

Abstract

In present-day English, a *to*-infinitival clause can be used after question words such as *how* and *where*, as in *Could you show me how to get to the station?/ No one told us where to meet*. On the other hand, many grammars of English treat *why* in this pattern as impossible or non-existent. However, *why to*-infinitival clauses *do* occur in certain environments, as in *Do questions of what, when and why to eat in the morning have you feeling scrambled?* After undertaking a corpus study of *why to*-infinitival clauses, this article describes and explains the occurrence and meaning of *why to*-infinitives, a rarely studied gap in the grammar of English. The article then examines semantic constraints governing its acceptability and claims that there are two kinds of *why to*-infinitival clauses. Finally, the article considers some related expressions and the derivation of infinitival interrogatives.

1. Introduction

It is well-known that *wh*-words such as *how* and *when* can be followed by a *to*-infinitive. This structure (i.e., question word + *to*-infinitive) is most often found with verbs such as *discover*, *find out*, *know*, *show*, and *wonder*. Let us look at the following sentences.

- (1) a. He discovered **how to open** the safe.
b. I found out **where to buy** fruit cheaply.
c. I didn't know **when to switch** the machine off.
d. I showed her **which button to press**.
e. She couldn't think **what to say**.
f. He couldn't remember **whether to turn** left or right.

(Thomson and Martinet 1986: 216)

As regards *why*, many grammars of English treat *to*-infinitival as impossible or non-existent. For instance, Quirk et al. (1972: 736) state that “an infinitive *wh*-clause can be formed with all *wh*-words except *why*.” Hudson (1976: 164) also notes that “... *why* is the only question-word that doesn't occur in embedded infinitive interrogative: I don't know **why* / *when* / *where* / *whether* to eat.” Eastwood (1999: 158) says decisively that “we cannot use **why** before a *to*-infinitive,” showing a clear contrast between *No one could explain why we had to wait* and **No one could explain why to wait*. The combination of *why* with *to*-infinitival is further rejected by Bolinger (1978: 118): “... *why* is not used in the infinitival construction” and Dixon (1991: 235): “**I don't know why to go* is ungrammatical...” Swan (2016) and Wierzbicka (1988) point out that the bare infinitival construction

with *why* is possible while the *to*-infinitival construction is not, as shown below.

(2) Why argue with him? He'll never change his mind.

(NOT ~~Why arguing ...?~~ OR ~~Why to argue ...?~~)

(Swan 2016: §630)²

(3) *Why to wait? *Why to bother? *Why to stop here?

Why wait? Why bother? Why stop here?

(Wierzbicka 1988: 28)

It is interesting to note that Jespersen (1940) discusses the constructions of question word plus *to*-infinitive under the heading of “isolated infinitive” and provides about thirty examples of embedded *to*-infinitival interrogatives. Concerning *why*, however, he states only that “opinions are divided as to the possibility of saying “I don’t know why complain (p. 326),” providing no example of the *why to*-infinitival construction. It might suggest how rare this construction is. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that Quirk and others did not accept *why to*-infinitives in their 1972 reference grammar book, but later, as in (4), they conceded that the construction is possible although it is rare.

(4) “An infinitive *wh*-clause can be formed with all *wh*-words, though instances with *why* are rare: I’m wondering why to go at all. [‘... why I should go at all.’]”
(Quirk et al. 1985: 1052)

As shown later, authentic examples of *why* plus *to*-infinitive are found in computerized corpora and on the Internet. Thus, as Quirk et al. (1985) comment, the con-

struction does exist although it is not frequent. This article examines the forms and meanings of this marked construction, the environment in which *why to*-infinitival clauses occur, and ways in which they are restricted in syntactic and semantic terms.

2. Data and Method

The following computerized corpora of present-day English were used to collect examples of *why to*-infinitives.

The British National Corpus (100 million words of texts from a wide range of genres, British, the 1980s-1993) (BNC)

The Corpus of Contemporary American English (560 million words of text, US, 1990-2017) (COCA)

The Corpus of Historical American English (400 million words of text from the 1810s-2000s) (COHA)

The Corpus of American Soap Operas (100 million words of data from 22,000 transcripts from the early 2000s, and it serves as a great resource to look at very informal language, US, 1990s-2000s) (SOAP)

The Movie Corpus (200 million words of data in more than 25,000 movies from the 1930s to the current time) (Movies)

The NOW Corpus (News on the Web) (8.7 billion words of data from web-based newspapers and magazines from 2010 to the present time. (NOW)

The Strathy Corpus of Canadian English (50 million words from more than 1,100 spoken, fiction, magazines, newspapers, and academic texts, Canadian, 1970s-20002) (Strathy)

The TIME Corpus (100 million words of text in about 275,000 articles from the TIME magazine, US, 1923-2006) (TIME)

The TV Corpus (325 million words of data in 75,000 TV episodes from the 1950s to the current time) (TV)

A search for *why to* sequences yielded 2,312 results. These contain examples in which *to*-infinitival clauses function as the subject or adjunct of the embedded clauses, as follows.

