Pragmatic and Expressive Functions of Certain Infinitive Phrases In Modern English Discourse

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Abstract: Nowadays modern linguistics is aimed at developing new methods of communicative and pragmatic research of the language use. The problem of studying the pragmatic and expressive characteristics of certain infinitive phrases in modern English is very complicated. It can depend on the conditions the language develops and is used in modern society. With the help of emotional, expressive, lexical means and stylistic devices the pragmatic and communicative characteristics the focused infinitive elements can be determined and have certain semantic and syntactic characteristics in narrow and wide contexts, i.e. in one sentence and in the whole extract or text. Discourse studies is often defined as the practice of 'good' public speaking and writing, using such optional structures that are used especially to convey or produce specific effects in a text and conversation. Being a special form of a text discourse includes the personal component of the communication and is closely connected with the speaker’s individuality. Discourse analysis within pragmatics deals with the functions of linguistic forms in speakers’ interaction and focuses on the ways people understand and manage their everyday life. Whereas discourse studies analyzes interactional sequences and phenomena such as interruptions, turn taking, pauses, opening and closing models in conversations and many other properties and strategic moves of various communicative situations. The investigation touches upon such a linguistic phenomenon as certain infinitive phrases within the approach to language as one of the most important means of communication and as an instrument by means of which the actual process of conveying information from one person to another is carried out.

Key words: Certain infinitive phrases · Pragmatic functions · Communicative situation · Context · Conversation · Expressive means

INTRODUCTION

Pragmatic aspects of communication contain certain linguistic means which help to create special speech patterns that focus on different genres and styles of speech. Having a communicative function language helps people not only to express their thoughts in the process of communication but to manifest their feelings and emotions as a sign of caring discourse participants. More generally, it states that pragmatic approach is connected with an empirical analysis of actual language use. As linguistics studies various aspects of language for specific purposes the purpose of communication depends upon the circumstances and people who are together to achieve efficient goals following the process of speech in each particular case. The study of communicative and pragmatic aspects of contextually based language use extend the traditional focus on syntax and semantics with a pragmatic component, accounting for the functions of language in terms of speech acts [1-4]. Within the tradition of British analytical philosophy, pragmatics has become the discipline that houses many of the studies of language use. It is the study of how the speakers use language to communicate in a particular context. The theory of so-called speech acts occupies the central place in pragmatics. Like sentences speech acts usually come in sequences that can be said to be locally or globally coherent, i.e. when one speech act provides reasons for the next one. Any kind of utterance has a certain influence on a listener in order to make further conversation more successful. In this case success depends on the choice of emphatic means of...
Modern English contains various fixed infinitive phrases or parentheses. The research purposes are focused on the ways of determination of the validity of infinitive phrases in accordance with the context of the conversation, i.e. the communicative situation. That is why such phrases need a new investigation due to their complicated and versatile nature. The infinitive phrases are frequently used in ordinary English conversation and one of the research aims of this paper is to prove that communicative and pragmatic features of such elements are justified both as an element of an utterance and as a unit of discourse. It is very important to achieve the nomination of the phenomenon within the studies of dialogue and pay attention to communicative and pragmatic characteristics of certain infinitive phrases.

In modern English parentheses and insertions are defined as the essential part of the texture of everyday conversation [5,6 and 7]. This may be characterized as the wide use of words, word-groups and clauses which are not grammatically dependent on any part of the sentence. So parentheses serve as independent elements in sentence structure. The term ‘parenthesis’ is used here to cover the independent sentence elements (certain infinitive phrases) commonly occurring in everyday conversation. The following infinitive phrases as to tell the truth, to be absolutely candid, to tell properly, to be (quite) frank with you, to be (perfectly) frank, to put it mildly (crudely/simply/briefly), to say nothing (least) of, so to speak, so to say, strange (needless) to say, not to speak of, to make matters worse, to begin with, to start with, to be sure, to be quite plain, to be honest, to be fair, to be more precise, to be more exact, to resume the thread of the story, to cut a long story short, to be brief, etc. are in focus because of their communicative and pragmatic functions and power in speaker-centered speech when a speaker’s emotions, feelings, needs, wishes, etc. are transmitted with the help of infinitive phrases to the listener (partner). They may be parenthetically inserted into a sentence without forming part of its strict grammatical structure.

