perceptive verb, V-per-2 = performative verb, V-emo = emotive verb, V-men = mental verb.

The following typology is a reduced variant based on those functions of the infinitive related to the predication basis of the sentence, namely the functions of the subject, the predicate, the attribute and the object.

The infinitive as a subject (S-inf):

1) the subject proper [S-inf + P]; **frequental** (strong variation in Polish); cf.: E. *to smoke is harmful* = G. *rauchen ist schädlich* = P.Я. *курить вредно* {= P. *palenie jest szkodliwe*} = S. *fumar es dañino* = F. *fumer est nocif*; E. *it is safe to drink this water* = G. *es ist sicher, dieses Wasser zu trinken* = *dieses Wasser ist sicher zu trinken* = R. *эту воду пить безопасно* {= P. *picie tej wody jest bezpieczne*} = S. (e) *beber esta agua es seguro* = F. *il est sûr de boire cette eau*;

2) the formal subject [P (S-for + p) + S-inf]; **frequental** (strong variation in Russian and Polish); cf.: E. *it is harmful to smoke* → *to smoke is harmful* = G. *es ist schädlich zu rauchen* → *rauchen ist schädlich* {= R. *курить вредно* → *вредно курить*} {= P. *palenie jest szkodliwe* → *szkodliwe palenie*} = S. *es perjudicial fumar* → (e) *fumar es perjudicial* = F. *c'est nocif de fumer* → *fumer est nocif*;

3) the complex subject [S-com (N + V-inf) + P(V-per)]; **marginal** (strong variation in German, Russian and Polish); cf.: E. *he seemed to know about it* = {= G. *es schien, dass er davon wusste*} {= R. *казалось, что он знал об этом*} {= P. *wydawało się, że (on) o tym wiedział*} = S. (e) *parecía saberlo* = F. *il semblait le savoir*.

The infinitive as a predicate (P-inf):

1) the composite predicate with an auxiliary verb [P (V-aux + V-inf)]; **universal** (weak variation in Polish, Spanish and French); cf.: E. *I shall draw your portrait* = G. *ich werde dein*

Porträt **zeichnen** = R. (я) буду рисовать твой портрет {= P. (ja) *bede malował twój portret*} {= S. (yo) *voya pintar tu retrato*} {= F. *je vais peindre ton portrait*};

2) the composite predicate with a modal verb [P (V-mod + V-inf)]; **universal**; cf.: E. *Passengers should check in at the airport 30 minutes before take-off* = G. *Passagiere müssen sich 30 Minuten vor dem Start anmelden* = R. *пассажиры должны регистрироваться за 30 минут до взлета* = P. *pasażerowie muszą dokonać odprawy 30 minut przed startem* = S. *los pasajeros deben registrarse 30 minutos antes del despegue* = F. *les passagers doivent s'enregistrer 30 minutes avant le décollage*; E. *everybody knows what they need to do* = G. *sie alle wissen, was sie tun müssen* = R. *все знают, что им надо делать* = P. *wszyscy wiedzą, co muszą zrobić* = S. *todos saben lo que tienen que hacer* = F. *ils savent tous ce qu'ils doivent faire*;

3) the complex verbal predicate with an aspectual verb [P (V-asp + V-inf)]; **universal** (partial variation in German and Polish, weak variation in Spanish); cf.: E. *The whole building suddenly began to shake* = G. *das ganze Gebäude begann plötzlich zu zittern* = R. *все здание вдруг начало трястись* = P. *cały budynek nagle zaczął się trząść* = S. *todo el edificio de repente comenzó a temblar* = F. *tout le bâtiment a soudainement commencé à trembler*; E. *he continued to read* {= G. *er las weiter*} = R. *он продолжал читать* {= P. *czytał dalej*} {= S. *continuó leyendo*} = F. *il a continué à lire*;

4) the complex nominal predicate [P (V-lin + V-inf)]; **frequental** (strong variation in Polish); cf.: E. *his only desire is to work* = G. *sein einziger Wunsch ist es zu arbeiten* = R. *его единственное желание – работать (= работа)* {= P. *jego jedynym pragnieniem jest praca*} = S. *su único deseo es trabajar* = F. *son seul désir est de travailler*.