- (5) a. That's why to blame the company's management for the lower stock price is as off base as it would have been to congratulate them for its excessively high prices. (Strathy 2001: *Windsor Star*)³
- b. This is why to hear him you would almost think his disappointment was a small huddled sadness and not a wail of self-pity and flaming rage at the one lost. (Strathy 1998: *Healer*)

In (5), *why* is placed before a *to*-infinitive and the *why to*-infinitive looks as if it were a constituent. However, the infinitive is part of the embedded clause and is not directly related to the question word. Such examples were manually sorted to elicit *why to*-infinitival forms. In addition, some web sites like Amazon.com were used to collect various examples of book titles. The research in this article was based on the examination of a total of 1,580 examples.⁴

3. Distribution

Let us first consider the use of *why to*-infinitival clauses. The examples col-

lected from the corpora and internet sites are divided into the following types from morphological, syntactic and functional points of view:

- With other *wh*-word
 - (A) with other *wh*-word(s)
 - (B) with other *wh*-word + *to*-infinitive(s)
 - (C) with a *wh*-finite clause
- Without other *wh*-words
- After verbs such as *ask, decide, explain, find out, know, learn, teach, tell*
- After prepositions
- After the noun *reason*
- As an independent clause
 - (A) Used as titles of books, articles, etc. or headings for lists, notices and the like
 - (B) Used as open interrogative

3.1 The combination of *why* with other *wh*-word(s)

3.1.1 With other *wh*-word(s)

As illustrated below, *why to*-infinitive clause occurs with other *wh*-word(s). Among this type, “how and why to do” and “when and why to do” are the most common.

- (6) In this article, we address **how and why to provide** instruction about connectives to students. (2013 COCA: *Reading Teacher*)
- (7) Conditional knowledge refers to knowing **when and why to use** declarative and procedural knowledge. (1997 COCA: *Roeper Review*)
- (8) The question before him, he said to himself, was **whether and why to get**

up and where to move to: the living room, his bedroom, the guest bedroom, or perhaps a walk in the empty street. (2004 COCA: *Southwest Review*)

(9) Do questions of **what, when, and why to eat** in the morning have you feeling scrambled? (2015 COCA: *Prevention*)

(10) Constructing generations is similar to constructing historical divisions, establishing **where, how, and why to place** a boundary between periods. (1995 COCA: *Symposium*)

(11) You told me **where, when and why to go** meet some guy for some job, I didn't even ask for. (2004 TV: *Everwood*)

(12) Like their fathers and mothers, who learned to hold their liquor in college, today's youngsters have to learn **how, when, where and why to use** how much marijuana. (1968 TIME: *Pot: Safer than Alcohol?*)

(12) is an example in which three question words occur before *why to*-infinitive. It seems that there is no restriction for the number of *wh*-word that can show up in the constructions and the combinations of *wh*-word with *why to*-infinitival clause. Governors of *to*-infinitival *wh*-clause(s) are mentioned in 3.3 and 3. 4.

3.1.2 With other *wh*-word + *to*-infinitive(s)

Why to-infinitive can occur with other *to*-infinitival interrogatives. Let us look at the following examples.

(13) Purpose is about living by self-determination, knowing **what to do and why to do it**. (2015 COCA: *Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin*)

(14) How to read clinical journals: **Why to read them and how to start** reading them critically. (2012 COCA: *Canadian Journal of Plastic Surgery*)

(15) They may be able to use science for the dissection and description of mat-

ter, but they cannot use it tell me **why to live and how to live**.

(1929 TIME: *Hebrew Council*)

- (16) If we don't, we may find that children who complete their educations know how to read, but not "**why to read, when to read, and what to read...**" (1998 COCA: *Clearing House*)

The data above shows that the juxtaposition of two or more *to*-infinitival *wh*-clauses is possible.⁵ Some of my native informants comment that the infinitival *wh*-clauses above do not express question and function as a noun phrase. The function of infinitival *wh*-clauses will be discussed below.

3.1.3 With other *wh*-word + finite clause

A close examination of data shows that *why to*-infinitival clause can occur with other finite *wh*-clauses. Examples of this type have never been disclosed before in previous studies and reference grammar books. In such special environments, it seems that *why to*-infinitive always comes last in the combination.

- (17) I think it's particularly useful as a way of gaining entry to ideas about childhood—**what children are for, why to have them**—that aren't written in the official records, ...

(1985 BNC: *Truth, dare or promise: girls growing up in the fifties*)

- (18) ..., all nations want to know more about **what is happening and why to help** them decide how much it matters and what they should do about it.

(1996 COCA: *Foreign Affairs*)

- (19) I was too focused on finding **who fired the gun and why to ask** him.

(2007 SOAP: *Passions*)

- (20) ..., assessment and evaluation strategies that will ensure rich and reliable

ways of knowing **what has been accomplished, what has not, and why to create** a means to disseminate information and successful practices learned from this effort among educators, legislators, local communities, and others ... (2000 COCA: *Arts Education Policy Review*)

3.2 Without other *wh*-word

We have seen examples in which *why to*-infinitives occur with other *wh*-words or other *wh*-infinitives. It appears that the juxtaposition with other *wh*-infinitives is a necessary condition, but, as a matter of fact, *why to*-infinitives can occur without other *wh*-infinitive(s).