Data Analysis: A parenthesis is considered to be connected with the rest of the sentence rather semantically than grammatically [5, 6]. The parenthetical remarks interrupt the flow of the sentence. They are usually used to show the speaker’s attitude to the thought contained in a sentence, or to connect the chain of utterances or to summarize what has been said in the sentence. Every time the message is sent there is someone to send it and someone to receive it. Communication must be two-way in order to be fully effective. There are some desirable stages for the speakers to fulfill the communicative purposes. Firstly, think clearly; secondly, arrange the thoughts logically; thirdly, express clearly; then use appropriate language; and, finally, express as concisely as possible. As it had been mentioned before the certain infinitive phrases serve to achieve the communicative purpose of the conversation. Successful communication requires that the participants adhere to conversational rules and norms of behaviour. Some infinitive phrases normally and typically occur in dialogue and play an important part in the connection between sentences (sometimes thoughts) said by different speakers. From the point of view of discourse functions the language of conversation is based on conveying attitudinal reactions. These attitudes generally entail a high degree of subjectivity, which finds its expression in the explicitness of the certain above-mentioned infinitive phrases. The use of certain parenthetical infinitive phrases as a medium of the speaker’s choice steers the development of individual traits of language – the new, original, non-standard forms which impart specific colouring to the utterance.

In speech production words and word combinations are brought together to convey all kinds of messages. Sometimes however the process of combining words goes beyond systemic correspondences and becomes creative. The speaker may make a series of conscious or unconscious choices that arise from the immediate context and affect the development of discourse. The main purpose of language is to serve as a means of communication, but it does not always have a ‘message’ in any real sense, certainly not in the sense of a piece of information. Part of language function is concerned with social relationship due to its association with the speaker and the context. It becomes obvious that not all communication is aimed at conveying factual information. Rather often it is not facts of reality as such that are being described, but more complicated states and images. Concepts and images of the world engendered in people’s minds through the process of perception constitute the inner (semantic) structure of linguistic units with the respect to which their material form is the outer (phonetic) structure. Words therefore possess both expression and content. The speaker’s involvement then becomes an important factor in language use which affects the choice of lexical items and the way they are employed to express meanings.
To be more exact, there is an increase in intensity or expressivity of the utterance when a more obvious manifestation of evaluation is rendered through certain infinitive phrases that imply their ability to enhance the force of representation. They, as a result, add individual and emotional overtones to the neutral sentences while the speaker has the right to choose an infinitive phrase that suits the context better as it implies a personal attitude.

The data for this study were obtained from English and American literature and drama of the two recent centuries. The works have been chosen as the source of research since they contain special word combinations with the infinitive that are widely used in everyday life up to the moment, i.e. in the XXI century. The aim of such a close look at them is to trace the frequency of their use and how certain infinitive phrases are treated in speech. So different groups of certain infinitive phrases were investigated and some communicative and pragmatic functions were identified in order to analyze the data of this paper. It is necessary to point out that the purpose of this study is not to approve or disapprove the existence and use of such infinitives but to analyze their the pragmatic and communicative effect in the conversation.

Thus parenthetical elements contained infinitive as the fixed component are called stereotyped phrases or clichés and are common among parentheses. With the help of these infinitive phrases the speaker can express various degrees of certainty, uncertainty, supposition, doubt, desirability, probability, etc. of the action indicated explain that almost all independent elements are easy to various degrees of certainty, uncertainty, supposition, doubt, desirability, probability, etc. of the action indicated explain that almost all independent elements are easy to

The following infinitive phrases are usually used to mark the beginning or summation of the thought. They are commonly used in conversational English to mark a transition to another stage of the thought.

e.g. (1) “To be sure – I’d quite forgot it in my thoughts of greater things! …” [8];
(2) “To begin with he’d only been there about five minutes and she or I would have heard the shot and secondly, the same difficulty remains about his being at the writing-table”[9];
(3) “Now to begin,” he said, “I need not say to you, of course, that there was considerable opposition on the part of Mr. Kane’s father, to this – ah – union between yourself and his son” [10].

