

Study on Infinitive in Alliterative Morte Arthure

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I am now trying to investigate the various aspects of infinitives which are seen in Morte Arthure. Morte Arthure was written in one of the North-West Midland Dialects about 1360, and retained some traces of OE syntax, as well as those of OE literary tradition.

(‘Thorn’ and ‘yogh’ are stood for respectively ‘th’ and ‘g’ for the sake of printing. The arabic number at the end of each example denotes the line in the Text.)

I. Form

When this alliterative romance was written, the levelling of inflexional endings had widely diffused, so the OE-an ending and early ME-en ending could not be met with. The ME-e ending is seen everywhere.

1. Simple Form

The simple forms are various.

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|---------------------------|------------------------|
| (i) Bare Infinitive | (ii) ‘To’ Infinitive |
| (iii) ‘For to’ Infinitive | (iv) ‘Till’ Infinitive |

cf. Comparison of frequency in forms with other ME works

	<u>Havelok</u> (c. 1270)	<u>Sir Gawain</u> (c. 1340)	<u>Morte Arthure</u> (c. 1360)
Bare Inf.	20.6 %	26.2 %	11.5 %
‘To’ Inf.	71.0)	66.6)	80.8)
‘For to’ Inf.	9.0) 80.0	7.2) 73.8	7.7) 88.8
‘Till’ Inf.			0.2)

(The case where infinitive appears after auxiliary verbs as their object is omitted)

Roughly speaking, the prepositional forms of infinitive were increasing at that time.

cf. Callaway says that in OE 75 % of infinitives had not any preposition.

2. Compound Form

Both passive-and perfect-forms are already seen in this romance.

- (i) Passive Infinitive

We mon be forfetede in faith and..... 1155

In caase his concell bee to kepe the no langere, To be killyde at his
commandment his knyghttez before, 1513 f.

(ii) Perfect Infinitive

He wolde hafe kyllde the kyng with his kene wapen. 1106

The senatour of Sutere wyth sowmes full huge, Whas assygnede to That
courte be sent of his peres, Traise towarde Troys, The treson to wyrke,
To hafe betrappede with a trayne oure trauelande knyghttez. 1627 f.

II. Syntax

Infinitives are variously used in this romance. Their syntax had changed so much from that of OE that they had gained the greater power of expression. This fact attracts our historic concern too much.

1. Nominal Infinitive

Some infinitives are used freely as nominals in this romance like in OE. But I think that they are more delicate and various in their use than those of OE.

(i) As Subject

In most cases bare infinitive appears in impersonal construction.

Hym thare be ferde for no faces, 403

Forthy to Brétayne the brode buske vs byhouys. 3579

Idrous, quod Arthure, ayre the byhoues. 4135

Of course, 'to' infinitive is rarely seen, too.

For thus vs schappes to daye. 1716

Me aughte to knowe the kyng. 3509

'To' infinitive was not yet used at this position alone, but the construction of 'to' infinitive with the redundant 'it' is sometimes met with. And this redundant 'it' seems on the step of developing into the formal 'it'.

'To' Inf. with the redundant 'it'

To putte men in perille, it es no pryce holden. 1924

To wepe als a woman, it es no witt holden. 3978

'To' Inf. with the formal 'it'

It es owre weredes to wreke the wrethe of oure elders. 385

It es non honour to me to owttray hys knyghttez. 1328

It come neuer of knyghthede to carpe of coseri when captyfis ere takyn.
1581 f.

It aughte to no presoners to prese no lordez. 1583

It es a foly to offende oure fadyr vndire Gode. 2413

The latter construction seems to have gradually been established at that period

of ME.

(ii) As Object

Infinitives are freely used as object of a verb even except when they stand after the so-called auxiliary verbs.

a) Bare Inf.

In this romance it is rarely met with. The OE-type infinitive gerund (or, gerundial infinitive which is often seen in OE) had gradually disappeared. At this period of ME gerund was clearly distinguished from infinitive.

To the brekyng of the daye, that brydez gan synge. 2510

In yone lykande londe lorde be I thynke. 3109

The above-mentioned examples are all that I have found. In other works in ME like Havelok or Gawain, bare infinitives stand after 'gan', 'thynke' and 'wende', also.

b) 'To' Inf.