The infinitive as an object [O (V-inf)]:

1) the perceptive verb as object (in the speech acts of the senses) [P (V-per-1) + O (V-inf)]; **universal**; cf.: E. *The policeman wanted to see my driving licence* = G. *der Polizist wollte meinen Führerschein sehen* = R. *полицейский захотел увидеть мои водительские права* = P. *policjant chciał zobaczyć moje prawo jazdy* = S. *el policía quería ver mi licencia de conducir* = F. *le policier voulait voir mon permis de conduire*;

2) the performative verb as object (in the speech acts of promise, invitation, apology приглашение, извинение, prediction, warning, insistence, prohibition) [P (V-per-2) + O (V-inf)]; **frequental** (strong variation in Spanish; cf.: E. *my brother promised to help me find a job* = G. *mein Bruder hat mir versprochen, bei der Arbeit zu helfen* = R. *мой брат обещал мне помочь с работой* = P. *mój brat obiecał mi pomóc z urządzeniem do pracy* {= S. *mi hermano me prometió ayuda con el dispositivo para el trabajo*} = F. *mon frère m'a promis de m'aider avec l'appareil au travail*);

3) the emotive verb as object (in the speech acts of volition/reluctance, liking/hatred желание/нежелание, приязнь/неприязнь) [P (V-emo) + O (V-inf)]; **universal** (partial variation

in German); cf.: E. *I can't bear to get up early in the morning* = G. *ich hasse es, früh am Morgen aufzustehen* = R. (я) *ненавижу вставать рано утром* = P. *nienawidzę wstawać wczesnie rano* = S. *odio levantarme temprano en la mañana* = F. *je déteste me lever tôt le matin*; E. *we all love to talk about ourselves* {= G. *wir alle reden gerne über uns selbst*} = R. *все мы любим говорить о себе* = P. *wszyscy lubimy mówić o sobie* = S. *a todos nos gusta hablar de nosotros mismos* = F. *nous aimons tous parler de nous-mêmes*;

4) the mental verb as object (in the speech acts of recalling, keeping in mind, forgetting) [P (V-men) + O (V-inf)]; **universal**; cf.: E. *don't forget to switch off the light in the bathroom* = G. *vergiss nicht, das Licht im Badezimmer auszuschalten* = R. *не забудь выключить свет в ванной* = P. *nie zapomnij wyłączyć światła w łazience* = S. *no te olvidas de apagar la luz del baño* = F. *n'oublie pas d'éteindre les lumières de la salle de bain*;

5) the complex object (in the speech acts of desire, feelings mental activities) [O-com (N / Prn) + V-inf]; **frequental** (strong variation in Russian and Polish, partial variation in German, Spanish and French); cf.: E. *he didn't want the bus to come* {= G. *er wollte nicht, dass der Bus ankommt*} {= R. *он не хотел, чтобы автобус приехал*} {= P. (on) *nie chciał przyjazdu autobusu*} {= S. (el) *no quería que viniera el autobus*} {= F. *il ne voulait pas que le bus arrive*}; E. *he saw a bus come* = G. *er sah den Bus kommen* {= R. *он видел, как приехал автобус*} {= P. (on) *widział, jak przyjechał autobus*} = S. *vio llegar el autobús* = F. *il a vu le bus arriver*; E. *I think him to be funny* {= G. *ich denke, er ist lächerlich*} {= R. *я думаю, что он смешон*} {= P. (ja) *myślę, że jest śmieszny*} {= S. (yo) *creo que es ridículo*} {= F. *je pense qu'il est ridicule*}.