- (21) Everyone already knows **why to hate** Keurigification of consumer goods, but ... (2016 COCA: *The Verge*)
- (22) If he wants you to play the ball farther back in your stance, for example, find out **why to promote** a more in-to-out swing, perhaps. (2015 COCA: *Gold Magazine*)
- (23) "..., then people are going to know **why to hire** you." (1998 COCA: *ABA Journal*)
- (24) The Navajo storyteller Yellowman was asked **why to bother** to tell Coyote stories to adults. (1997 COCA: *American Indian Quarterly*)
- (25) Somebody wanted to stop something, Francis was there saying **why to do** it. (1993 COCA: *Sacred Clowns*)

3.3 After verbs

Why to-infinitives share syntactic characteristics of structures consisting of other *wh*-word plus a *to*-infinitive. According to Thomson and Martinet (1986:

216), the verbs most frequently used in the verb + *wh*-word + *to*-infinitive construction are “*ask, decide, discover, find out, forget, know, learn, remember, see (=understand/perceive), show + object, think, understand, want to know, wonder.*” As illustrated in the above examples, *why to*-infinitives are embedded by verbs such as *ask, decide, explain, find out, know, learn, teach, and tell.*

3.4 After prepositions

Collins COBUILD English Grammar (2017) notes that “[s]tructures consisting of a *wh*-word plus a *to*-infinitive, which refers to a possible course of action, are used after prepositions but not usually as subjects.”

- (26) a. ... the problem of what to tell the adopted child.
- b. ... a book on how to avoid having a heart attack.
- c. People are worried about how to fill their increased leisure time.

(Collins COBUILD English Grammar. p.410)

As displayed in (27) - (33), *why to*-infinitives are found after prepositions such as *about, for, of, on, over, concerning, and regarding.*

- (27) Melissa’s in our audience as well. Kind of a similar question **about** why to do it. *(1996 COCA: CNN Talk Back)*
- (28) Warning: Students will need clear and understandable (browsable) instructions **for** how to do this and why to do this. *(2011 COCA: Teacher Librarian)*
- (29) I think we lack common sense at times in our judgments **of** why to justify something. *(2007 COCA: NPR: The Bane of a Principal’s Life)*

- (30) Also many readable articles **on** why to take vitamins, dangers posed by pollutants, benefits of PS and other brain nutrients, and other columns...
(2005 COCA: *Total Health*)
- (31) Not surprisingly, different values, expressed as different goals, lead to disagreement **over** how and why to set PTLs. (2006 COCA: *Bioscience*) cf. PTL = Population Target Levels
- (32) His emphasis ... on the limitations and weakness of human judgement, would seem to forbid any very general doctrine **concerning** when and why to go with the flow of custom and convention and when to critique and resist it.
(2000 COCA 2000: *Monist*)
- (33) Adequate education for coaches, including sufficient knowledge of head injuries and symptom management. Clearly defined standards **regarding** when and why to refer athletes to physicians.
(2000 COCA: *USA Today Magazine*)

There were no attested cases of *why to*-infinitive examples used as complements of adjectives like *clear* and *obvious*. Our data contains the following example used as subject.

- (34) ..., indicate the source of the instability of the exchange rate of the Jamaican dollar, and why to peg or not to peg the exchange rate is not the question.
(2010 NOW: Jamaica-gleaner.com)

3.5 After the noun *reason*

Why collocates with the noun *reason(s)*. *Why to*-infinitival clauses are also used after the noun *reason(s)*, as shown in (35) - (40).

- (35) ...make sure that the investigation that he's doing doesn't necessarily include the Comey memo or he just wants a little bit of time, there's no reason why to believe that Comey is not going to say, yes, of course.
(2017 COCA: *CNN Tonight*)
- (36) "... So it's been very difficult to find a reason why to apply automation to the industry," he said. (2003 COCA: *Washington Post*)
- (37) And I have many reasons why to do it now and not to delay it.
(2001 COCA: *CNN Insight*)
- (38) But now, after what happened to him, it was another great reason why to stop.
(2001 COCA: *CNN Larry King Weekend*)
- (39) One of the reasons why to save money is because the studio theatre has a limited capacity. (1991 BNC: *at a Harlow Playhouse public meeting*)
- (40) You can come up with many reasons why not to do something.
(2016 TV: *Mozart in Jungle*)

3.6 As an independent clause

Why to-infinitives often take the form of independent clauses. They are divided into two kinds. One is a non-sentential construction in affirmative usage, often used as titles of books and articles and headings for lists, notices, and the like.⁶ (41) to (50) are typical examples of the non-sentential construction functioning not as a question but a statement.