It is the natural case in this romance.

I ettyll my selfen To hastaye in Almayne with armede knyghtez. 554 f.

Wenez thow to britten hym with thy brande ryche? 963

The kyng castes to kepe be thaa clere strandes. 1998

And one the vicounte londes he visez to lenge. 3167

c) 'For to' Inf.

And thow fande for to venge them, that thus are offendyde! 867

Thow wenes for to flay vs, folke-mowthede schrewe! 2779

The following diagram shows comparison of distribution with other works.

	Bare Inf.	'To' Inf.	'For to' Inf.
Havelok	15.8 %	52.6 %	31.5 %
Sir Gawain	13.1	79.0	7.9
Morte Arthure	11.5	80.9	7.7

Roughly speaking, bare infinitives had been replaced by 'to' infinitives, and 'for to' infinitives had also been absorbed into 'to' infinitives.

(iii) 'Be' + 'To' Inf.

Already 'to' infinitives had appeared after 'be' verb. This infinitive has a nominal function.

Trow it for no trufles, his targe es to schewe. 89

In caase his concell bee to kepe the no langere, To be killyde at his commandment his knyghttez before. 1513 f.

(iv) 'Were' + 'Had' + leuer + Inf.

This construction seems to have come from OE construction (Dative + ^{were}/_{had} leuer + that clause). OE that clause was replaced by the infinitival structure.

a) 'Were leuer' + Inf.

Fore me were leuer preuely be prykyd to the harte Than euer any prikkere
had siche a pryse wonnyn. 2648 f.

b) 'Had leuer' + Inf.

I had leuer see hym synke on the salte strandez. 1573

In a), OE dative had still remained, but in b), OE dative had replaced by nominative pronoun. The interesting remark might be concluded by many proofs, but as there are only two instances in this romance, I can not conclude any remarks about them. The following examples are from *Havelok*.

That were him leuer to ben ded. 1193

Leuere was him be forworen than drenchen me. 1423

Both are interesting from the viewpoint of their constructions.

2. Infinitival Nexus

What Jespersen calls 'Infinitival Nexus' is widely and freely used in this romance. So, I'm going to classify this construction.

(i) Inf. Nexus as Obj.

In OE, like other Germanic languages, this construction seems to have appeared mainly after the verbs of causation or the those of sense and mental perception. The infinitives in this construction had been bare, but later, 'to' infinitive appeared, and this construction was applied to the other verbs. Many instances in this romance will show this procedure.

a) After vbs. of causation.

Sen thow couettes the corounne, latt it be declarede ! 1321

Latt no wykkyde wede waxe ne wrythe one this erthe. 4322

This construction frequently appears after 'let'. The other cases are following.

New thei graythe them to goo, 1279

Towrres he turnes and turmentez the pople, Wroghte wedowes full wlonke wartherayle syngen. 3153 f.

With that boystous brayde he (=Modred) bownes hym (=Gawayn) to dye.

Inf. nexus in the last example seems to be 'Object of Result', SVO^α [S₂L].

b) After vbs. of sense and mental perception.

I had leuer see hym synke on the salte strandez. 1573

Thare myght men see the ryche ryde in the schawes. 1876

- I see the traytoure come yondyr tryande full yerne. 4189
 I wyll that Waynour, my weife in wyrchipe be holden, That hire waunte
 noo wele, ne welthe that hire lykes, Luke my kydde castells be clenlyche
arrayede. 654 f.
 Lokis it (=the cors of the knyghte) be clenly kepyd. 4016 f.
 Qwythen ne hade Dryghttyn destaynede at his dere wille, That he hade
 demyd me todaye to dy for yow alle. 4157 f.
 There cho maye suggourne hire selfe wyth semlyche berynes, Faunde
my forestez be frythede. 655 f.
 I trowe it be for cowardys, thow carpes thes wordez. 1693
 And wysse me to werpe owte som worde at this tyme. 9

c) After vbs. of commanding

In this case, this construction may seem to be SVOO(I).