The infinitive as an attribute [A (V-inf)]:

1) the attribute for noun [N + A (V-inf)]; **universal**; cf.: E. *he has a chance to defeat his rival* = G. *er hat die Chance, seinen Rivalen zu besiegen* = R. *у него есть шанс победить своего соперника* = P. *ma szansę pokonać swojego rywala* = S. *tiene la oportunidad de vencer a su rival* = F. *il a une chance de vaincre son adversaire*;

2) the attribute for pronoun [Prn + A (V-inf)]; **universal**; cf.: E. *would you like something to eat?* = G. *möchtest du etwas essen?* = R. *тебе хочется что-нибудь поесть?* = P. *chciałbyś coś zjeść?* = S. *¿quieres comer algo?* = F. *veux-tu manger quelque chose?*

3) the attribute for ordinal numeral [Num-ord + A (V-inf)]; **frequental** (strong variation in Russian and Polish); cf.: E. *if there is any news, you will be the first to know* = G. *wenn es Neuigkeiten gibt, wirst du es zuerst erfahren* {= R. *если появится какая-то новость, ты первый об этом узнаешь*} {= P. *jeśli pojawi się jakaś wiadomość, najpierw się o tym dowiesz*} = S. *si hay alguna noticia, eres el primero en saberlo* = F. *s'il y a des nouvelles, tu es le premier à le savoir*;

4) the attribute for collective numeral [Num-col + A (V-inf)]; **universal**; cf.: E. *there was much to do on that day* = G. *viel musste an diesem Tag getan werden* = R. *многое надо*

было **сделать** в тот день = P. *wiele* trzeba było **zrobić** tego dnia = S. *había mucho que hacer* ese día = F. *il y avait beaucoup à faire* ce jour-là.

Syntactic typology of the infinitive in the languages of contrast

| FUNCTION | MODEL | E. | G. | R. | P. | S. | F. |
|---------------|----------------------------------|----|-----|----|-----|-----|-----|
| S (subject) | 1.[S-inf + P]: | + | + | + | - | + | + |
| | 2.[P (S-for + p) + S-inf] | + | + | - | - | + | + |
| | 3.[S-com (N + V-inf) + P(V-per)] | + | - | - | - | + | + |
| P (predicate) | 1.[P (V-aux + V-inf)] | + | + | + | (+) | (+) | (+) |
| | 2.[P (V-mod + V-inf)] | + | + | + | + | + | + |
| | 3.[P (V-asp + V-inf)] | + | (+) | + | (+) | (+) | + |
| | 4.[P (V-lin + V-inf)] | + | + | + | - | + | + |
| O (object) | 1.[P (V-per-1) + O (V-inf)] | + | + | + | + | + | + |
| | 2.[P (V-per-2) + O (V-inf)] | + | + | + | + | - | + |
| | 3.[P (V-emo) + O (V-inf)] | + | (+) | + | + | + | + |
| | 4.[P (V-men) + O (V-inf)] | + | + | + | + | + | + |
| | 5.[O-com (N / Prn) + V-inf] | + | (+) | - | - | (+) | (+) |
| A (attribute) | 1.[N + A (V-inf)] | + | + | + | + | + | + |
| | 2.[Prn + A (V-inf)] | + | + | + | + | + | + |
| | 3.[Num-ord + A (V-inf)] | + | + | - | - | + | + |
| | 4.[Num-col + A (V-inf)] | + | + | + | + | + | + |

All in all, the four functions of the infinitive (subject, predicate, object, attribute) are distributed in 16 models, representing three types of equivalence with the etalon: *full equivalence* <+> (one point), *partial equivalence* <(+)> (half a point), *negative equivalence* <-> (zero point) (see the table above). The sum total of the points related to these types ranks the contrasted languages to display affinity with the etalon: E. (16) → F. (15) → S. (14) → G. (13,5) → R. (12) → P. (7). Thus, English takes the highest mark on the scale showing full coincidence with the etalon (16 = 16), while Polish takes the lowest mark (7 < 16), the other languages taking intermediate positions.

As for cross-linguistic coincidence, universals prevail (9 < 16), frequentals are fewer (6 < 16), there is only one marginal (1 < 16) and there are no univals at all (0 < 16).

