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Grammatical History of the Split Infinitive

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Grammatical History of the Split Infinitive
(Bakalářská práce)

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V Olomouci dne 17. 8. 2016

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Motto

“When I split an infinitive, God damn it, I split it so it will stay split.”

— Raymond Chandler

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor Prof. M.A. Joseph Emonds, Ph.D., because I would not be able to write my thesis without his seemingly endless patience and encouragement.

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Abstract

This work deals with the split infinitive, which is now a common construction with a long history in the English language, but has been condemned by grammarians since the 19th century. My study provides its grammatical history supported by examples. The aim is to demonstrate that the split infinitive is in no case ungrammatical. On the contrary, use of this construction can in certain contexts lead to better comprehensibility. The second half of this work discusses the figure of the English Bishop Robert Lowth (1710–1787), who is often seen as the one who created the prescription for not using the split infinitive. The argumentation will show that this popular belief among linguists is misleading, and that the prohibition is due rather to an anonymous American, who objected to the split infinitive in 1834 in *The New-England Magazine*.

Key words

split infinitive, Bishop Lowth, prescriptive grammar, Early Modern English, particle *to*, preposition stranding

Anotace

Tato práce se zabývá split infinitivem (dosl. „rozděleným“ infinitivem) – konstrukcí s dlouhou historií, která je nyní v anglickém jazyce běžná, ale přesto byla od 19. století autory gramatických příruček zakazována. Má práce se věnuje historii tohoto gramatického jevu, která je podpořena příklady. Účelem práce je dokázat, že split infinitiv v žádném případě neodporuje gramatickým pravidlům. Právě naopak, jeho použití vede v určitých kontextech v lepší srozumitelnosti. Druhá polovina této práce se věnuje postavě anglického biskupa Roberta Lowtha (1710–1787), který je často uváděn jako ten, kdo vytvořil pravidlo proti používání split infinitivu. Tento mezi lingvisty všeobecně rozšířený názor je pomocí argumentů označen jako mylný. S největší pravděpodobností totiž první námitku proti split infinitivu vznesl neznámý Američan v roce 1834 v časopise *The New-England Magazine*.

Klíčová slova

split infinitive, biskup Lowth, kodifikace jazyka, raná moderní angličtina, částice *to*, preposition stranding

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1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis deals with the split infinitive in the history of English. The split infinitive is a construction in which a free morpheme, usually an adverb, occurs between the infinitive marker *to* and the verb itself, for example:

- (1) (a) *to boldly go*
- (b) *to immediately follow*
- (c) *to definitely see*

Even though this construction is quite common not only in Modern, but also in older stages of the English language, some grammar books persist on its unacceptability – for example Henry Alford (1864) in his *The Queen's English* and very recently in Krizan et. al (2011) in their *Business English*. However, as my discussion will show, the split infinitive is felt as acceptable by most current English speakers; most of them use it quite unconsciously. Even most of the present grammars agree that splitting an infinitive is fine.

Before I get to the history of the split infinitive, I will provide a theoretical introduction into this topic. First I will explain the infinitive construction as such, followed by an argumentation why we should consider the particle *to* as an independent unit. My arguments are supported with citations from Huddleston and Pullum (2005) and Leech (2006).

Then I will move to the split infinitive and its acceptability. As I have already stated, the English language strongly inclines to infinitive splitting and most speakers have no problem with it. How then did it come about that some grammarians tried to convince us the split infinitive is wrong? I have also dedicated one section to preposition stranding. It has a similar history with the split infinitive and as I will explain below, they are both connected with the figure of the 18th century English Bishop Robert Lowth.

I have tried to trace the development of the split infinitive – where is its origin and how it happened that it is considered ungrammatical. There is evidence that split infinitives can be found as early as in Middle English. I give examples

from Crystal (2003) and Curme (1931). It is a matter of interest that there were no split infinitives in Old English.

Moving through Middle to Early Modern English, I will discuss where the need for a unified orthographic system of English came from. It all started with the development of printing. Books had to be printed in some non-dialectal variant of English which everybody would understand.

Then I will finally turn my attention to the history of the split infinitive, which is in fact the history of the particle *to*. *To* was originally (i.e. in Old English) a preposition. This preposition introduced a verbal noun. Gradually, it was reanalyzed and lost its semanticity. Charles Butler (1634) in the 17th century already sees *to* as an infinitive marker or in other words, as a free but non-prepositional grammatical morpheme.

An independent section is dedicated to the rise of prescriptivism. The way to the first English grammar was not straight and easy. The first grammar books only discussed Latin (for instance William Lily (1534) and his *Rudimenta Grammatices*). Later the attention turned to English, but still, grammars were written in Latin (Ben Jonson's *The English Grammar* (1640) and John Wallis (1653) and his *Grammatica Linguae Anglicanae*).

Focusing on Latin did not work out well. Since English and Latin are two different language systems, it was not the best idea to model English grammar on the Latin one. At the end of the section on prescriptivism I will present the first prescriptive condemnation of the split infinitive, which appeared in 1834 in *The New-England Magazine*. That was followed by three various rejections of this construction through time.

An important chapter is dedicated to Bishop Robert Lowth and his *A Short Introduction to English Grammar*¹. Some grammarians – for instance Aitchison (2004) and Baugh and Cable (2002) – mention Bishop Lowth as one of the first grammarians who advised not to split infinitives and it is also a matter of popular belief that he is the one to be blamed for this anti-splitting dogma. However, there is not a word about split infinitives in Lowth's grammar. Apart from other

¹ For my purpose I used *A Short Introduction to English Grammar* from 1838, 2nd Cambridge edition. The very first edition was published in 1762.

constructions he sees as unsuitable (e.g. double negatives), he only mentions preposition stranding, but not the split infinitive.

My point then is, how is it that people still believe he was opposed to the split infinitive? I want to prove Bishop Lowth was not a prescriptivist, but he was made into one without any reason. In section 5.3 I discuss various opinions (both from books or popular articles) on Lowth and the split infinitive and try to challenge them.

Going through various sources on Lowth was not really easy, because I found many contradictory opinions. Moreover, it is sometimes complicated to figure out what was written where and when, because Lowth's grammar was published so many times and many authors used it as a source for their own grammars (such as Lindley Murray). And unfortunately, I do not have access to all editions of (not only Lowth's) grammars.

Very helpful was thus a chapter on Lowth by Tiekens-Boon van Ostade in volume edited by Raymond Hickey (2014). She spent a lot of years researching Lowth's editions of *A Short Introduction to English Grammar*. Tiekens-Boon van Ostade tries continuously to disprove the aspersions cast on him and to set the record straight. But as will become apparent from the argumentation in the last section, it will take a long time to set the record straight.

2 WHAT IS THE SPLIT INFINITIVE?

2.1 The infinitive as such

“Infinitive” is a term which refers to the base form of the verb, i.e. the uninflected form under which verbs are listed in a dictionary. There are two options how to express the infinitive, it can be either bare or with the preceding particle *to*.² Thus, the bare infinitive denotes “the base form of the verb when used as a non-finite form” (Leech 2006, 15). As opposed to the bare infinitive, “*to*-infinitive verbs are used to introduce *to*-infinitive clauses” (Leech 2006, 113). Here I give examples of bare infinitives (2a) and *to*-infinitives (2b):

- (2) (a) *I heard him open the door.*
She should do this homework.
They will go on a holiday.
- (b) *I wanted to go home.*
She tried to make it longer.
They are said to be seen together.

The infinitive verb form has no suffix or inflection in English. However, there are some suffixes (bound morphemes) which not only help us to identify a word as the verb, their presence can mark the infinitive too:

- (3) (a) *-ate* as in *advocate, dedicate, educate, ...*
(b) *-en* as in *broaden, lighten, frighten, ...*
(c) *-fy* as in *modify, simplify, verify, ...*
(d) *-ise/-ize* as in *memorize, nationalize, privatize, ...*

² Huddleston, Pullum and Bauer (2002, 83) have a different approach and use the term “plain form”. They say that an identical verb form appears in the imperative, the subjunctive and the infinitival construction. They are convinced that there is no reason to list the three constructions under separate terminology. They have therefore “chosen the term ‘plain form’, which is oriented towards morphology rather than meaning or syntax.”