- (41) **WHY TO AVOID:** It causes dermatitis itchy skin and blister.
(2015 COCA: *Popular Mechanics*)
- (42) Thank you for your editorial: "**Why to Support** Labelling GM Foods" in the August/September 2013 issue. (2013 COCA: *Mother Earth News*)

- (43) **Why to hope:** Stability. (2007 COCA: *Denver Post*)
- (44) **WHY TO BUY AMERICAN:** The biggest innovation of the 2001 auto season may have to do less with in-dash satellite-navigation systems than with lower sticker prices. (2000 TIME: Men of Substance)
- (45) The Single Person's Guide to Buying a Home: **Why to Do It** and How to Do It. (Book title)
- (46) Little Dude Perfect: **Why and How to Start** Your Child's YouTube Channel (Book title)
- (47) Fermentation: **How and Why to Incorporate** Fermented Foods Into Your Diet Today For a Healthier Gut and Body (Book title)
- (48) **Why to Choose** Road Less Traveled: Dunlith Hill Writing Guides, Book 7 (Book title)
- (49) **Why To Wash** Hands (Book title)
- (50) Hand-Book of Tree-Planting: or **Why to Plant**, Where to Plant, What to Plant, How to Plant (Book title)
- ((45) to (49) are taken from www.Amazon.com)

Duffley and Enns (1996) gives the following three examples of *why to*-infinitives in affirmative contexts.⁷

- (51) a. Why to ban birthdays (Time, 1992: 25)
- b. Radio: How, When and Why to Use it. (Tolleris, 1946, Book title)
- c. Why to vote Yes in the referendum (The Globe and Mail, 1992: A22)

Notice that all examples in (51) are also used as titles of a book and headings for a magazine and a newspaper article.

As regards this use, Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 906) notes that “[i]n *to*-infinitivals, *why* is just possible in the titular use: *Why to vote yes in the referendum.*” and that these non-sentential constructions have the same function as an NP. Their comment coincides with the comments made by my informants. Some informants state that they do not use a *why to*-infinitive by themselves but admit that it is often used in written language, mainly in advertisement, as in *Why to recycle*, *Why to travel abroad*, and *Why to study hard*. Others say that a *why to*-infinitive can be acceptable when used as the title of a blog, magazine and book or paragraph headings, as in *10 reasons why to stop drinking* and *Why to volunteer*. They feel that the *why to*-infinitive clauses in (41) - (50) are not interrogative sentences but noun phrases meanings ‘the reason(s).’ In fact, *why* can be used a noun. The *Oxford English Dictionary* lists the nominal use, stating that *why* was used “formerly as a general synonym for these words [= reason, cause]; now only in reference to something mentioned, and with conscious allusion to the interrogative use” (*OED-3*, adv., n., and int., def. III 6 (a)), providing 11 examples from 1303 to 1907. Our data also contains several examples of the nominal use of *why to*-infinitival clauses, as follows.

- (52) a. Seriously people, it’s pretty obvious they have taken the service down for a limited (undisclosed) period of time before they think of **a why to stop** this from happening. (2013 NOW: videogamer.com)
- b. We all need **a why to help** us get through the good and the bad of life. (2017 COCA: PBS News Hour)
- c. “He who has **a why to live for** can bear with almost any how.” (2005 COCA: *Adolescence*)
- d. Kick the Habit: **The How and Why to Quit** Smoking. (Book title)

(www.amazon.com)

- e. If I was a killer and the police were trying to make a case against me, **what better why to draw** them off than to put their attention on someone else? (1992 COCA: *Knight Moves*)

In the examples (52a) to (52d), *why* occurs with an article. (52e) is a rare instance in which *why* is modified by lexical items other than articles. The following examples offer further support for the nominal use.

- (53) a. One of the main differences between cognitive strategy instruction and direct instruction is that direct instruction does not focus as strongly on explaining the general process to use, why to use the strategy, and the meta-cognitive processing that should also take place.
(2015 COCA: *Learning Disability Quarterly*)
- b. Instead, money had become why to do anything and everything.
(2007 COCA: *Analog Science Fiction & Fact*)

In (53a), *why to*-infinitival clause is conjoined with two noun phrases *the general process to use* and *the meta-cognitive processing that should also take place*. *Why* here can be paraphrased as ‘the reason.’ In (53b), the *why to*-infinitival clause functions as the complement of *become* that never requires a *wh*-complement. As noted in 3.3, the verbs that can take infinitival *wh*-clauses as the complement are limited to a narrow range: verbs of knowing, asking, telling, deciding, and concerning. The verbs that can govern *why to*-infinitival clauses functioning as inquiries are confined within narrower limits. The verb *become* is not among them.

Let us next consider the other kind of *why to*-infinitives, namely infinitival

interrogative sentences. They are open interrogative sentences in conversation. Typically, they immediately follow the preceding statement and are an elliptical construction in which the subject and the *should* or *be*-verb are dropped. Some of them function as interior monologue, where one is pondering question.

- (54) ... He said he wants to cut contracting by 10 percent a year for the next three years, which, if you do the math, is about one quarter – a little more than a quarter of all contractors. **Why to do** that?

(2010 COCA: *Talk of the Nation*)

- (55) Ivana has never stopped wearing the bustiers, the jeans, the thigh-grazing skirts. “I have good legs, and **why to hide** them?” she said.

(2009 COCA: *Harper Bazaar*)

- (56) OK, let’s say that they want to build the wall for security. Is it? So **why to put** it here?

(2004 COCA: *CNN Sunday Morning*)

- (57) Disarmament is necessary not only for all the world and not only for the United States, but badly in need of that disarmament is the Soviet Union. So **why to connect** those two issues?