- Bott byde them neuer be so bolde. 2348
 Then cho bade me brawndysche the blade. 3358
 Forthi the comelyche kynge, curtays and noble, Commandez the kenely
to kaire of his landez. 1318 f.
 And on Christofre daye a concell he Comandez them kenely to caste all
theire wittys. 2390 f.
 I charge the, my sektour, cheffe of all other, To mynystre me nobles
fore mede of my soul. 665 f.
 Towarde Chestyre in Charre thay chay chese hir the wayes, Dighte
thir ewyn for to dye with dule at hir herte. 3914 f.
 His archers on ayther halfe he ordayne thes therafter To shake in a shetronne.
 1191 f.

In the last example, the subjective of infinitive is so far separated that this sentence might be considered as SVOO construction. The followings may seem to be in SVOO construction, too, for a certain pause is set between the indirect object and infinitive.

- And thene the kynge kenely comaundyde hys knyghttes, For to byde with
theire blonkez and bowne no forthyre. 935 f.
 He comande hys cosyn with knyghtlyche wordez, To make a kyrke on the
cragg. 1218 f.

Sometimes the object-clause is seen after 'com(m)ande' and 'bidde'. When compared with infinitival nexus construction, it seems too rugged.

- Scho bad the bewes scholde bewe down. 3366
 He commande me kenely with knyghtly wordes, That I schulde lelely
one the lenge and one no lede elles. 4148 f.

After 'comand', one object 'me' and another object 'that' clause are placed

in parallel. Such structure shows some annotation to the explanation of infinitival nexus, when compared with it.

d) After vbs. of demanding and entreating

The konygeste cardynall Prayes hym (=kyng) for the pes and profyrs
full large To haft peté of the pope. 3178 f.

I rede thow rekkyn and reherse vnresonable dedis. 3452

I beseke yow, sir, certyfye yone londez, Gif ye will send tham ouer the
see. 1555 f.

The syre of Melane Besoghte hym as souerayne to socoure the pople.
3134 f.

After 'seke' the same construction as after 'comand' is seen.

I beske yow, sirs, for sake of oure Lorde, That ye doo wele todaye and
dredis no wapen. 4048 f.

In both examples, the distance between the predicate verb and its object clause is noted too far, and some word-groups are inserted between one object and another object.

At any rate, this construction had begun to appear widely about this time. This was not limited to only a few verbs.

Well, the following diagram shows the comparison of the forms of infinitive in this romance with those in *Sir Gawain*.

	Sir Gawain	Morte Arthure
Bare Inf.	51.7 %	63.0 %
'To' Inf.	48.3	37.0

Its frequency is following.

Sir Gawain	29 cases/2530 lines
Morte Arthure	73 cases/4346 lines

This shows that this construction had become more popular as the times went on.

(ii) Split Inf. Nexus

The subjective of infinitive is separated by the predicate verb-group. In this case, almost all the predicate verb groups are in the passive voice.

If me be destaynede to dye at Dryghtyns wylle, 664

Gif vs be destaynede to dy todaye one this erthe, 4090

Giffe him be destaynede to dy todaye one this erthe, 4153

In above-mentioned cases, the subjective of infinitival nexus is in Dative/Accusative case, but in the following, the subjective is thought to be in Common case.

When Inlyus and Ioatall ware juggede to dye, 2877

There is only one case found where the predicate verb is in the active voice.

Of this dere day-werke the Dryghtten be louede, That vs has destaynede
and demyd to dye in oure awen. 4305 f.

But in this case infinitival nexus is in the subordinate clause, and this phenomenon is caused by mere inversion.

(iii) Inf. Nexus after Preposition.

Already infinitival nexus is seen after preposition. The English expression had gradually and widely become more and more minutely exact and delicate at this period of ME.

He graythes to sir Gawayne graythely to wyrche. 1384

Hym dremyd of a dragon dredfull to beholde, Come dryfande ouer the depe to drenchen hys pople. 760 f.

To herken of the hye men to helpen theis lordes, 1646

'Of' and 'to' are seen in this romance. The verb 'graythe' has the infinitival nexus without preposition.

Now thei graythe them to goo. 1279

When the following instance is met with, its analysis becomes various.

It anghte to no presoners to prese no lordez. 1583

(1) It aughte to no presoners + to prese no lordez.