The infinitive phrase within a statement can occupy: 1) the initial position (To tell the truth, I’d got hardly enough to keep body and soul together (and you’ve got to look presentable as a clerk) when I got the offer of this stocking job. A salary and commission! [9]; 2) the interposition “She wouldn’t have had time, to begin with and then women never like fiddling about with firearms …”[11]; 3) the final position (“… but I somehow felt that if I could stop on it would be quite different, that I shouldn’t be frightened at all, so to speak” [12]. As an independent element in the sentence the infinitive phrase is graphically marked with the help of comma, dash or brackets and in speech it is marked with the help of intonation or a pause. At the same time a pause, being an extra linguistic means, grips a listener’s attention. So, the speaker tries to use such an ‘opening phrase’ at the end of the sentence. It should be stressed though that inversion takes place here and makes the whole utterance more expressive. In the sentence: “It was my fault to begin with.” He pattered her hand reassuringly. [13] the infinitive phrase to begin with is not marked graphically but is placed at the end of the utterance. It emphasizes a speaker’s desire to render a strained and nervous communicative situation. The question arises whether the phrase which is not punctually marked (has a “zero” punctuation) is a parenthesis or whether it becomes the dependent element in this or that sentence.

On the one hand, it can be discussed that in the following sentence the independent infinitive is an adverbal modifier of purpose: To tell the truth she was a teeny bit ridiculous. On the other hand, the component to tell the truth in this context has inner idiomatic unity which makes it a specific infinitive clause. Necessity can explain that almost all independent elements are easy to be omitted without any grammatical loss of the sentence. For example, in the sentence To tell the truth she was a teeny bit ridiculous the process of transforming is obvious: To tell the truth she was a teeny bit ridiculous? She was a teeny bit ridiculous. Moreover, the element to tell the truth correlates with the component contained modal verb must – if the truth must be told which, on the contrary, shows the inner predicative relation. So the process of omission proves the independence of the infinitive that can be distinguished as a parenthetical infinitive phrase.

When the analysis has been made there may be the following conclusion: the certain infinitive phrases are referred to peculiar components called loose or isolated (independent) infinitive. They are not involved into predicative components’ relations but possess great communicative and pragmatic content of the utterances. Such infinitive phrases appear in a sentence on the basis of introductory, i.e. they are not connected with the parts
of a sentence but are used to convey extra characteristics
of discourse. This linguistic phenomenon has syntactical
and functional features in the structure of both an
utterance and a text (discourse). All this allows to analyze
certain infinitive phrases in modern English discourse,
taking into account their inner content and pragmatic
features in communication. The pragmatic approach
reveals the factors that determine speech situations.
The language of conversation is specifically characterized
by its interactional function in its expressive, emotive,
interpersonal aspects. In turn, discourse, contrary to the
text, is understood as a process, not as a product, the
structure of which is constituted on the basis of the
interaction of wide and narrow context. It should be
pointed out however that context and its impact on
discourse is very complex.

While focusing on text and talk there are a vast
number of other aspects that need to be further studied
both in micro (local) situations and on macro (global)
levels. Indeed, in a micro situation a general aim and
point of the utterance are defined by the speaker in order
to inform the partner in the process of conversation.
In the following example: “… it makes me sort of feel as if
I wasn’t so much of a nobody, so to speak, as your
mother seems to like to make out sometimes.” [14] a
general point is conveyed but the infinitive phrase so to
speak helps to understand more closely that the speaker
is anxious and adds a certain extra explanation in this
situation to make it clearer and to show his alarm feelings.

e.g. “She wouldn’t have had time, to begin with and
then women never like fiddling about with firearms …”

Again, such infinitive phrase as to tell the truth the
speaker demonstrate his participation and great interest
in what’s going on combining his feelings with expectations
and emotional background of the partner. At the same
time, such emotional attitude towards what has been said
is expressed via a certain infinitive phrase to tell you the
truth.

e.g. (1) “How much were the cigarettes?” – “To tell
the truth, I forgot to buy them.” [15]; (2) To tell you the
truth, I’d got hardly enough to keep body and soul
together (and you’ve got to look presentable as a clerk)
when I got the offer of this stocking job.

A salary and commission! [9].

