

**THE ACCUSATIVE WITH  
INFINITIVE, AND SOME  
KINDRED CONSTRUCTIONS  
IN ENGLISH**

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The accusative with infinitive, and some kindred constructions in English by Jacob Zeitlin

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BY  
JACOB ZEITLIN

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## PREFACE

Perhaps no construction has been the object of so deep-rooted a misconception or of so oft repeated a misstatement as that which goes by the name of accusative with infinitive. The prevalent notion concerning the construction, that it is of fifteenth century origin and due to Latin influence, is indorsed by such scholars as Professor Jespersen. But the presence in Old English of a number of clear examples of accusative with infinitive makes it evident that the statement is in need of qualification. It was for the purpose of ascertaining the truth concerning this construction that the present dissertation was undertaken.

After a review of the various theories which have been advanced during the last century in regard to the origin and development of the accusative with infinitive, the writer briefly examined the status of the construction in a number of the Indo-Germanic languages. This was done with a view to determining its earliest phases in each language and the elements possessed in common by all. The examination was in the nature of a critical summary of the most important contributions on the subject in the separate dialects. The extent of the construction in Old English was next investigated. All the poetical texts were read, and on these, as being least subject to the contamination of Latin influence, the chief emphasis was laid. A number of original prose texts and translations were also read for the purpose of observing whether there was any distinct difference in the usage. In the Middle English period, five or six texts were chosen from each century. The selection was made from poetry and prose, and with a view to having the learned, the courtly, and the popular styles all represented. In many

cases texts were not read in their entirety, if a perusal of several hundred pages revealed a general uniformity in usage and no striking peculiarities. After the middle of the sixteenth century, when the construction may be considered to have attained its full development, a number of Shakespeare's plays and an equal amount of the prose of representative writers of successive periods was examined, for the sake of noting the extent of modern usage and the relative employment of the construction by various writers.

In illustrating the development of so common a construction it was, of course, inexpedient and unnecessary to make exhaustive citations from the texts examined. In the case of the more common and obvious phases, such as that of the active infinitive employed after verbs of causation and sense perception, only a few examples after any verb are given from Old English texts and the earliest occurrences from the Middle English texts examined, no illustration being given in any case after Chaucer. The passive infinitive after these verbs, as being more important, is illustrated more fully, but not exhaustively. For the rarer manifestations of the construction—after verbs of mental perception and declaration—all the occurrences in Old English are given either by quotation or by reference, while from the Middle English only as much is given as is required to indicate clearly the course of the development. This, it may be said, involves the citation of practically all occurrences except after such very common verbs as *think* and *know*. In Modern English the construction is illustrated only after verbs of mental perception and declaration. No more than one or two quotations from a writer are made after any particular verb, references being given for other passages.

This study was begun with the sole purpose of investigating the accusative with infinitive, but the course of the investigation forced upon the writer the consideration of several peculiarly Middle English constructions which have hitherto

been crudely associated with the accusative with infinitive, but which seemed in need of a different explanation. This gave rise to the fourth and fifth chapters of this dissertation, in which the writer has attempted to classify all cases in which a substantive is used in conjunction with an infinitive. In the first of these chapters the use of a substantive with infinitive as the subject of a neuter or impersonal verb is discussed, while in the other there is grouped a series of examples illustrating a very striking use of the infinitive with imperative force in Middle English, together with some other miscellaneous usages. The examples for these two chapters were chosen from scattered sources.

There only remains the pleasant duty of extending my thanks to all those who through their generous co-operation have made the existence of this dissertation possible. To Professor G. R. Carpenter I am indebted for the original suggestion of the subject. I wish to thank Professor W. W. Lawrence for numerous helpful suggestions in regard to substance and style, and for his assistance in reading proof. The Indo-Iranian section of this dissertation owes its value in the greatest measure to the supervision, both in manuscript and in proof, of Professor A. V. W. Jackson, whose kindness and courtesy it is impossible to overestimate. My thanks are due also to Professor A. H. Thorndike for useful suggestions in regard to mechanical form, and to Mr. Leo Frachtenberg for help in reading proof. But my chief indebtedness is to Professor G. P. Krapp. From the initial step in the collection of material to the reading of the last proof-sheet, his constant guidance and unfailing counsel have made easy the execution of this task. I wish to express my deep gratitude to him for his share in this dissertation.

JACOB ZEITLIN.