The infinitive is a non-finite verb form. A non-finite verb is “a verb form which is not finite, that is does not involve variation for past tense and present tense” (Leech 2006, 71). There are three non-finite verb forms. The already mentioned infinitive (with or without *to*) (4a), present participle (also called gerund) (4b) and past participle (4c):

- (4) (a) *Sarah heard him sing.*
To sing was a pretty bad idea.
(b) *Would you mind sending me a letter?*
(c) *He has undergone an operation.*

If we want to decide, whether a verb is finite or non-finite, we need to pay attention to the context. For instance all verbs in (3) can be used as both finite and non-finite verb forms and only their function or position marks whether they are infinitives. That is the reason why we cannot always rely on morphemes in (3) as on the infinitive markers. Let me illustrate this on examples:

- (5) (a) *We dedicate this book to our families.*
I decided to dedicate my book to my children.
(b) *Spiders frighten me.*
He tried to frighten me with a plastic spider.
(c) *Simplify your question please.*
Could you simplify your question?
(d) *Children memorize a lot by heart.*
You have to memorize these examples.

The first sentence in every example contains a finite form and the second a non-finite. At first glance the underlined verbs seem to be in the same form, but a closer look at their contexts helps to determine, what verb form it actually is. This is a proof that relying on something’s form and not paying attention to the whole construction may cause a misunderstanding of a given text.

2.2 The particle *to*

As I have already mentioned, *to* is a particle. Particles belong to a closed word category (the number of items in this class is limited), but a particle is not a bound affix, i.e. one which cannot stand on its own. We cannot consider *to* as an inseparable part of the verb. Huddleston et al. (2002) say that *to* “is not a (morphological) prefix but a quite separate (syntactic) word” (Huddleston, Pullum, and Bauer 2002, 84).

The infinitival subordinator *to* forms a construction together with a verb phrase, not the verb alone. This can be demonstrated by examples in (6) below. In (6b) *to* at the end of the sentence is an anaphor for the whole verb phrase in the main clause. *To* itself is sufficient for a listener to understand the intended idea of a speaker. In (6c) *to* introduces not only the first underlined verb phrase, but also the second one. If *to* was an inseparable part of its following infinitive verb, it would be necessary to repeat it before the second underlined verb phrase. As long as *to* does not need to be there, I take it as a proof that it can stand on its own.

- (6) (a) *I wanted to go on a long holiday.*
(b) *I wanted to go on a long holiday, but I was not allowed to .*
(c) *I wanted to go on a long holiday and have all my problems solved.*

Similar argumentation is used in Huddleston et. al (2002). They list three reasons, why *to* should be taken as a separate word: it can stand on its own in elliptical constructions (7a), need not be repeated in coordination (7b) and can be separated from the verb by an adverb (7c) (Huddleston, Pullum, and Bauer 2002, 84). They give these examples:

- (7) (a) *I haven't read it yet but I hope to shortly.*
(b) *I want to [go out and get some exercise].*
(c) *I'm trying to gradually improve my game.*

Huddleston and Pullum (2005) refer to the particle *to* as “a member of the subordinator category – a special marker for verb phrases or infinitival clauses”

(Huddleston and Pullum 2005, 205) and they repeat that “*to succeed* is not a verb; it’s two words, the subordinator *to* and the verb *succeed*. There is no rule of grammar requiring them to be adjacent” (Huddleston and Pullum 2005, 206). It means then that there is nothing to be split.

In all probability Huddleston and Pullum (2005) seem to be assuming that if morphemes are free, they can always be separated in some way. But this is not so simple. There are some words which, even though free grammatical morphemes, must be adjacent to their complements, for example complex prepositions and conjunctions. Complex prepositions are discussed in more detail in section 2.5.1, for more on conjunctions see Leech (2006).

2.3 How the split infinitive is formed

Emonds and Faarlund (2014) say about the split infinitive that it is a construction “where some free morpheme, typically a sentence or frequency adverbial, appears between the infinitive marker and the verb” (Emonds and Faarlund 2014, 97). Swan (2005) gives a very similar definition: “a ‘split infinitive’ is a structure in which *to* is separated from the rest of the infinitive by an adverb” (Swan 2005, 281). Huddleston et. al (2002) say that pre-verbal central position in infinitival clauses which contain the marker *to* has two variants. The adjunct can either precede or follow *to* as in (8) (Huddleston, Pullum and Bauer 2002, 581):

- (8) (a) *We ask you [not to leave your seats].* [pre-marker position]
(b) *We ask you [to please remain seated.]* [post-marker position]

If the adjunct appears in the post-marker position, it is called the split infinitive, i.e. “the construction with an adjunct in post-marker position. The most usual adjuncts in the split infinitive construction are adverbs, particularly those which mark degree (such as *really*, *utterly*, *actually*, *even*, *further* and so on), short prepositional phrases (e.g. *at least*, *in effect*, *in some measure*) and noun phrases (e.g. *one day*)” (Huddleston, Pullum and Bauer 2002, 582).

- (9) (a) *She decided to further continue with her work.*
(b) *She decided to in some measure be less strict.*
(c) *We hope to one day double our income.*

The examples in (9b) and (9c) are provided by my informant. All examples in (9) serve as a good piece of evidence that there is quite a big amount of elements which have the ability to split an infinitive. I am convinced that if the split infinitive construction has so many possibilities, it is an indication of its long history and system stability.

2.4 Why should infinitive splitting be acceptable?

2.4.1 The structure of a Verb phrase and the Predicate

The infinitive can be split by an adverb and the negative particle. It is important then to explain the structure of a verb phrase and the predicate first. A verb phrase consists of a verb (which is its head) and its following constituents. Verbs are subcategorized with respect to their obligatory complementation. As a constituent can stand a noun phrase (10a), a prepositional phrase (10b), a verb phrase (10c), an adjectival phrase (10d) or a clause (10e):

- (10) (a) *to watch a new film*
(b) *to escape from a prison*
(c) *to start to play the piano*
(d) *to seem so nervous*
(e) *to say that it is impossible*

The English verbs are usually divided into three classes: lexical verbs, auxiliaries and modals. This classification is important for syntactic analysis of the English predicate. The English predicate is analytic and can consist of several elements. Therefore when analysing a clause, a 2-slot predicate model is used.³ The first slot is the operator (or the omega position). This is the position of the

³ This predicate model is used in a coursebook *English Morpho-Syntax* by Ludmila Veselovská (2013–2014).

sentence first modal or auxiliary which precedes any negation. The second slot is the position of any following auxiliary or verb.

The negative particle *not* and negative or short adverbs always follow the first auxiliary or modal (i.e. the omega position), as in (11):

- (11) (a) *He will not/never/just swim.*
(b)* *He not/never/just will swim.*
(c)* *He will swim not/never/just.*

A similar pattern shows the split infinitive. The negative particle *not* and negative or short adverbs can be placed between the particle *to* and the verb:

- (12) (a) *He decided to swim there.*
(b) *He decided to not swim there.*
(d) *He decided to never swim there.*
(e) *He decided to quickly swim there.*

According to this fact, I conclude that the particle *to* has the nature of modals and auxiliaries. It has the power to occupy the omega position in the English analytic predicate.

2.4.2 The split infinitive as an acceptable construction

Preposition stranding (discussed in more detail in section 2.5 below) and infinitive splitting are among the most discussed English grammar controversies. Crystal (2003) lists top ten complaints among grammar, among which are both these constructions (Crystal 2003, 194). Those grammarians who say that infinitive splitting is unacceptable (for instance Alford (1864)) often argue that Latin did not split infinitives either. But it is important to note that Latin infinitives are a completely different kind of construction.

Modern English is an analytic language type, with various free grammatical morphemes, and so was the Early Modern version of the English language. Old English was, however, very different – it had case inflections, grammatical gender and verbal conjugations with a wealth of different finite forms. For my purpose I

will not take now Old English into account, because prescriptive grammarians were above all concerned about the English of their time, i.e. Early Modern.

Latin is a complete opposite of English – a highly synthetic fusional language. Latin affixes fuse with the stem and thus create a complex word, whose affixes are not easily separated from one another, because one affix can carry more than one meaning (i.e. the boundaries between morphemes are not clear). It is true that some similar situations can be found in English too, for instance with the verb *to have*. In a construction *he has been living* the element *has* denotes that it is the 3rd person singular form and perfective aspect (*has* + *-en*). These two features fuse together and it is almost impossible to find the boundary between them in this one word.