(2) It aughte + (to) no presoners to prese no lordez.

(1) seems to be more ME-like.

Well, at any rate, this construction, infinitival nexus after preposition, seems not so frequent in this romance.

(iv) Incomplete Inf. Nexus.

Though very rare, the subjective of infinitival nexus is omitted because it denotes general people or things.

Whence the senatours harde say That it so happenede. 1950 f.

The syre of Melane herde say the ceté was wonnen. 3134

(v) Inf. Nexus as Adverbial Adjunct.

In fact, the following instance should be included in the later chapter, but as it is concerned with infinitival nexus, I set a strange section here.

There is only one instance found that infinitival nexus is used adverbially.

Bot I will passe in pilgremage this pas vnto Rome, To purchase me pardonne of the pope selfen, And of paynes of purgatorie be plenely assoyllde. 3496 f.

In this case, infinitival nexus appears after preposition 'of'. This may stand for clause "in order that paynes of purgatorie may be plenely assoyllde".

3. Adjectival Infinitive

Many infinitives are used as attributive to a noun in this romance. This gives the expression a certain vividness.

And gyffe vs grace <u>to gye and to gouerne vs here.</u>	4
I haue title <u>to take tribute of Rome.</u>	275
Now may lesse men haue leue <u>to say whatt them lykes.</u>	370
I gyffe yowe lyffe and lyme and leue <u>for to passe.</u>	2321
For hade sir Gawayne hade grace <u>to halde the hill grene.</u>	3778

The form of infinitives in this use is two-fold, i.e., 'to' and 'for to' infinitives.

Frequency is following:

'To' Inf.	81.0 %
'For to' Inf.	18.9

'To' infinitive is widely used.

Some infinitives are used as retroactive adjunct. Infinitive had not yet so keen distinction in voice.

I sall at the reuerence of the rounde table Ryde throughte all the rowte, rewarde and other Redy wayes <u>to make.</u>	389 f.
There sall appon Godarde a garette be rered, That schall be garneschte and kepyde with gude men of armes, And a bekyn <u>abouen to brynne</u> , when them lykes.	562 f.
For he has more tresour <u>to take</u> , when hym lykes, Than euere aughte Arthure.	1015 f.
Abowte the ceté tha seuen, they soghte at the nextte to seke them a sekyre place <u>to sett with engynes.</u>	2422 f.

4. Adverbial Infinitive

'To' infinitive has gained more power of expression than in OE, and it has become widely used as subjunct in ME. Though its classification is not so exactly clear, its usage in this romance is classified as following.

(i) Denoting 'Purpose'

a) 'To' Inf.	
I make the somouns in sale <u>to sue for thi landys.</u>	91
<u>To passe in youre presaunce my purpos es takyn.</u>	687
Forthy erdez he here <u>to owtraye hys pople.</u>	1010

b) 'For to' Inf.

'For to' is explained to have come from Fr. 'Por (=pour)' in order to emphasize the meaning of purpose.

At this time of ME, the so-called original meaning of 'For to' had faded out and it had become a mere marker of infinitive. But in denoting purpose

especially, it seems to have used more frequently than 'To' in this romance.

Alblawsters at Arthure egerly schottes, For to hurte hym or horse with that hard wapen. 2426 f.

Thane sent he on iche a syde to certayne lordes For to assawte. 3062 f.

(ii) Denoting 'Purpose'/'Result'

This instance appears chiefly after verbs of motion. Sometimes infinitive retains the meaning of 'Direction'. Here are also two forms found.

a) 'To' Inf.

He sendez furthe **sodaynly** sergeantes of armes To all his mariners on rawe, to arreste hym schippys. 632 f.

Now they hye to the holte, thes harageous knyghttez To herken of the hye men to helpen theis lordez. 1645 f.

Gif I may entire into Awguste awnters to seke And byde with my balde men within the burghe ryche, 1966 f.

Than rydes a renke to reschewe that byeryne. 2784

b) 'For to' Inf.

This is rarely met with in this romance.

And seyne that worthilyche wy went vnto chambyre For to comfurthe the qwene. 696

(iii) Denoting 'Result'

I could find only a few instances of 'to' infinitive.