It can prove that the use of certain infinitive phrases
helps not only to express the author’s position and
convey the content, but also relate to the proceeding
context and forestall the further response. On the other
hand, on macro levels the infinitive phrases function as
discourse markers. This states that the speaker uses
certain infinitives with different goals in different
situations just to achieve his own intention and to fulfill
his own expectations. While language coincides with
objective world and knowledge is connected with the
subjective characteristics of the speakers the certain
infinitive phrases have communicative and pragmatic
characteristics which help to solve communicative task in
any situation. In the following communicative situation
the infinitive phrase to tell the truth enlarges the frame of
the sentence, makes it more informative and expresses the
speaker’s attitude alongside with the ability of the
partners to understand each other’s intentions in the
process of conversation. In the end they agree with each
other and, moreover, give their own points of view.

e.g. “To tell the truth,” I said, as I fetched her shawl,
the whole thing seems to me a bewildering maze.” [11].

The data under investigation demonstrate the
particular validity of the infinitive phrases under certain
circumstances. Therefore every speech act has its goal to
have an influence on the interlocutor. While choosing the
certain infinitive phrase in this or that communicative
situation the speaker appeals to the listener’s feelings,
desires and expectations. Most of what human beings say
is aimed at success of perlocutionary acts, but because
perlocutionary effects are behavioural, cognitive, or
emotional responses they are not linguistic objects.

What linguists can properly look at, however, are the
intentions of speakers to bring about certain
perlocutionary effects which are called illocutionary
intentions. The basis of a speech act is the speaker’s
intention to influence the hearer in a desired way.
The common pragmatic aim is a possible choice of one of
the view points on the events, facts and phenomena of
real life through the author’s individual vision of the
world. As the studies of discourse are also called
‘pragmatic’ they somehow have to do with the study of
‘language use’. Within the framework of the empirical
investigation the communicative and pragmatic aspects of
the focused infinitive phrases are represented in three
main groups containing: 1) expressive features; 2)
informative features; 3) special-purpose features.

In general expressive means are used to colour one’s
speech, to make it more vivid and lively as in the following
situation: “To put it mildly,” giggled Mrs. Low. “The truth
is they gave the whole show away” [16]. The infinitive
phrase to put it mildly is used to show irony and sneer.
In the following example: “Had he not picked her up out
of nothing, so to speak and befriended her?” [10] the infinitive so to speak contains a great deal of pragmatic content. It is used to maintain one’s own opinion, to emphasize the speaker’s sarcastic feelings.

In the following examples: “Needless to say, we were gazetted to completely different regiments from those we had applied for” [17]; “Although a lady of ‘mature charms’, Mrs. Winterbourne loved to fancy herself as a delicious young thing of seventeen, passionately beloved by a sheik-like but nevertheless ‘clean’ (not to say ‘straight’) Englishman” [17] the participants may be ironical, sentimental, emotional while talking to each other and, of course, each of them wants to state his own point of view. With the help of expressive means the speaker shows his intention to achieve some certain pragmatic effect in speech. Thus, the utterance contains a great deal of pragmatic power which creates the specific atmosphere within the communicative situation. The pragmatic aspect of emotiveness is displayed in expansion of conversational norms when the participants in a speech act give way to their feelings and emotions and use language as an outlet of their communicative energy or intentions. The use of the infinitives can be described as a powerful technique of characterization bringing out individual features of personages improving their own point of view.

 e.g. “To tell the truth, I did not expect much in that line. But we could not neglect two possible candidates for the murder.” “Surely you don’t think –” [9]; “Well, to tell you the honest truth, Lester,” replied Robert. “I never did feel right about that will business, I never did things that have happened.” [10].