(1990 COCA: *ABC Brinkley*)

- (58) Avoiding war means avoiding catastrophe on everybody. **Why to have** a catastrophe for to [*sic*] the world, to the Gulf and to the Middle East?

(1990 COCA: *ABE Nightline*)

- (59) But **why to spend** your final days in agony? Why not enjoy every moment?

(2007 SOAP: *General Hospital*)

- (60) Meanwhile Rippon Winery in Wanaka is said to be the most photographed winery in the world! **Why to go** there?

(2019 NOW: *Auckland Magazine*)

- (61) While I have nothing against Veena doing Astaghfar. But **Why to do** it in public?

(2012 NOW: *The News International*)

(62) Do you want to be a murderer? **Why to murder?** I just want his hand.

(1997 Movie: *Playboy*)

(63) Why surrender? Why? Israel entered to Bethlehem, not Bethlehem went to Israel. They came. **Why to give** them ourselves? (2016 TV: *Captive*)

As the question mark in these sentences shows, this kind of *why to*-infinitival clauses has the illocutionary force of asking or wondering. Since this pattern is rare, Duffley and Enns (1996) suggest that the *to*-infinitival construction cannot occur in clauses with interrogative force. Quirk et al. (1985) and Huddleston and Pullum (2002) note that non-embedded *why to*-infinitival interrogative clauses do not exist.⁸ What they say seems to be supported by my informants, because some of them answered definitely that *why to*-infinitival interrogatives are not grammatical as they are incomplete sentences. Others say that such sentence fragments are possible in the affirmative, as in headlines and titles. Furthermore, many of them mentioned that *why* must be followed by an infinitive without *to*. A difference between *why to*-infinitive structures and *why* bare infinitive structures will be discussed in section 5.

4. Semantic restrictions on *why to*-infinitival clauses

As shown above, *why to*-infinitival constructions are in fact possible in some contexts. Here in this section, semantic restrictions imposed on the infinitival *why*-clauses are examined. As mentioned in section 1, many grammars of English treat this construction as impossible or non-existent. Thus, it has hitherto received little attention in the literature. Among the few previous studies are Wierzbicka (1988), Dixon (1991), and Duffley and Enns (1996). They have a great deal in common in

that all of them try to account for the unacceptability of *why to*-infinitival clause from a semantic viewpoint.

4.1 Wierzbicka (1988)

Wierzbicka (1988) gives the contrast between (64) and (65) and suggests that this remarkable difference between *why* and the other *wh*-words is attributed to the semantic clash between the meaning of *why* and that of the *to*-complement.

- (64) a. Where to turn for help?
b. What to do?
c. Who(m) to ask for advice, for help?
- (65) a. *Why to wait? (cf. Why wait?)
b. *Why to bother? (cf. Why bother?)
c. *Why to stop here? (cf. Why stop here?)

(Wierzbicka 1988: 28)

The point she is making is this: On the one hand, *why* is used to ask a question about the motive or reason for something. On the other hand, *to*-infinitive implies the speaker's personal motive for her/his volitional act. The speaker herself/himself does not know the motive or reason for doing something and that is why she/he is asking a question, but the *to*-infinitival clause explains the motive at the same time. This causes a contradiction, according to Wierzbicka.

4.2 Dixon (1991)

Let us next consider the following pair of examples given by Dixon (1991).

- (66) a. I don't know why I should go.
b. *I don't know why to go.

Dixon (1991: 235)

According to Dixon, (66a) is grammatical and it means something like 'I don't know what my obligation is supposed to be that would make me go.' In (66a), the reason the speaker has to go to a particular place is due to some extraneous obligation. The speaker asks the person who gives her/him this extraneous obligation about the motive she/he should go. In contrast, (66b) is ungrammatical since "*why*, demanding clarification of the reason for entering an activity, is semantically incompatible with Modal (FOR) TO, stating that the subject does volitionally become involved in the activity." (p.235)⁹ Put differently, the subordinate *to*-infinitival clause in (66b) asks the reason the speaker should go, while the *to*-infinitival clause implies the potentiality of the subject's getting involved in the activity, thereby causing a semantic conflict.

4.3 Duffley and Enns (1996)

Duffley and Enns (1966: 221) considers the contrast between *why* bare infinitival clause (e.g. *Why give a bribe?*) and *why to*-infinitival clause (e.g. *Why to give a bribe*). According to Duffley and Enns, the *to*-infinitival constructions are not a question but a statement. The reader already knows the motive or reason for doing the activity implied by the *to*-infinitival clause. As for the bare infinitive constructions, the speaker/writer does not know the motive or reason as to the realization of the infinitive's event. The assumption behind this is that there is a gap between the time when the activity is set up by the *to*-infinitive and the time when the activity expressed by the *to*-infinitive is to be carried out. On the other hand, there

is no such temporal gap in the case of the bare infinitive construction.

4.4 Further semantic accounting for *why to*-infinitival clauses

The arguments provided in the previous studies all mention that the meaning of *why* is incompatible with the meaning of *to*-infinitive.¹⁰ Apparently, the explanations in Wierzbicka (1988), Dixon (1991) and Duffley and Enns (1996) seem to be appealing, but if they are right, *why to*-infinitives are always impossible. However, some *why to*-infinitives *are* possible. How can we account for such cases?