We can easily illustrate this on verbs. Latin verbs usually consist of only one word. The suffixes (an inflectional morpheme) show us which form the word is (infinitive, person, tense, etc.). Modern English has only four inflectional morphemes with verbs: *-s* (agreement, 3sg present), *-ed* (past tense), *-en/ed* (perfect aspect) and *-ing* (progressive aspect). These morphemes cannot be combined in one word, i.e. they do not fuse together. Thus the English verb has to use additional free morphemes to express its syntax and full meaning.

Let us go back to the infinitives. The Latin verb *laudare* is a one-word infinitive form, whereas the English translation *to praise* consists of two words. If the prescriptivist grammarians say that we should not split English infinitives because Latin does not do it, it is one big misunderstanding of the different nature of these two languages. Since Latin is the inflectional one, there is nothing to be split. Analytic English builds up infinitives differently, as I have already explained in 2.1. Since it is generally acknowledged that *to* is the particle and has no close relation to the verb (it is not its bound morpheme), it is not surprising that it is possible to insert a word or a short phrase (such as *at least*) between these two elements.

In my opinion, there are two main reasons why infinitive splitting should be acceptable. First, it is a natural tendency of the English language. English native speakers use this construction quite often and do not hear it as something strange. Second, using the split infinitive can help speakers to avoid ambiguity. Compare these sentences:

- (13) (a) *They agreed eventually to go and visit Paris.*
They agreed to eventually go and visit Paris.
 (b) *He decided quickly to read the book.*
He decided to quickly read the book.

The meaning of the adverb in the first sentence in (13a) indicates that it probably took them some time to find a compromise and that they maybe had an argument about it. Whereas the second sentence implies that they also had another plans and the one they want to realize as the last is a trip to Paris. The examples in (13b) show similar ambiguity.

2.5 Preposition stranding

2.5.1 Prepositions and their phrases

As indicated at the end of the section 2.2, there are some free grammatical morphemes which must be adjacent and cannot be separated in any way, typically complex prepositions. A preposition is a word which together with its complement forms a prepositional phrase. The prepositional complement may be a noun phrase or a nominal phrase (Leech 2006, 90):

- (14) (a) *with all the good intentions I had at the beginning of the year*
 (b) *He was ashamed of what he had done.*

A preposition can be complex, i.e. it can consist “of more than one (written) word, for example *instead of, up to, with reference to*” (Leech 2006, 30). These words cannot be separated and the group acts as one unit.

- (15) (a) *He went there instead of me.*
 (b) **He went there instead me of.*
 (c) **He went instead there of me.*

Quirk and Mulholland (1964) list six indications according to which a prepositional structure can be considered a complex preposition in English:

- (16) (a) it contains a word that cannot be used in any other context: *by dint of*, *in lieu of*
- (b) the first preposition cannot be replaced: *with a view to* but not **for/without a view to*
- (c) it is impossible to insert an article, or to use a different article: *on account of* but not **on an/the account of*, *for the sake of* but not **for a sake of*
- (d) the range of possible adjectives is very limited: *in great favor of*, but not **in helpful favour of*
- (e) the grammatical number of the noun cannot be changed: *by virtue of*, but not **by virtues of*
- (f) it is impossible to use a possessive determiner: *in spite of him*, but not **in his spite*

It is clear from these indications that complex prepositions act very similarly as idioms, i.e. they are fixed phrases which mostly cannot undergo any change. Let me now return to Huddleston and Pullum's (2005) assumption that free grammatical morphemes can be always separated (at the end of the section 2.2). Even though complex prepositions consist of several free grammatical morphemes, they cannot be in any way separated from their complements.

2.5.2 Stranded prepositions

Stranded prepositions are a construction which shares a similar history with the split infinitive. Moreover, as I have indicated in the Introduction, preposition stranding is a phenomenon into which was Bishop Lowth interested (as opposed to split infinitives). Let me now briefly introduce this construction. As I said, stranded prepositions and split infinitives have a parallel prescriptivist history.

A stranded preposition is a situation when the complement of the preposition is moved away from its immediate position adjacent to the head. This happens for example in *wh*- questions or relative clauses:

- (17) (a) *This is the guy I told you about* _.
(b) *Who is the guy you were talking about* _?
(c) *This is what I have been waiting for* _.
(d) *What are you waiting for* _?

Stranded prepositions have been condemned by prescriptivist grammarians as well as the split infinitive (John Dryden, see below, or recently Donald C. Jackman and Youngsuk Chae (2016)⁴). The opinions against them are still strong, even though both of these constructions have been widely used for several centuries and can be found in works of many famous authors. According to Huddleston et. al. (2002) “the rule against preposition stranding first appeared in 1672, when the essayist John Dryden objected to Ben Jonson’s phrase ‘*the bodies that those souls were frightened from*’. Unfortunately, we have no evidence why Dryden thought of it as unacceptable” (Huddleston, Pullum and Bauer 2002, 627).

Stranded prepositions only exist in English and Mainland Scandinavian (Danish, Swedish and Norwegian), this pattern has no other Indo-European language (Emonds and Faarlund 2014, 86). It is interesting that stranded prepositions are common only in the North Germanic, but there is no such construction in West Germanic. West Germanic infinitive markers “are bound prefixes that cannot be separated from the verb, even by another prefix” (Emonds and Faarlund 2014, 99). This is the case in e.g. German and its infinitive marker *zu* or Dutch *te* which must be always immediately followed by the infinitive.

⁴ “Avoid stranding preposition when clause begins with preposition.(...) In writing, this consequence should be avoided” (Jackson and Chae 2016, 28).

3 HISTORY OF THE SPLIT INFINITIVE

3.1 Language innovations in Middle English

It is generally acknowledged that the history of the English language starts with the Angles, the Saxons and the Jutes. Almost nothing survived to Old English from the Celtic, which had been spoken by the first inhabitants of the British Isles. In Old English prior to the Norman Conquest the infinitive was marked by *-an* or *-ian* (an inflectional ending). This way of marking the infinitive (which was originally a deverbal noun) was lost in the following stage of English. “At some point the case inflection of these deverbal nouns was lost, the derivational suffix *-an* was reanalyzed as an inflectional suffix, and the forms ending in *-an* became verbs. The preposition preceding this verbal form was then reanalyzed as an infinitive marker” (Emonds and Faarlund 2014, 98).

A following stage of English was Middle English. The arrival of Normans, who conquered Britain in 1066, is usually seen as the beginning of the Middle English language period. So, it spans the time from the beginning of the 12th century to Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*, which he was writing during the second half of the 15th century. It was also the time of the return of Latin, which came along with French literacy. Middle English was eventually affected a lot by Norman French. But even though French influence was strong, it had not the power to destroy English. At the time of the Norman Conquest, English already had both a literary and oral tradition. Besides, the French influence began to decline from the 14th century on. In the 13th century English kings lost their control over Normandy and French had been therefore slowly losing its aristocratic status in England.

Middle English differed from Old English a lot. It lost most of the inflectional endings and replaced them with grammaticalized word order. This is the time when “*to* begins to be used as an infinitive marker.” (Crystal 2003, 45) Crystal (2003) even gives two examples of an early infinitive splitting:

- (18) (a) *for to him reade*
 (b) *for to freely and in no weye of his owne dette or of eny oþer mannys
 dette to geve and paie eny reward...*

He argues that these examples from the 13th and the 15th century are a proof that “infinitive splitting is by no means an unnatural process in English, as prescriptivist (for more on prescriptivism see section 4) argue, and certainly not a modern phenomenon (Crystal 2003, 45). This opinion also shares Jespersen (1960): “This order is found as early as the thirteenth century and is favoured by many distinguished writers, especially of late, but nevertheless it is often condemned by grammarians, who have invented the name ‘split infinitive’ for the phenomenon” (Jespersen 1960, 345). Other examples of the Middle English split infinitives are given in Curme (1931, 456):

- (19) (a) *He louied þe lasse auþer to lenge lye or to longe sitte.*
 He (Arthur) did not like to either lie or sit long. (*Sir Gawayne and the Grene Knight*, ll. 87–88)
 (b) *Bot to take þe toruayle to my-self to trwluf expoun.*
 But to undertake the task *to expound true love*. (*ib.*, l. 1540)

To sum this up, the split infinitive first appeared in the 13th century Middle English and from this time on it became a natural feature of the English language. We cannot reject it only because some grammarian once objected against it (for instance Henry Alford (1864)) and created a rule which has no reasonable ground (an anonymous American who is said to be the first to create an “official” condemnation for the split infinitive, for more on this see section 4.3.1).