All the languages of contrast differ in the way of expressing grammatical meaning, which is highly likely to induce non-finite forms of the verb, such as the infinitive. Naturally, this difference cannot serve but a rough tool for dividing languages into synthetic and analytical. As is known, in J. Greenberg's index (M/W) based on correlation of morphemes (M) and words (W) in one text, the index ≤ 2 points is typical for the analytical type, while the index ≥ 2 points for the synthetic type [1]; thus, J. Greenberg's study of this index for English ranges from 1.9 to 2.45. The problem is that the number of morphemes related to the number of words of a concrete language, such as English, happens to vary significantly in different counts. Traditionally, such languages as English, French, Spanish and (with some reservations) German are treated as analytical tongues opposed to the representatives of synthetic languages, such as Russian and Polish.

The analysis shows a more expansive usage of the infinitive in English, French and Spanish, as well as (partially) in German as compared to Russian and, especially, Polish. The most likely factor to explain the infinitive spread is *text compression* [4, p. 193–194], i.e. its reduction “up to the level of minimum superfluity, yet sufficient for comprehension” [3, p. 128].

This kind of text compression typically results from transforming a subordinate clause structure by an infinitive structure based on either *accusativus cum infinitivo* or *nominalivus cum infinitivo*.

Text compression models are typically related to idiomatic phrases with aspectual meaning of the predicate verb; they are partial lexical equivalents in the languages of contrast, thus, they may be considered as univals; cf. the following idiomatic expressions in English, Spanish, French and German: E. [V-used + V-inf]: *he used to play the piano in the evening*, [V-have + Prn + V-do]: *they have nothing to do with that incident*; S. [V-finish + V-inf]: *ella acaba de llamarme* “she called me up just now”, [V-ir + V-inf] *voy a invitar a mis padres* “I am going to invite my parents”; F. [S-for-on + V-inf]: *on vient de rentrer* “<somebody> has just returned”, [V-venir + V-inf]: *vous venez de le demander* “you have just asked about it”; G. [Prn-darauf + V-inf]: *er freut sich darauf, bald nach Hause zu fahren* “he feels happy about going home soon”, [S + P (V-inf)]: *an der Grenze sind die Pässe vorzuzeigen* “it is necessary to produce a passport when crossing the border”.

To recapitulate:

1. Cross-linguistic coincidence in the use of infinitive structures is due not so much to their genetic kindred, but to their structural affinity, which distinguishes the languages characterized by the manifest of analytical tendency (English, French, Spanish) from the languages of synthetic tendency, such as Polish, (to a lesser extent) Russian and (to the least extent) German. This corroborates the first part of the hypothesis on the correlation between the spread of the infinitive and structural affinity of languages.

2. The affinity between the languages of contrast is specifically displayed in the way the infinitive functions as subject, predicate, object and attribute.

3. According to the degree of representing the etalon the languages of contrast may be ranked from left to right as follows: English → French → Spanish → German → Russian → Polish. Thus, English is closest to and Polish farthest from the etalon.

4. Such languages as English, French and Spanish, as well as (partially) German are characterized by text compression, especially by the way of substituting more complicated subordinate clause structures by infinitive structures.

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Инфинитивные конструкции в европейских языках

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В статье рассматривается типология инфинитивных конструкций в английском, немецком, русском, польском, испанском, французском языках, что имеет важное значение для лингвистической типологии и лингвистики языковых универсалий. Метаязыковым инструментом сравнения основных видов инфинитивных структур в конкретных языках служит язык-эталон. Межъязыковое совпадение со структурами языка-эталона соответствует одному из четырех типов, таких как универсалии, фреквенталии, маргиналии, уникалии. Критерием отбора языковых репрезентаций, представляющих эталон, служит прототип как наиболее характерный для конкретного языка способ выражения значения. Гипотезой исследования служит двуединый тезис: 1) структурный тип языка влияет на его способность к использованию инфинитивных структур; 2) использование инфинитивных структур объясняется тенденцией к компрессии текста. По степени близости к эталону языки-репрезентанты можно расположить слева направо в следующем порядке: английский → французский → испанский → немецкий → русский → польский.

Ключевые слова: инфинитив, маргиналия, функция, универсалия, уникалия, фреквенталия, язык сравнения, язык-талон.