With regard to the acceptability of sentences containing a *to*-infinitival *wh*-clauses, Bolinger (1978) deserves a special mention. Let us first look at the following sentences.

- (67) a. I don't know where to find Mary.
b. *I don't know where to get Mary.
c. I don't know where to find good jobs.

(Bolinger 1978: 116, 146)

Bolinger (1978: 146) notes that (67a) is close to being deviant and sounds as awkward as (67b). He also explains (p.146) that “there has to be some established relationship between the place and the action.” In (67c), “where to find good jobs” implies “the place at which good jobs exist.” In (67a) and (67b), however, it is hard to imagine that there is a connection between Mary and her location. He states that “[t]he *place to find good jobs in Minneapolis* defines *place* and makes sense; *the place to find Mary* makes sense only if it refers to Mary's haunts.” This is why (67a) exhibits low acceptability. As for (67b), the sentence has to be contextualized if it stands, as follows.

(68) I've arranged with Jill and Ester to pick them up on the corner of Six and Vine, but I don't know where to get (= arrange to pick up) Mary.

(Bolinger 1978: 146)

Given more contextual information as in (68), it would be easier to imagine that the place is for picking up Mary. The awkwardness for “where to get Mary” might be reduced.¹¹ In other words, *where to*-infinitive scores lower on the scale of acceptability unless there is a close relationship between the place and the action expressed by the *to*-infinitival clause.

In what context is a close link between a question word and the infinitive established? The key to understanding the answer is to take a fresh look at the *to*-infinitival *wh*-clause. First of all, make sure that the infinitival construction does not allow an explicit subject. It will be ungrammatical if the subject of the infinitive appears, as illustrated below.

(69) a. I don't know where to draw the line.

b. *I don't know where for me / myself / Betty to draw the line.

Another characteristic is that the *wh*-clause has a *to*-infinitive and thus it does not carry the tense. It implies that the proposition expressed in the infinitival clause is not linked to the time of utterance or any particular time in the past. The lack of the subject and tense suggests that the action represented in the *to*-infinitive holds for everyone. The reason *why to*-infinitive is so rare is that the motive or reason asked for by *why* is usually a personal matter and assumes a matter for the individual. Therefore, the meaning of the *to*-infinitival construction is very likely to become incompatible with the meaning of *why*.

One might remember that a typical context in which a *why to*-infinitive construction occurs contains another *wh*-word plus a *to*-infinitive and serves as the title of a book or paragraph headings, as follows.

- (70) **Why and How to Keep** Your Kids Away From Smartphone and TV
(Book title)
- (71) **How and Why to Get** Students Talking: 78 Ready-to-Use Group Discussions About [*sic*] Anxiety, Self-Esteem, Relationships, and More, Grade 6-12
(Book title)
- (72) For anyone wanting a primer on **how and why to switch** from bacon cheeseburgers to veganburgers, our free Vegetarian Starter Kit should prove helpful. (1999 COCA: *Environmental Magazine*)
- (73) Conditional knowledge: knowledge about **when and why to use** learning procedures Metacognitive Control (1997 COCA: *Roeper Review*)

It seems reasonable to suggest that conjoining with other *wh*-word and *to*-infinitive guarantees the environment in which a *why to*-infinitival clause can appear. The implicit subject of the infinitive does not take a specific controller and thus the meaning of the construction holds for everyone. In (70) to (73), *why to*-infinitives show reasons that everyone can accept, but not personal reasons. That is why the sentences stand. On the other hand, if a *why to*-infinitive represents a content that is applicable to a specific individual, the acceptability of the sentence gets lower. Consider the following sentence.

- (74) *She explained to me why to beat her drums.

Here it is hard to imagine an established relationship between the motive and the situation in which beating a particular person's drums holds for everyone. Thus, (74) ends up being gibberish.

5. The derivation of *why to*-infinitive

According to Quirk et al. (1985), there are several types of sentences or sentence fragments beginning with *wh*-word that do not conform to the regular clause structure patterns. They call these sentences 'irregular *wh*-questions', dividing them into eight types. Among them, three types are irregular sentences with *why*. One of them is a *why* interrogative without a verb, as shown below.

- (75) a. Why no class today? [cf. Why are there no classes today?]
b. Why all the noise? [cf. Why is there all the noise?]

(Quirk et al. 1985: 840)

This verbless type is used as an inquiry and part of the type is equivalent to an existential sentence with *why*.¹²

Another type is a *why* interrogative without a subject and with the base form of a verb. This abbreviated form with the bare infinitive is always used as a directive. The following are the examples.

- (76) Why (not) listen to me? [cf. Why should(n't) / do(n't) / did(n't) you listen to him?]

(Quirk et al. 1985: 840)¹³

The other type is a dependent *why*-finite clause, as in (77).

(77) Why you should have medical examination once a year.

(Quirk et al. 1985: 840)

The first two types are interrogatives that occur mainly in conversation, while the third one is used as a statement heading in written English and functions as suggestions.

As regards elliptical *wh*-interrogatives, it is interesting to note that Jespersen (1940) provides a discussion on the derivation of structures.¹⁴ He claims that the structure consisting of a *wh*-word plus a *to*-infinitive originated from the French equivalents, as follows.