3.2 Early Modern English

Most authors agree that this stage of English begins with William Caxton and ends approximately at the beginning of the 18th century. William Caxton was the first one to print a book in English. In 1473 he published in Bruges his translation of a French courtly romance *Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye* and three years later he started his own printing office in London. Before printing started, there

was in fact no big need of some standardised English. For the first time, many people noticed that an English language system should be described and studied. It was important to print books in some non-dialectal variant of English, so that everyone would understand the text.

However, there were two problems. First, English had so many dialects and every word so many forms that it was very hard to decide which of them should be “universal”, i.e. used as a standard form. Second, it was almost impossible to describe English, because there were no technical terms for it. As a solution, language observers first used the Latin terminology and letters. The first English grammar was written by William Bullokar in 1586. Andrew Linn (2006) says that “William Bullokar published his *Pamphlet for Grammar* with the express intention of showing that English grammar was rule-governed like Latin, something not generally assumed to be the case” (Linn 2006, 5). Linn (2006) also adds: “Bullokar modelled his English grammar slavishly on the Latin Grammar attributed to William Lily⁵ and prescribed for use in the schools by Henry VIII.” (Linn 2006, 5).⁶ However, Bullokar’s grammar was, unlike the other works of that time (for instance *Grammatica Anglicana* by Paul Greaves (1594) or *Logonomia Anglica* by Alexander Gil (1619)), written in English. He even invented his own spelling system. As Ivan Poldauf (1948) puts it, “William Bullokar was himself principally a spelling reformer and he may be said to form a link between his predecessors, the fathers of modern English spelling reform, and all the scientific orthographists and orthoepists that were to come after him” (Poldauf 1948, 55). According to *Brittanica*, Bullokar stated: “A dictionary and grammar may stay our speech in a perfect use forever” (Brittanica 2016).

William Bullokar was not the only scholar who was conscious of the problems of the Latin language model. Charles Butler (1634) writes in the preface to the reader:

⁵ William Lily wrote in 1534 *Rudimenta Grammatices*, a Latin grammar book.

⁶ The same point has been made by J. R. Turner (1980) in his Introduction to *The Works of William Bullokar*: „It is generally accepted that grammatically Bullokar’s work is little more than a translation into English of the system used in William Lily’s grammar and therefore Bullokar is trying to force English to comply with Latin rules.” (Turner 1980)

“For so certain is the Orthographi of the Hebru’, Greek’, and Latin; that all Nations (thowgh never so far distant in plac’, and different in Speech’) doo’ writ’ them alik’ : wher’as many woords in our Languag’ ar written diversly, even at hom’ : neither our nu’ Writers agreeing with the old’; nor either nu’ or old’ among themselvs. (...) Unto this uncertainti of Writing, even among the Learned, is necessarili coupled a tedious difficulti of Spelling, & Reading, unto the Learners : who, by our usuall naming and ordering of the Letters, cannot attain to the right found of the fyllable, which they stand for; until long and painful practic’ hav’ beat it into their heds.” (Eichler 1910, 7⁷)

Butler (1634) was well aware of the fact that the Latin letters are not sufficient for the English language. However, his grammar is forty eight years younger than Bullokar’s and by that time at least some progress in studying English was made. Even though the effort of the Early Modern English grammarians may seem funny or just not “academic” enough, we must keep in mind that these efforts gave a start to a serious language study.

3.3 The split infinitive

Earlier in sections 2.3 and 2.4.2, I discussed the construction of the split infinitive. Let us now move to its history. There is evidence that there were no split infinitives in Old English. This was proved by S. Pintzuk who examined “1,652 cases of *to* and Old English infinitives in the *York-Toronto-Helsinki parsed corpus of Old English*” (Emonds and Faarlund 2014, 99) and did not find any example of the infinitive with an intervening constituent.

In fact, the history of the split infinitive is a history of the particle *to*. “The infinitive with *to* was originally (i.e. in Old English) a noun in the dative governed by the preposition *to*, hence was in the first stages of its development a prepositional object modifying the verb” (Curme 1931, 456). *To* was thus a preposition suggesting the meaning *towards*. For instance William Bullokar (1586) sees *to* as a preposition: “The Infinitive has neither number, nor person,

⁷ The pagination refers to the manuscript of Butler’s grammar given in Eichler (1910), not Eichler’s text.

nominative case before it, and is known commonly by this time or preposition *to*, which, too, is not expressed many times when there comes an accusative case between the Infinitive-mood and the verb before-going: as bid him come hither” (Turner 1980, 886–912⁸).

During the time *to* changed its nature and developed into a functional free morpheme, losing formal semanticity expressing location. This process is called grammaticalization. Curme (1931) explains that “although the infinitive is still a verbal noun, object of the preposition *to*, it has also the force of a verb, for it takes an object in the accusative case: *Hunger drove him to steal food = to the stealing of food*” (Curme 1931, 477–478). The particle *to* thus ceased to have its prepositional meaning and speakers began to associate it with base form of a verb, which is known as the infinitive. Curme (1931) adds: “The simple infinitive was often employed to complete the meaning of a transitive verb, performing the grammatical function of the direct object” and gives this example:

- (20) (a) *þa ongan he wepan*. (Object in Old English)
(b) *Then he began to weep*. (Modern English)

“The Old English simple infinitive in the object relation was thus replaced by the prepositional infinitive. As the prepositional infinitive had come to be felt as a unit, a verbal noun, it became natural to employ it not only as the object of the verb but also as the subject, for a noun may be used as either the subject or the object of the verb” (Curme 1931, 456). Curme’s explanation can be demonstrated on examples from Modern English:

- (21) (a) *We started to play cards*.
(b) *To play cards is one of our favourite pastimes*.

Butler (1634), who was writing in the 17th century, already sees *to* as an infinitive marker (i.e. a free functional morpheme). Unlike Bullokar (1586) he does not say *to* is a preposition: “To ðeƒ ad ðe 3 invariable Sign’s, let, to,

⁸ The pagination refers to the manuscript of Bullokar’s grammar given in Turner (1980), not Turner’s text.

heer‘after: ðe firft of ðe Imperativ‘ mood‘, ðe second of ðe Infinitiv‘ mood‘, ðe hird of ðe Futur‘ tens of ðe 2 laft mood‘s” (Butler 1634, 44).

Another grammarian Rissanen (1992) observes the following: “The split infinitive first appears in Middle English and is very common in Pecoock’s writing in the fifteenth century. Somewhat surprisingly, this construction is rare in the Early Modern English and gains ground only at the end of the eighteenth century. The most common elements appearing between the *to*-particle and the infinitive are the negative particle and adverbs of manner and degree” (Rissanen 1992, 290). This point raises a question, why is the split infinitive rare in Early Modern English? As given above in section 3.1, there were split infinitives in Middle English. It is kind of strange then that they began to be widely used only in the 18th century.

The fact that the split infinitive was used in Middle English also supports Curme (1931): “Late in the 14th century two scholars – Wyclif and John Purvey – employed the split infinitive as it is used today, even in the case of *not*, which is still in our day not so thoroughly established here as other sentence adverbs: ‘It is good *to not ete fleisch* and *to not drynke wyn*’ (*Romans*, XIV, 21, Purvey’s ed., A.D. 1388)” (Curme 1931, 458).

As an indication that the split infinitive construction was not usual in Early Modern English serves this passage from *Pamphlet for Grammar*: “The negative *not* is commonly set after the verb or his time of tense [sic], and before a participle” (Turner 1980, 1267–1292). Bullokar (1586) does not mention the possibility of insertion of the particle *not* between *to* and the verb. The only reason is probably that the split infinitive construction was rare, as Rissanen (1992) says.

4 DESCRIPTIVE VS. PRESCRIPTIVE GRAMMAR

4.1 The Latin background

It is only natural that in any field, there are always people who try to describe the field and people who try to set a collection of rules according which things should be done. We call these approaches descriptive and prescriptive. As I have indicated in 3.2 above, there was a call for an English grammar in the 16th century. The spelling, pronunciation and the conscious scholarly understanding of language had no clear system. The idea was to create an explicit set of rules (as there were for Latin) which would be followed.