When oure saules schal parte and sundyre fra the body, Ewyre to belde and to byde in blysse wyth himseluen, 7 f.

The duche of Bretayne todaye has he takyn, Lead hyre to the mountayne, thare that lede lengez, To hye by that lady aye, Whyls hir lyfe lastez. 852 f.

And he brawles one the bronde and bownes to dye. 4251

(iv) Denoting the grounds of 'Emotion' or 'Judgement'

a) 'To' Inf.

Thow saynned the vnsekyrly, to seke to these mountez. 966

Sir, said sir Ferrere, a foly thow wirrkkes, Thus nakede in thy noblaye to neghe to the walles. 2432 f.

b) 'For to' Inf.

I syghe noghte for my selfe, sa saue me oure Louede ! Bot for to see vs surprysed, my sortowe es the more. 3795 f.

(v) Denoting the surrounding circumstances.

There are some infinitives found which may be considered denoting the surrounding circumstances of the subject. These had later been replaced by participles.

Sir Lott and sir Launcelotte Sall lenge on his lefte hande wyth legyounes ynowe, To meue in the morne-while, Gif the myste happynne. 1999 f.
 Sir Howell and sir Hardolfe here sall beleue, To be lordes of the ledis,
 That here to me lenges. 3583 f.

(vi) Inf. of Specification

Some infinitives are used to specify mainly adjectives and other subjuncts. Two forms appear here.

a) 'To' Inf.

Hym dremyd of a dragon, dredfull to beholde. 760
 Erne had he full huge and vgly to schewe. 1086
 Thow arte apparant to be ayere ore one of thi chilydre. 1944
 Bot oure wyse kyng es warre to waytten his renkes. 1973
 Thou was worthy to be kynge. 3692

b) 'For to' Inf.

Hym thare be ferde no faces, that swylke a folke ledes Bot euer fresche for to fyghte in felde. 403 f.

Almost all infinitives are in retroactive voice here.

Of course, there are some cases where the logical reflexion happened and the new passive expression was preferred.

It (=This ryall rede blode) ware worthy to be schrede and schryned in golde. 3991

(vii) Denoting 'Degree' / 'Purpose' and 'Result'

'too~to' Inf. Structure.

Already this structure had been used. There are some instances in this romance.

Siche sex ware to symple to semble with hym one. 967
 Ye are at the ferreste noghte passande fyue hundrethe, And that es fully to fewe to feghte with them alle. 2741 f.
 For we are faithely to few to feghte with them alle. 4031

When the frequency of the various forms of infinitives in adverb equivalent, 'to' infinitive is used at most cases, and bare infinitive never appears.

	Morte Arthure	Sir Gawain
'To' Inf.	74.8 %	67.2 %
'For to' Inf.	25.1	32.7

5. Absolute Infinitive Construction.

When the subjective of infinitive means general persons, or it is generally understood from the context, it is often omitted. In this romance there are some instances, several of which have survived and become set-phrases in Mod E. and several have lost.

For thus vs schappes to daye, schortly to telle, Whedyre we schone or
schewe. 1716 f.

Forthy I merkede ouer thees mowntes, to mene the the sothe. 3556

Of the traytours men one trappede stedis Ten thousandez ware tynte,
the trewthe to accounte. 3928 f.

Remarks

1. Syntax of infinitives had developed so much that they became quite different from those of OE.

(i) The loss and levelling of the inflectional endings.

(ii) The appearance of compound forms. They began to appear freely anywhere even except after auxiliary verbs. This gave infinitives so strongly the verbal character.

(iii) The adoption of prepositions as mere markers of infinitive.

(iv) Infinitives appeared in 'Had leuer' and 'Were leuer' structure.

(v) Infinitives of specification appeared after adjectives and other subjuncts.

(vi) Adverbial use became various.

2. As already shown on diagrams, the forms of infinitives had gradually been settling into 'To' infinitive.

3. Infinitival Nexus had begun to be used widely. This made ME expression concise and smart.

4. Though only a few instances, absolute infinitival construction appeared.

5. From many instances, it may be safely concluded that ME infinitive became too much verbal, while OE infinitive had been gerundial at almost all cases.

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