- (78) a. What to do? [F. Que faire?]
b. Where to go? [F. Où aller?]
c. When to start? [F. Quand partir?]

(Jespersen 1940: 324)

He then points out that, unlike other *wh*-words, the bare infinitive is used after *why*.

- (79) a. Why talk so much about it?
b. Why not do it at once?

(Jespersen 1940: 325)

Based upon the observation that *to*-infinitive is used after *wh*-words like *what*, *when* and *how* while the bare infinitive is used after *why*, Jespersen suggests the infinitival clause has a modal meaning¹⁵ and that the constructions are elliptical:

- (80) a. What (am I, is one) to do?

b. Why (should you, don't we) do it at once?

(Jespersen 1940: 325)

One might think that the reason *why to*-infinitive is rare is that only *why* can take the bare infinitive and that just because there already exists the bare infinitival *why* construction, it is unnecessary to use the *to*-infinitival *why* construction.¹⁶ It seems to be a plausible explanation, but it does not answer the question because the bare infinitive with *why* is different in meaning from the *to*-infinitive with *why*. Consider the following abbreviated form with the bare infinitive.

(81) a. Why bother to reply?

b. Why make so much fuss?

(Quirk et al. 1985: 820)

This construction is always directive: *Why* usually asks why an action is (or was) necessary. In other words, this bare infinitive structure can suggest that ‘an action is unnecessary or pointless,’ as Swan (2016: §630) notes.¹⁷ Take (80a) for example. It means that I suggest that you not bother to reply.¹⁸ On the other hand, the infinitival interrogative with *why* illustrated in (54) - (63) serves as questions in which a positive implicature remains.

The nominal use of *why to*-infinitive does not usually function as subject, but as the object of the main verb or prepositions. In this regard, there is a possibility that the *why to*-infinitival clause originated from indirect question and later *why to*-infinitive was felt to be a noun phrase. Since it is an NP expressing a statement (suggestions), it is even more suitable for the titles of books, article headings or the like when conjoined with other *wh*-words or *to*-infinitival *wh*-clauses. As noted

in 3.6, the OED supports the nominal use of *why to*-infinitive, showing *why* still maintains the nominal use meaning ‘cause’ or ‘reason’ although this use is considered obsolete by the OED. That is why examples of *why to*-infinitives are rare.

The interrogative use of *why to*-infinitive does exist but it is more infrequent than other infinitival *wh*-interrogatives, as in (82).

- (82) a. What to do next? [cf. ‘What should I / we do next?]
b. Who to see?
c. Which way to go?

(Quirk et al. 1985: 840)

The non-embedded *to*-infinitival *why* clauses occur mainly in spoken English as inquiries.

6. Conclusion

The present paper has examined some morphological, syntactic and semantic features of *why to*-infinitival clauses, one of the marked constructions that have hitherto received little attention in the literature. Based on a wide range of authentic data, this study has provided a close analysis of (in)dependent *why to*-infinitival clauses both in affirmative and interrogative contexts and has disclosed that *why to*-infinitival constructions are ambiguous in two ways. One is the nominal use that functions as a statement. The other is the interrogative use that functions as an inquiry. The former is most likely to be acceptable when it occurs with other *wh*-clauses and is used as the title of a book or magazine or paragraph headings. With regard to the latter case, most previous studies have treated the independent inter-

rogative *to*-infinitival clause as impossible, but the present study has proved that it is possible, illustrating several naturally occurring examples. *Why to*-infinitives are the only missing gap among the structures consisting of a *wh*-word and a *to*-infinitive, but the gap can be filled in if some conditions are met. Nonetheless, the rarity of the non-embedded *why to*-infinitival interrogative clauses suggests that it is not entrenched firmly enough to be part of the general grammatical repertoire of present-day English.

Another important topic in this paper is concerned with the semantic constraints on the *why to*-infinitival clauses. The discussions provided in previous studies were carefully examined and a close scrutiny of examples confirmed that there has to be some “established relationship between *wh*-word and *to*-infinitive” when the construction containing the infinitival *wh*-clause is considered acceptable. Finally, some ‘irregular’ *why*-sentences were compared to sentences with other *wh*-words.

This study has revealed that *why to*-infinitival clauses do exist in present-day English. Further examination suggests that the usage dates back to the 16th century. The *OED-3* quotation database provides the following examples.

(83) a. There is no cause why to cut off these membres.

(1548 N. Udall et al. tr. Erasmus *Paraphr. New Test.* I. Matt. V. f. 42;
OED-3)

b. Why to hid thy face persever?

(1580 Sir P. Sidney tr. Psalmes David xlv. xi; OED-3)

c. To leaue poore me, thou hast the strength of lawes, Since why to loue, I
can alledge no cause.

(1609 W. Shakespeare *Sonnets* xlix. Sig. D3; OED-3)

- d. Why to go for a low-running shot or for a high lofting shot, respectively.
(1905 Westm. Gaz. 25 Aug. 3/1; OED-3)

The earliest attested example of *why to*-infinitive cited in *OED-3* dates from 1548. Although evidence is scarce and spotty (the citations ranges from 1548 to 1905), the examples clearly represent part of the usage. A diachronic research has to be done in order to better understand the origin and development of the structures consisting of *wh*-word and *to*-infinitive.