The reason why early grammarians (such as William Lily⁹ or Henry Alford) tried to model the English grammar on Latin tradition was that classical Latin was honoured as a kind of exemplary language. But Latin is just so different from English in system that observing its rules is in some cases almost impossible. The prescriptive tradition lasted even to the 20th century. Nevertheless, I should note that there were also grammarians, who were trying to capture the way the language is used, i.e. to describe it.¹⁰ In any case, as Görlach (2001) puts it, there was a problem about deciding “which variety should be chosen as a model” (Görlach 2001, 483).

It is very interesting that even though there was a strong prescriptivist movement during the 17th and 18th centuries which tried to build an English language learning tradition on the Latin one, English syntax at that time underwent several major developments, which have no base in Latin at all. Görlach (2004, 483) cites these four:

⁹ “John Colet (...) and William Lily (...), co-authors of a Latin grammar which was reprinted again and again until about 1850, presented the English with an important exposition of the Latin grammar which was to influence English philologist for more than two centuries” (Poldauf 1948, 46–47).

¹⁰ According to Görlach (2001), this was the case of Ben Jonson: „Ben Jonson was one of the few early grammarians who not only included a section on syntax in his *Grammar* (posthumously printed in 1640), but also diverged from Latin rules when describing English structures“ (Görlach 2001, 483).

- (22) (a) the completion of functional (fixed) word order (notably free in Latin)
(b) the regulation of the syntactical uses of *do* (which has no equivalent in Latin at all)
(c) the semantic distinction between past and present perfect (tense distinctions in Latin are completely different – in fact almost contrary)
(d) the consolidation of aspectual distinctions (there is no formally equivalent aspect in Latin)

The grammars of Latin were intended for language learners. As long as a speaker has no conscious knowledge of a Latin system, the system has to be explained and demonstrated. Since it is a system unknown to the untutored speaker, there need to be some prescriptions how to use the language correctly.

There were two kinds of people who needed an English grammar: foreigners (such as merchants, sailors, etc.) and Englishmen who wanted to learn more about their mother tongue. Crystal (2003) explains: “The first books which handled English grammar were written in Latin and were dedicated for language learners, for example Ben Jonson’s *An English Grammar...for the Benefit of all Strangers, out of his Observation of the English Language now Spoken* and John Wallis’ *Grammatica Linguae Anglicanae*” (Crystal 2003, 78). So, it was purely logical that a grammar intended for an English learner had to be written in some generally known language (which Latin among educated people was).

However, the problem of the first grammars of English was not in the language they were written in, but in their attitude. Latin was seen as a model language which construction should be followed. As Gorrell (1961) puts it, this is why “early English grammars were based upon these Latin grammars; they continued and even increased the tendency to tell the student how the language should and should not be used” (Gorrell 1961, 181). William Bullokar’s *Pamphlet for Grammar* was – as a grammar written in English – one of the exceptions. But as Linn (2006) remarks, “moving into the 17th century, grammars of English still tended to be written in Latin, Christopher Cooper’s of 1685 being the last of the Latin ones” (Linn 2006, 5).

4.2 The rise of prescriptivism

It may seem that the prescriptive approach to the language came all of the sudden, but it was only a logical step in the development of discussing English systematically. As mentioned in section 3.2, the first need for a coherent system arose in the 15th century with the development of printing. As soon as the English spelling was standardised, language observers turned their interest to the English lexicon.

The predecessors of the first dictionaries were glosses from old manuscripts. Gorrell (1961) says, “in Anglo-Saxon times, manuscripts written in Latin might be glossed with Old English words” (Gorrell 1961, 121). Such glosses of hard Latin words were later to be put together and formed the first primitive dictionary. However, it was still only a dictionary of a limited number of Latin words. Gorrell (1961) also adds a very interesting observation of these dictionaries, which were edited around 1700: “They were all intended to be helpful, a fact which may at first seem insignificant, but is not. None of the earlier dictionaries were calculated to determine what was right and what was wrong, what was elegant and what was crude. (...) Interestingly enough, this is essentially the attitude of a modern lexicographer” (Gorrell 1961, 121).

But there comes the 18th century and a new group of language observers, who are confident enough to prescribe what they think is appropriate. One of them was Samuel Johnson, the author of the first big English dictionary. Crystal (2003) remarks that “it was not until Samuel Johnson completed *A Dictionary of the English Language* in 1755 that the lexicon received its first authoritative treatment” (Crystal 2003, 74).

Now when both spelling and lexicon were put in order, the attention turned to English syntax. The first books concerning English grammar appeared in the 16th century. But it was not until the 1760s when the prescriptive grammar really started. Between 1750 and 1800 more than two hundred grammar books were published. 1762 saw the publication of Bishop Lowth’s *A Short Introduction to English Grammar*. Later it gave inspiration to Lindley Murray and his *English Grammar* (1794). As Crystal (2003) says, “both grammars went through many editions in the years following their publication, and had enormous influence on school practises, especially in the USA” (Crystal 2003, 78).

4.3 Prescriptive and descriptive views on the split infinitive

4.3.1 *The first condemnation*

The first condemnation of the split infinitives appeared in *The New-England Magazine* in America in 1834.¹¹ An unknown American (signed only as “P.”) published an article in which he discusses “awkward habits” which some people use in a language and to which he wishes to call attention (P. 1834, 467). P. deals with an inappropriate use of *shew*, *sate*, missing article *the*, putting an adverb between *to* and the verb and mistakes in the English orthography.

The following revealing passage from page 469 deals with the split infinitive, even though P. does not use this term:

The practise of separating the prefix of the infinitive mode from the verb, by the intervention of an adverb, is not unfrequent among uneducated persons; as, “To fully understand it,” instead of “to understand it fully,” or, “fully to understand it”. This fault is not often found in print, except in some newspapers, where the editors have not had the advantage of a good education. I am not conscious, that any rule has been heretofore given in relation to this point: no treatise on grammar or rhetoric, within my knowledge, alludes to it. The practise, however, of not separating the particle from its verb, is so general and uniform among good authors, and the exceptions are so rare, that the rule which I am about to propose will, I believe, prove to be most accurate as most rules, and may be found beneficial to inexperienced writers. It is this:—The particle, TO, which comes before the verb in the infinitive mode, must not be separated from it by an intervention of an adverb or any other word or phrase; but the adverb should immediately precede the particle, or immediately follow the verb.

Unfortunately, P. does not explain why he is against separating the particle from its verb. There is not even a hint. As long as he is aware that there is “no treatise on grammar or rhetoric, within my knowledge” which deals with this

¹¹ This information is taken from Tiekens-Boon van Ostade (2014, 82).

construction, in all probability he could not adopt this rule from someone else. It raises a question, why did he object to it. If it was only an opinion of one “quibbler”, why did the condemnation became so popular? The only explanation I have is that the disapproval of the split infinitive must have been already common at that time.

4.3.2 Three opinions on the split infinitive through time

One of the early rejections of the split infinitive (following the first condemnation by P. in 1834) was Henry Alford’s in his *The Queen’s English*¹² (Alford 1864, 171):

“A correspondent states as his own usage, and defends, the insertion of an adverb between the sign of the infinitive mood and the verb. He gives as an instance: ‘to scientifically illustrate.’ But surely this is a practise entirely unknown to English speakers and writers. It seems to me, that we ever regard the to of the infinitive as inseparable from its verb. And when we have a choice between two forms of expression, ‘scientifically to illustrate,’ and to ‘illustrate scientifically,’ there seems no god reason for flying in the face of common usage.”

Alford states confidently that splitting an infinitive is “entirely unknown to English speakers and writers”. But this is not true. I gave an evidence from Crystal (2003) and Curme (1931) in section 3.1 about the split infinitives in Middle English. Although they were rare, they existed. Anyway, if this construction was unnatural and unknown, it would give no sense that someone defends it as a common language feature.