Taking into account the so-called human-centered approach the infinitive phrases may have the following expressive functions to convey evaluative and emphatic basis of this or that statement: 1) Evaluative function highlights the expressive characteristics of the context (e.g. “To be sure – I’d quite forgot it in my thoughts of greater things!…” [8]; Of course, that’s not accurate, so to speak, but it gives us an idea. [11]; “To put it mildly,” giggled Mrs. Low. “The truth is they gave the whole show away” [16]; “To put it simply, is there among us one or more persons who could not possibly have administered either cyanide to Anthony Marston, or an overdose of sleeping draughts to Mrs. Rogers and who had no opportunity of striking the blow that killed General Macarthur?” [9]. 2) Emphatic function serves to accentuate colourful component of the statement (e.g. “Truth to tell, the affair was fading from my mind also, partly, I think, because I dislike to think of Poirot as being in any way associated with a failure, when on July 25" it was suddenly revived” [9]; “Needless to say, we were gazetted to completely different regiments from those we had applied for” [17]; “Towards the end of the week, however, he announced his intention of paying a visit to Bexhill and neighbourhood and suggest that I should come with him. Needless to say, I accepted with alacrity” [9]. 3) Appealing function is connected with the demonstrative address and is fully revealed in discourse (e.g. “Well, to tell you the honest truth, Lester,” replied Robert. “… I never did things that have happened” [10]; “To tell the truth, my Tess, I don’t like you to be left anywhere away from my protection and sympathy” [8].

Informative aspect of studying the infinitive phrases gives the opportunity to trace the logical and reasonable arguments as in the examples: “To tell the truth, I did not expect much in that line …” “Surely you don’t think –” [9]; “But to say the truth, it would be a disappointment to myself: I long to see them as much as they to see me – perhaps more” [18].

There are some epistemological characteristics of certain infinitive phrases in modern English discourse which deserve attention. They are as follows: 1) Argumental function of the infinitive phrases has the aim to prove and estimate the speaker’s words and, at the same time, to make the recipient take them for granted (“But to say the truth, it would be a disappointment to myself: I long to see them as much as they to see me – perhaps more” [18]; “It would come better from you, sir.” “Perhaps – but to tell the truth – well, I’ve no fancy for doing it …” [11]; “They could probably tell us the way to the Emerald City.” “To be sure they could” [19]; “Was Mr. Hatfield at the ball?” “Yes, to be sure” [18]; “Is it really so, Miss Murray? And does your mamma know it and yet wish you to marry him.” “To be sure she does!” [18]; 2) cohesive function helps the speakers to organize the thoughts in a sentence and connect them with the further replies: “I’m afraid it preyed on his mind very much to begin with.” “To begin with? Not so much afterwards” [9]; “To begin with he’d only been there about five minutes and she or I would have heard the shot and secondly, the same difficulty remains about his being at the writing-table” [9]; “Now to begin,” he said, “I need not say to you, of course, that there was considerable opposition on the part of Mr. Kane’s father, to this – ah – union between yourself and his son” [10].
As for the special-purpose features in use of the independent infinitive it is of great importance to be sure that one’s dreams will come true. To see the result of the conversation one should make his interlocutor believe him and be ready to do what the speaker wants. The use of the infinitive phrase in the following example show the certain pragmatic content of the speakers: When I, to use your own words, screw and bully and drive these people to pay what they have freely undertaken to pay me, I cannot touch one penny of the money they give me until I have first paid you your seven hundred a year out of it” [20].

The following functions include the rate of the result, i.e. the fulfillment of some actions in speech: 1) Perlocutive intention is aimed at the communicative intention in order to select the specific infinitive phrases to maintain the speech act in the certain context (“…and, to put it short, the game is up for men in the position of you and Mr Sartorius” [20]; 2) Performative function “Aunt Judy, To be sure: you know you can come in n out as you like”[20]. One more group of certain infinitive phrases include the following word combinations as to begin with, to start with, to begin, now to start, to conclude, to sum up, so to say, so to speak, to say nothing of, that is to say which have a text-formation function. With the help of such infinitive phrases the speaker connects the parts of the text, making the certain structure of his thoughts in the context just to give some kind of a logical outline of the utterance (e.g. To begin with, she was strangled with her own belt – therefore she must almost certainly have been killed by some one with whom she was on friendly or affectionate terms. [9]; “Had he not picked her up out of nothing, so to speak and befriend her?” [10]. These certain infinitive phrases (to begin with, to start with, etc.) are determined in linguistics as linking signals. In this case the speaker has a real purpose to help his partner to understand him. Note though, that with the help of the isolated infinitive now to begin in the following example: “Now to begin,” he said, “I need not say to you, of course, that there was considerable opposition on the part of Mr. Kane’s father, to this – ah – union between yourself and his son.” [10] the speaker begins a new utterance and grips the listener’s attention involving him into the conversation. Similarly, certain infinitive phrases can be represented as conjuncts which logically connect parts of discourse. For instance, such infinitive phrases or enumerating linking signals as to begin with, to start with, to conclude, etc. are used to show the coherence and sequence of speaker’s thoughts. Sometimes the emotional tension is noticeable when the speaker uses an infinitive phrase alongside with repetitions, auxiliaries, interjections, or parentheses.