Notes

- 1 This is a revised version of the paper presented at the eighth Biennial International Conference on the Linguistics of Contemporary English (BICLCE 2019) at the University of Bamberg, Germany on September 28, 2019. I am grateful for comments from David Lorenz and the audience at the BICLCE meeting. My thanks also go to Jane Flick for suggesting stylistic improvements. Any remaining errors and shortcomings are my own. This research is supported by Seijo University.
- 2 Swan (2016) implies elsewhere (§111) that a *to*-infinitive after *why* can be used although sentences like *I can't understand why to do it* are not usually allowed.
- 3 The parentheses show the name of the corpora, the year, and the source (i.e., the title of books, journals, magazines, magazine articles, movies, TV or radio shows, etc.).
- 4 Needless to say, examples in which *to*-prepositional phrases are used after *why* are excluded, as shown below.
 - i) a. This may explain why to this day people in Weh remember him fondly, while many of the later missionaries are all but forgotten (1991 COCA ACAD: African Arts)
 - b. “This is the all-time debatable issue. Photographers argue this about their craft. Why to you, is it a craft? (1997 COCA SPOK: CNN_King Wknd)
- 5 The patterns in 3. 1. 1 and 3. 1. 2 can be fused into a noun phrase, as in ‘The question before him, he said to himself, was *whether and why to get up* and *where to move to*: the living room, his bedroom, the guest room, or perhaps a walk in the empty street.’ (2004 COCA: Southwest Review)
- 6 This usage is also seen in other infinitival *wh*-clauses. Jespersen (1940: 324) gives an example of book title: *How to Be Happy Through Married*. Swan (2016: §111. 3) notes that “how to ..., what to ..., etc are often found as titles for instructions, information leaflets, books, etc.”
 - i) a. **HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR PRONUNCIATION**
 - b. **WHAT TO DO IF FIRE BREAKS OUT**
- 7 Their observation is based upon only sixteen examples of *why to*-infinitival clauses and they do not notice that *why to*-infinitival independent interrogative clauses do exist.

- 8 As noted in section 1, Quirk et al. (1985: 1052) admit the possibility of subordinate *why to*-infinitival clauses, as in “I’m wondering why to go at all.”
- 9 On the other hand, Dixon (1991: 235) notes that Modal (FOR) TO is “perfectly compatible with other *wh*-words,” showing the example *I don’t know how to open the door/ when to arrive / who to blame*.
- 10 Bolinger (1978: 118) accounts for the impossibility of *why to*-infinitive by hypothesizing that “the reason for a choice precedes the choice; it is not part of it.”
- 11 Bolinger (1978: 118) points out that there is gradience as to likelihood with *wh*-words and the *to*-infinitival construction. *Whether* and *how* are most likely to combine with the *to*-infinitive, because *whether* represents a choice and *how* tends to be a question of choice. *Where*, *when*, *which*, *who* and *what* are less apt to be a question of choice. *Why* is probably impossible.
- 12 There are various types of verbless *why* constructions but they do not always correspond to existential sentences:
- i) a. I constantly questioned “why me?” and felt very sorry for myself. (2019 NOW: www.image.ie)
 - b. And that people think, started really asking after those death, “Why by the end of the decade? (2019 NOW: www.cbsnews.com)
 - c. “But why with her?” Marshall nodded toward Belle. (2010 COCA: *The Kitchen House*)
 - d. “But why to mars, dear?” Vicky asked. (2001 COCA: *Analog Science Fiction & Fact*)
 - e. “I grabbed one more sip of wine, then said, “Why not?” (2017 COCA: *Grilled for Murder*)
- The *why* expressions in (ia) asks why a particular person has been chosen and that in (ie) displays that the person in question agrees with a suggestion.
- 13 As for the verbs of the bare infinitival *why* construction, Johnson (1975) notes that they are limited to ‘self-controllable’ ones. (cf. *Why have blue eyes? / *Why resemble your father?)
- 14 Jespersen calls independent infinitival *wh*-clauses ‘isolated infinitives’.
- 15 Quirk et al. (1985: 1052) note that the infinitival *wh*-clause has an obligational sense

and is paraphrased as containing 'should' in its finite construction, as follows.

- i) a. I don't know *what to say*. ['...what I should say.']
 - b. You must explain to them *how to start the motor*. ['...how one/they should start the motor.']
 - c. I never know *who to speak to*. ['... who one/I should speak to.']
 - d. I'm wondering *where to put my coat*. ['...where I should put my coat']
 - e. I'm wondering *why to go at all*. ['... why I should go at all.']
- 16 Strictly speaking, all *wh*-words can take the bare infinitive (cf. Jespersen (1940), Duffley (1992) and Duffley and Enns (1996)), but the construction of the bare infinitive with *wh*-words other than *why* is rare. By contrast, the bare infinitival construction with *why* is common.
- 17 See also Freeman (1976).
- 18 The structure containing *why not* + the bare infinitive as in *Why not read a book?* makes a suggestion or asks why a particular action has not been taken. The conventional meaning is to suggest that you should read a book.

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