A more recent objection against the split infinitive is given in a textbook *Business Communication*: “Split infinitives are not correct grammar. Avoid them

¹² Henry Alford's *A Plea for the Queen's English* of 1864 (titled *The Queen's English* in later editions) was one of the earliest and most influential style manuals. It was not a comprehensive grammar, but instead moved through the language addressing topics Alford knew many people found difficult. Much of the content comprises his personal views on usage and abuse. (The British Library website. Accessed on July 28. <http://www.bl.uk/learning/timeline/item126808.html>.)

when possible” (Krizan et. al. 2011, 617). However, this book is not a grammar, it is a guide to business English and that makes a difference. It does not necessarily mean that the authors of this textbook reject the split infinitive completely; they only reject it in the polite speech and writing. Anyway, the example they give is not very good, because when they “correct” the sentence with the split infinitive, they create a sentence with different meaning:

- (23) (a) *The Human Resource Department selected Pamela to officially represent her department at the company’s annual conference.*
(b) *The Human Resource Department officially selected Pamela to represent her department at the company’s annual conference*

This is exactly the problem I discuss in section 2.4.2. If we change the position of an adverb as in (23), the sentence also changes its meaning. Now the reader (or listener) might be confused – was Pamela about to be the official representative of her department or was it just an official process to select her? We do not know. The split infinitive can make the situation clear.

Another and completely opposite opinion on the split infinitive can be found in Curme (1931, 458):

“The insertion of the adverb here between to and the infinitive cannot even in the strictest scientific sense to be considered ungrammatical. (...) As the feeling grows that to should introduce the clause, it becomes more common to place the adverb after the to. (...) Thus the split infinitive is an improvement of English lexicon. (...) “The split infinitive has been censured by grammarians to whom grammar is not an objective study of the living language but a fixed body of rules that has come down to us from the past.”

The next three citations I give are not taken from books but are to be found on the internet. It is a proof that splitting an infinitive is a popular matter of lore too. The first citation at least admits that a sentence with the split infinitive can be less ambiguous in meaning:

*“The easiest rule to remember about the split infinitive is to avoid it, as long as there is no doubt that the meaning will be ambiguous or awkwardly expressed as a result.”*¹³

The second citation is not so strict in its attitude to the split infinitive, but it does not see it as correct too:

*“Split infinitives are still frowned upon in formal writing situations. For this reason, split infinitives are best left out of a sentence. However, it is not wise to mangle a sentence simply to avoid splitting an infinitive.”*¹⁴

The last account on the split infinitive I want to present is one of Fowler’s:

“The English-speaking world may be divided into (1) those who neither know nor care what a split infinitive is; (2) those who do not know but care very much; (3) those who know and condemn; (4) those who know and approve; and (5) those who know and distinguish. (...) Those who neither know nor care are the vast majority, and are a happy folk, to be envied by the minority classes.” (Fowler and Gowers 1965, 579–582)

It is evident from this excerpt that apart from descriptive and prescriptive approaches, there is the third voice. A voice which makes fun from the previous two. However, all opinions are important and had to be taken into account.

¹³ http://wrywriter.com/2016/04/split-infinitives/?fb_action_ids=1703103686596663&fb_action_types=news.publishes. This page was last modified April 19 2016.

¹⁴ <https://www.grammarly.com/blog/to-infinitive-andbeyond>. Accessed on July 18 2016.

5 “THE MYTH OF INFINITIVE SPLITTING AND BISHOP LOWTH”

The “anti-splitting” rule is said to be “the best-known topic in the whole of the English pedagogical grammatical tradition” (Huddleston, Pullum, and Bauer 2002, 581). Because of this rule, many writers avoid this construction in order not to be ungrammatical. However, spoken language sometimes seems to prefer this split infinitive construction as it is less ambiguous (see discussion in section 2.4.2). So there is this question: why is the split infinitive such a discussed issue, if this construction has been present in English for several centuries and can help to avoid ambiguity? According to Huddleston et.al. (2002, 581) the prescriptive condemnation for splitting infinitives did not arise until the second half of the 19th century, and such is the view of Crystal too (2003, 195). This is true, because as we already know, the first prescription appeared in 1834 (see section 4.3.1).

5.1 Bishop Lowth as a figure

Bishop Robert Lowth was both a successful scholar and clergyman. He was born on November 27th 1710 in Winchester, Hampshire. His father Rev. William Lowth was a clergyman and biblical commentator. Robert Lowth took after his father and very early decided to dedicate his life (apart from literature) to religion. In 1728 he went to study at New College in Oxford, where he was elected fellow in 1733 and later obtained his M.A. degree in 1737. Four years later he succeeded Joseph Spence as Oxford Professor of Poetry.

In 1748 Lowth attended Henry Bilson-Legge, Chancellor of the Exchequer. Meeting him was an important event in his life, as I explain in the following section 5.2. In 1754 Lowth received the degree of Doctorate in Divinity by the University of Oxford. In 1766 he became Bishop of St. David’s and in the same year he was consecrated Bishop of Oxford, which he remained until 1777. Then he was made Bishop of London. In 1783 he was even offered to become Archbishop of Canterbury. Due to his age and ill health he declined. Bishop Lowth died on November 3rd 1787 after a severe illness.

Apart from his *A Short Introduction to English Grammar* (1762) he is the author of *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of Hebrews*, for which he was awarded the Doctorate in Divinity. This series of lectures, originally published in Latin, was translated into English by George Gregory in 1787. In the preface it includes Lowth's life.¹⁵

5.2 Lowth, his grammar and the prescriptivist lore

Some people still see Bishop Lowth as a prescriptivist and as the one who once set the rule against the split infinitive. But is that really so? As Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2014) claims, Lowth originally intended to write his *A Short Introduction to English Grammar* for his little son. Evidence for this is given in a letter he wrote to his friend James Merrick: "I drew it up for the use of my little Boy, for the reasons mentioned in the Preface" (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2014, 74). But the situation was not this simple.

At the very beginning Lowth maybe really intended to produce only one version of his grammar, which would help his son Thomas Henry to understand his native language. However, as Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2014) explains in her chapter on Lowth's prescriptivism, Lowth decided to print his grammar on the request of Bilson-Legge, whose power in all probability helped Lowth with his Church career. In any case, Bilson-Legge had a son Henry Junior who was about three years younger than Thomas. In order to meet the request of his patron, Bishop Lowth decided to have his grammar printed (Tieken-Book van Ostade 2014, 75).

Thus, the intended purpose of Lowth's grammar was changed. Tieken-Book van Ostade (2014) argues that "the original aim of the grammar is still evident from several of the example sentences it contains, that is: Thomas book; I love Thomas; Thomas is loved by me; Who is loved? Thomas; a loving, more loving, most loving, father" (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2014, 75). Nonetheless, these examples are the only evidence of the original intended purpose. The text is

¹⁵ The preface is also the source of information in this section. *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of Hebrews* can be accessed on this link: https://books.google.cz/books?id=hdYMAAAAIAAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=cs&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

written in a scholarly way and it would be almost impossible for children to understand it. It is strange then that this grammar was widely used in schools.

A reader of *A Short Introduction to English Grammar* should pay attention to the style of the text. Though it is written in a scholarly way, the tone of the text of this grammar is not prescriptive at all. I dare to say that Lowth rather describes than prescribes and at several points only gives a suggestion as to how the language is to be used. Somehow, his suggestions (or observations) became some kind of a dogma, but without any reason.

Even some present day grammarians link Bishop Lowth with prescriptive rules, such as Jean Aitchison (2004). She states that “he himself attempted to lay down ‘rules’ of good usage” (Aitchison 2004, 9). Moreover, she continues that the present day “laws of ‘good usage’ can be traced directly to Bishop Lowth’s idiosyncratic pronouncements as to what was ‘right’ and what was ‘wrong’ (Aitchison 2004, 9). Other ones who blame Lowth for being prescriptive are Albert Baugh and Thomas Cable (2002).¹⁶ They see him as “a typical representative of the normative and prescriptive school of grammarians” (Baugh and Cable 2002, 258). Another opinion on Lowth as a prescriptivist is found in Bryson (1990): “It is to Lowth we can trace many a pedant’s most treasured notions” (Bryson 1990, 141).