e.g. (1) It had, of course, far more elements of popularity. To begin with the victim was a young and good-looking girl. Also, it had taken place at a popular seaside resort. [9]; (2) “I was very sorry to believe what I did – very sorry. Because I liked them both. But you know what human nature is. And to begin with, when first he and then she both confessed in the most foolish way – well, I was more relieved than I could say. …” [11].

The examples bellow show that some infinitive phrases are repeated within the frame of the dialogue and give both speakers a possibility to copy the same utterances in the conversation.

e.g. (1) “I’m afraid it preyed on his mind very much to begin with.” “To begin with? Not so much afterwards.” [9].

(2) Jack: …To say nothing of the fact that she is my ward. Algernon: … To say nothing of the fact that she is my cousin. [21].

In the first example given above the infinitive phrase to begin with used in the question is stimulated by what was said before in the situational context. This question repeats part of the preceding utterance with the intention of the questioner to express some emotion (incredulity or great surprise). The second statement in the example (2) serves as a comment on the first one and Expresses the speaker’s emotional attitude, i.e. the infinitive phrase is repeated with great interest. The infinitive phrase so to speak has a post- or interposition in an utterance, connects parts of a text and helps the speaker to express his own point of view.

e.g. (1) “Pshaw! No thanks necessary. Always glad to oblige a friend, so to speak.” He winked at me. [22];

(2) “And indeed the hopes of the future are a fine company to live with, exquisite forms, fascinating if you like, but – so to speak – naked, stripped for a run” [23-28].

When the speaker uses that is to say he makes his thoughts more exact, full and particular [29-31].

e.g. There must have been deliberate selection on his part – and therefore premeditation. That is to say, he must have reconnoitered the ground beforehand [9].

CONCLUSION

Certain infinitive phrases are used to convey individual or communal emotions in speech acts. Emotiveness is a functional category that serves to express the speaker’s emotional state in the process of
communication. It is obviously revealed with the help of independent infinitive phrases in the text. Certain infinitive phrases constitute a special class of lexical emotive units which explicate the way people conceptualize their attitude towards is being said in their communication. This type of discourse has some peculiarities and differs in intention from the discourse of a person using language to convey descriptive or referential meanings. As a result, it has reference not directly to things or phenomena of objective reality but to emotions and feelings associated with them that are created by the speaker and the recipient at the moment of speech. When the speaker seeks to express feelings (outbursts of anger or the thrill of delight) he uses sets of clichéd means typical of given situation of conversation.

It is necessary to point out that certain infinitive phrases are used to let the speaker release a ‘flood’ of communicative energy when the message to be delivered is of emotional or evaluative nature. In actual fact, it then makes for the expression of the speaker’s experiences, feelings, or prejudices. In this case the infinitive phrases help, firstly, express emotions and as a rule realize the nominative function and, secondly, represent them and, as a rule, realize the pragmatic and expressive functions. The results of investigation of semantic structure and functional characteristics show that certain infinitive phrases are acknowledged as fixed idiomatic infinitive phrases (loose infinitive, independent infinitive) and, according to the speaker’s choice, have great pragmatic effect in speech.

To sum up, certain infinitive phrases are called loose or isolated infinitive in modern English discourse and have communicative and pragmatic characteristics in focus of expressive means of communication. Parenthetical infinitive phrases are the source of emotional intensifiers and are commonly used to emphasize components of an utterance gripping listeners’ attention. Any utterance is created to have a certain effect in speech and the communicative and pragmatic characteristics of the infinitive phrases are staticized in order to be used or encode by a speaker and to be decode by a recipient in discourse.

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