It’s true that Lowth’s influence was great. His *A Short Introduction to English Grammar* was reprinted many times. Moreover, Lowth’s grammar was influential through Lindley Murray, a grammarian who had used Lowth as a main source for his *English Grammar* published in 1795 (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2014, 73). Poldauf (1948) says about Murray’s *English Grammar* that together with *An Abridgment* and *English Exercises with a Key* (both 1797) “they were clever compilations of the teachings of the prescriptive grammarians, annotated and unsparingly provided with historical, comparative and ‘critical’ references” (Poldauf 1948, 147). Baugh (1963) shares Poldauf’s point: “At least twenty-two editions appeared during the 18th century, and its influence was spread by numerous imitators, including the well known Lindley Murray” (Baugh 1963, 331). Another proof of Lowth’s big influence is from *Original Papers*:

¹⁶ This work is not really current, the first edition of *A History of the English Language* was published in 1951.

Inaccuracies of Diction. Grammar, an article in which the first condemnation for the split infinitive appeared. The author of the article mentions in several passages “Dr. Lowth” as “high English authority” (P. 1834, 468), even though P. at some points admits he does not always agree with him (for example with his conjugation of the verb *sit*).

To sum this up, it is true that Bishop Lowth may be considered as a language conservative. But as I argue in the following section, those who see him as a prescriptivist and “anti-splitter” are not right. It seems like for the most part, they have just created a straw man, outdoing themselves in trying to show how strongly anti-prescriptivist they are.

5.3 The prejudices against Lowth

5.3.1 Lowth’s sentences lifted out of context

The first opinion on Bishop Lowth which I want to challenge is the one of Crystal (2003, 79):

“It is important to note that these examples are not taken from the speech or writing of the uneducated, or even of the reasonably well-educated, but from ‘the politest part of the nation, and...our most approved authors’. Lowth is talking about Shakespeare, Milton, Pope, Swift, all of whom in his opinion ‘offend’.”

However, in my opinion Crystal (2003) has only lifted a part of a sentence out of context. The sentence originally goes like this (Lowth 1838, iv):

“Does it mean, that the English language, as it is spoken by the politest part of the nation, and as it stands in the writings of our most approved authors, often offends against every part of Grammar? Thus far, I am afraid, the charge is true”

But, this is not his idea, he only agrees with the idea of someone else. In a paragraph preceding this one with the cited sentence, Lowth (1838) discusses Jonathan Swift and his “public remonstrance (...) concerning the imperfect state

of our Language; alleging in particular, ‘that in many instances it offended against every part of Grammar’” (Lowth 1838, iii–iv). Swift in his *A Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Language* (1712) criticised the state of the then English and proposed establishing of a language academy which would kind of “guard” its purity. In one of the sections he gives examples of grammatical features which he considers bad and points to authors who (in his opinion) use the English language incorrectly.

Another sentence of Lowth which is often lifted out of context is: “to lay down rules, and to illustrate them by examples” (Lowth 1838, ix). Again, we need to see the rest of the paragraph to fully understand it:

“The principal design of a Grammar of any Language is to teach us to express ourselves with propriety in that Language; and to enable us to judge of every phrase and form of construction, whether it be right or not. The plain way of doing this is, to lay down rules, and to illustrate them by examples. But, beside showing what is right, the matter may be further explained by pointing out what is wrong.” (Lowth 1838, ix)

In this paragraph Lowth (1838) clearly explains how he is going to treat grammar in his book. He sees laying down rules and illustrating them by examples as too simple and probably insufficient. Therefore, as he continues, he decided not only to explain the rules and give the examples of proper usage, but also give the examples of improper usage so that the explanation is as clear as it can be.

5.3.2 Lowth and the lore

Bishop Lowth and his grammar has been the target of much other criticism. I believe that the grounds for this criticism results from misunderstanding of his *An Introduction to English Grammar*. Some of these prejudices are still present in the grammatical lore. One example of a popular belief in Lowth’s condemnation of the split infinitive is an article in an old Wikipedia domain:

No doubt Lowth's most famous (or infamous) contribution to the study of grammar was his prescription that forbade the use of the split infinitive, a

*rule that has been a subject of dispute for grammarians ever since. Additionally, Lowth originated the antagonism towards sentences ending with a proposition, thus declaring a sentence such as "she refused to come in" as invalid. The textbook remained in standard usage throughout educational institutions until the early 20th century.*¹⁷

The current Wikipedia version of an article on Bishop Lowth has been corrected, because it does not contain a single sentence from the text given above. It only informs us that Lowth did reject (apart from other grammatical phenomena) preposition stranding. Moreover, it even advocates Lowth's work:

*"Although it is sometimes reported that a prohibition on split infinitives goes back to Renaissance times, and frequently the 18th century scholar Robert Lowth is cited as the originator of the prescriptive rule,^[18] such a rule is not to be found in Lowth's writing and is not known to appear in any other text prior to the mid-19th century."*¹⁸

The cross reference in the text above [18] refers to Lederer (2003, 248):

"The prohibition of that practice was created in 1762 by one Robert Lowth, an Anglican bishop and self-appointed grammarian."

The same opinion on Lowth reappears in Stockwell (2002):

"To boldly go where no one has gone before ('Star Trek'). This is the most famous 'split infinitive' in history (another of Bishop Lowth's prohibitions, on the grounds that infinitives cannot be split in Latin). However, the alternatives ('Boldly to go...', 'To go boldly...') sound much more clumsy and destroy the powerful rhythm of the iambic pentameter." Stockwell (2002, 98)

¹⁷ https://nostalgia.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Lowth. This page was last modified on 18 November 2001.

¹⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Split_infinitive. This page was last modified 20 July 2016.

These two citations (Lederer's and Stockwell's) are a proof that there are still (and I dare to say well respected) scholars who believe that Lowth is the author of the anti-splitting rule, even though this belief has no grounds at all. It seems that Bishop Lowth's grammar is still more discussed than read.

The following citations I give are from various websites, not academic books. They should serve as an example that the anti-prescriptivist lore is full of prejudices against Lowth and the split infinitives too. This first one accuses Lowth of creating the anti-splitting rule, again with no reason:

“The most influential of these grammars was Robert Lowth's “Short Introduction to English Grammar,” published in 1761. Criticizing almost every major English writer from Shakespeare to Pope, Lowth made most of the prescriptive statements that people still follow today. His prescriptions include: (1) Two negatives make a positive, except in constructions such as “No, not even if you paid me.”; (2) Never split an infinitive; (3) Never end a sentence in a preposition; (4) “Ain't” is unacceptable in formal English.¹⁹

The next citation I give “only” blames Lowth for being prescriptive, but not for creating the rule against the split infinitive. It connects the split infinitive with Henry Alford:

“For some of them, we can blame misguided Latinists who tried to impose the rules of their favorite language on English. Anglican bishop Robert Lowth popularized the prohibition against ending a sentence with a preposition in his 1762 book, A Short Introduction to English Grammar; while Henry Alford, a dean of Canterbury Cathedral, was principally

¹⁹ <http://techwhirl.com/tech-writers-grammar-and-the-prescriptive-attitude/>. Last modified 18 June 2002.

responsible for the infinitive taboo, with his publication of A Plea for the Queen's English in 1864."²⁰

It is rather arguable how much is Henry Alford responsible for the infinitive taboo. I showed in section 4.3.1 that the first one to condemn the split infinitive was an anonymous American. On the other hand, it is true that even though Henry Alford was not the first one to object to it, his *Queen's English* was definitely more read than *The New-England Magazine*.

Another example of connecting Lowth with the split infinitive is in the article "Bishop Lowth was a Fool":

*Hot linguistic debate often occurs over a number of normative usage rules. One example which leaps instantly to mind is the foolish "one must never split an infinitive." In Lowth's grammar infinitives cannot be split. It is not possible for Lowth because it is not possible in Latin to split an infinitive. Well, of course not. In Latin, an infinitive is one word. However, it is not in English. English infinitives are two words, such as "to split," and there is little logic to keeping them fused together, except that it cannot be done in Latin and Bishop Lowth decided, quite on his own, that English should emulate Latin, and the world followed suit. Thus, one foolish man has made a messy mockery of the rich and dynamic English language. Because of Lowth's erroneous decision, users of English have no end of confusion and difficulty sorting out these illogical rules.*²¹

Let me give the last false example of accusing Lowth. In fact, the internet is full of these prejudices and it will take a lot of time to clear Bishop's name:

²⁰ <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/most-of-what-you-think-you-know-about-grammar-is-wrong-4047445/>. Last modified February 2013.

²¹ Originally published on the website of the same name, now only as a single article on <http://www.thehumblefarmer.com/future.html>. Last modified September 13, 2003. This text also quotes Ostade (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2014, 81).

*The prohibition of that practice was created in 1762 out of whole cloth by one Robert Lowth, an Anglican bishop and self-appointed grammarian. Lowth's anti-infinitive-splitting injunction is founded on models in the classical tongues. But English is a Germanic tongue, so the fact that Greek, Latin and all the succeeding romance languages feature single-word infinitives, such as videre and hablar, that are unsplittable is irrelevant to English syntax.*²²

It must be clear from these examples that advocating Lowth is quite a hard task. The accusations have an unknown ground and moreover, the authors of citations given above often copy each other's sentences. For instance in the last citation given above there is this wording: "an Anglican bishop and self-appointed grammarian". Does it sound familiar? These are words of Lederer (2003) whom I mention earlier in this section: "The prohibition of that practice was created in 1762 by one Robert Lowth, an Anglican bishop and self-appointed grammarian" (Lederer 2003, 248).

So, not only do not these "grammarians" bother to read Lowth's original work. Furthermore, they only copy other's arrogant statements. After all, aren't these people "self appointed grammarians" too? I will leave this question to your own discretion.

²² <http://verbivore.com/wordpress/is-it-acceptable-to-occasionally-split-an-infinitive/>. This page was last modified December 6 2014.

6 CONCLUSION

In my thesis I have focused on the phenomenon of the English split infinitive, i.e. inserting an element (e.g. an adverb) between the infinitive marker *to* and the verb, and its history.

In section 2 I have concentrated on the grammatical background. I provide a theoretical introduction to the construction of the infinitive as such. In order to make clear how the split infinitive is formed, I discuss the particle *to* and explain why we should consider it an independent unit. My discussion is supported by arguments from Leech (2006) and Huddleston, Pullum and Bauer (2002). I also discuss the structure of the verb phrase. This serves as an introduction to a section in which I explain the acceptability of the split infinitive. The reason why the split infinitive should be acceptable lies in the fact that in certain contexts the sentence with this construction is less ambiguous.

I have dedicated a short section to preposition stranding. Stranded prepositions have a similar history with the split infinitive – both these constructions have been present in the English language since Middle English, both have been condemned in the 19th century and both are now slowly beginning to be seen as acceptable.

In section 3 I have tried to track down the history of the split infinitive and its use. In fact, it is a history of the particle *to*. Therefore I provide only a very short introduction to the history of the English language. This section is followed by the grammatical history of *to* (which was originally a preposition followed by an Object), including various supporting examples of early infinitives and also the early split infinitives.

Section 4 explains the difference between the descriptive and prescriptive grammar. It is important to note that the need for an English grammar did not appear all of the sudden. It followed the expansion of printing at the end of the 15th century. The necessity of a unified orthographic system later led to call for a systematic treatment of English vocabulary and syntax.

In the same section I also deal with the first condemnation of the split infinitive in 1834 created by an anonymous American. Then I provide three

various opinions on the split infinitive through time – Alford’s (1864), Curme’s (1931) and Krizan’s (2011).

In section 5, which is the last, I introduced the figure of Bishop Robert Lowth and his *A Short Introduction to English Grammar*. Lowth’s grammar was first published in 1762. It is a question, how come that he has been connected with the condemnation of the split infinitive, if the first rejection of this construction did not appear until 1834 (i.e. after Lowth’s death)? Tiekens-Boon van Ostade is convinced that it is “a matter of accident” (Tiekens-Boon van Ostade 2014, 82) and I share her opinion, because there is no other explanation.

Lowth and his grammar have been the targets of many prejudices. Therefore I provide a section in which I challenge some of them. I discuss two of Lowth’s sentences often lifted out of context. I mention some websites which blame Lowth for creating the anti-splitting rule. They serve as evidence that the grammatical lore is still full of misleading ideas.

A problem of a majority of grammars is that they either reject the split infinitive completely or at least say it is better not to use it in formal writing and speech. But no grammar gives a sufficient explanation under which circumstances would the use of the split infinitive be acceptable. The same situation repeats with Bishop Lowth. Those who see him as the originator of the anti-splitting rule have in all probability never read his *A Short Introduction to English Grammar*. Otherwise they would know that he has never created or discussed such a stricture.

7 RESUMÉ

Ve své práci jsem se zaměřila na fenomén anglického split infinitivu a jeho historii. Split infinitiv je konstrukce, kdy se mezi infinitivní indikátor a sloveso samotné vloží další element (např. příslovce).

Ve druhé kapitole se věnuji gramatickému pozadí tohoto jevu. Nejprve je podán teoretický úvod do infinitivní konstrukce jako takové. Abych mohla objasnit, jak se split infinitiv tvoří, vysvětluji nejdřív povahu partikule *to*, kterou bychom měli považovat za samostatnou jednotku. Má diskuze je podpořena argumenty Leeche (2006) a Huddlestona, Pulluma a Bauera (2002). Probrána je také struktura verbální fráze. To slouží jako úvod do kapitoly o přijatelnosti split infinitivu. Hlavním důvodem, proč by split infinitiv měl být přijatelný, je jeho schopnost předcházet dvouznačnosti. V některých případech je totiž věta se split infinitivem srozumitelnější.

Krátká kapitola je věnována předložkám „na konci věty“²³. Tento jev má se split infinitivem společnost historii – obě konstrukce jsou v anglickém jazyce přítomné už od střední angličtiny, obě byly v devatenáctém století zakazovány a obě nyní postupně začínají být viděny jako přijatelné.

Kapitola 3 sleduje historii split infinitivu a jeho použití. Ve skutečnosti se totiž jedná o historii partikule *to*. Proto uvádím pouze krátké shrnutí historie anglického jazyka. Následuje kapitola věnující se gramatické historii partikule *to* (která byla původně prepozicí následovanou objektem) a zahrnující různé příklady raných infinitivů i split infinitivů.

Ve čtvrté kapitole vysvětluji rozdíl mezi deskriptivní a preskriptivní gramatikou. Je důležité poznamenat, že potřeba anglické gramatiky nevznikla jen tak náhodou. Podnětem byl (mimo jiné) rozvoj knihtisku na konci patnáctého století. Potřeba jednotného ortografického systému později vedla i k systematickému zpracování anglické slovní zásoby a syntaxe.

Stejná kapitola se dále zabývá prvním odsouzením split infinitivu, vytvořeném neznámým Američanem v roce 1834. Dále představuji tři různé

²³ Jedná se o můj vlastní pracovní překlad *preposition stranding*, který používám pouze pro účely této práce.

názory na split infinitiv v průběhu času – Alfordův (1864), Curmeův (1931) a Krizanův (2011).

Poslední pátá kapitola se věnuje postavě biskupa Roberta Lowtha a jeho *A Short Introduction to English Grammar*. Lowthova gramatika byla poprvé vydána v roce 1762. Otázkou je, proč je Lowth spojován se zákazem split infinitivu, když se první odmítnutí této konstrukce objevilo až v roce 1834 (tedy po jeho smrti)? Tieken-Boon van Ostade je přesvědčená, že se jedná pouze o náhodu a já sdílím její názor, protože jiné vysvětlení pro to není.

Lowth a jeho gramatika byly a jsou terčem mnoha předsudků. Proto se v následující části pokouším napadnout některé z nich. Probírám dvě Lowthovy věty často vytrhované z kontextu. Zmiňuji i některé webové stránky, které Lowtha obviňují u vytvoření pravidla proti rozdělování infinitivů. Slouží jako důkazy toho, že gramatická tradice je stále plná mylných představ.

Problém většiny gramatik je, že buď split infinitiv zakazují úplně nebo alespoň uvádí, že je nevhodné používat ho ve formální komunikaci (ať už v mluveném či psaném projevu). Žádná gramatika ale nepodává dostatečné vysvětlení, za jakých okolností je použití split infinitivu přijatelné. Stejná situace se opakuje u biskupa Lowtha. Ti, kteří ho vidí jako původce pravidla proti rozdělování infinitivu, s největší pravděpodobností jeho *A Short Introduction to English Grammar* nikdy nečetli. Jinak by jim muselo být zřejmé, že takové jazykové omezení nikdy nevytvořil a ani se jím nezabýval.

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