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**THE FUNCTIONING OF “ABSOLUTE” VERBS
IN THE ENGLISH BELLE-LETTRES TEXTS**

**ФУНКЦІОНУВАННЯ «АБСОЛЮТНИХ» ДІЄСЛІВ
В ТЕКСТАХ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ ХУДОЖНЬОЇ ЛІТЕРАТУРИ**

Popovich E.S.,

orcid.org/0000-0003-4583-8264

PhD, Associate Professor,

*Associate Professor at the Foreign Language Department
Odessa National Polytechnic University “Odesa Polytechnic”*

Tomenko M.G.,

orcid.org/0000-0002-4149-0320

Senior Lecturer at the Foreign Language Department

Odessa National Polytechnic University “Odesa Polytechnic”

Mykeshova G.P.,

orcid.org/0000-0003-1963-0013

Senior Lecturer at the Foreign Language Department

Odessa National Polytechnic University “Odesa Polytechnic”

Vorobiova E.V.,

orcid.org/0000-0003-3474-502x

Senior Lecturer at the Foreign Language Department

Odessa National Polytechnic University “Odesa Polytechnic”

The article examines the status of the so-called “absolute” units functioning in text corpora referred to the discourse of belle-lettres. The main unresolved problem in such a grammatical phenomenon as the absolute use of language units is the lack of results of the study of factual material, i.e. samples, text corpora, etc., which could contribute to the formation of the correct thesis of theoretical grammar in this matter. Therefore the purpose of the article is as follows: consideration of such language units as verbs in the infinitive form, verbs in imperative sentences, reflexive and reciprocal verbs, which are discussed by grammar theorists as possible “absolute” units, from three positions: theoretical developments presented

in the works of specialists in the field of theoretical English grammar; data of normative dictionaries published abroad; examples with absolutely used units taken from a text corpus of 2.5 million tokens compiled by the authors and based on several literary works. The article provides examples that, in the opinion of the authors, quite convincingly demonstrate the presence/absence of the “absolute” characteristics (in accordance with the definition of the “absolute” unit adopted by the authors in the article). The interaction of these three components, which are necessary in any linguistic research, makes it possible with a high degree of probability to determine the “absolute” unit of the language, in our case – the verb. The examples convincingly demonstrate that the verb in the form of the infinitive is certainly an “absolute” unit. The verb is not used absolutely in imperative sentences since this contradicts the accepted working definition of the term “absolute”. With regard to the absolute use of reflexive and reciprocal verbs, it has been proven that although some grammar theorists tend to consider such types of verbs as absolute units, lexicographic data, as well as examples extracted from the text corpus, do not support this assumption, so they cannot be attributed to an inventory of “absolute” units.

Key words: grammatical status, working definition, text corpus, lexicographic resources, discourse.

Стаття розглядає статус «абсолютних» одиниць, які зустрічаються у текстових корпусах. Були відібрані тексти, які відносяться до дискурсу художньої літератури. Основною невирішеною проблемою у такому граматичному явищі, як абсолютне використання мовних одиниць, вважається відсутність результатів дослідження фактичного матеріалу, тобто – вибірок, текстових корпусів тощо, які б сприяли формуванню коректних положень теоретичної граматики у цьому питанні. Тому метою статті є наступне: розгляд таких мовних одиниць як дієслів у формі інфінітиву, дієслів у наказових реченнях, дієслів зворотних та взаємних, які обговорюються граматистами-теоретиками як можливі «абсолютні» одиниці, з трьох позицій: теоретичних положень, представлених у роботах фахівців у галузі англійської граматики; даних нормативних словників, які видаються за кордоном; прикладами з абсолютно вживаними одиницями, взятими зі скопійованого авторами текстового корпусу обсягом 2,5 млн. слововжитків на базі кількох художніх творів. У статті наводяться приклади, які на думку авторів досить переконливо демонструють наявність/відсутність відтинку «абсолютний» (відповідно до прийнятого у статті визначення «абсолютної» одиниці). Взаємодія цих трьох складових, необхідних у будь-якому лінгвістичному дослідженні, дозволяє з великою ймовірністю визначити «абсолютну» одиницю мови, у нашому випадку – дієслова. Було встановлено, що дієслово у формі інфінітиву є безумовно «абсолютною» одиницею. Дієслово в наказових реченнях не використовується «абсолютно», оскільки це суперечить прийнятій робочій дефініції терміна «абсолютний». Що стосується абсолютного використання зворотних та взаємних дієслів, то було доведено, що, хоча деякі граматиристи-теоретики схильні вважати такі типи дієслів «абсолютними» одиницями, лексикографічні дані, а також приклади, вилучені з текстового корпусу, не підтверджують це припущення, тому вони не можуть бути віднесені до інвентарю «абсолютних» одиниць.

Ключові слова: граматичний статус, робоча дефініція, текстовий корпус, лексикографічні ресурси, дискурс.

Formulation of problem. Discussions on various theoretical issues in linguistics directly affect practical research, especially in such an area as the choice of the subject and object of analysis, the methods necessary to obtain correct results. Thus the data obtained as a result of the analysis of facts in the process of their study by applied, theoretical or cognitive linguistics (i.e. sections of linguistics that have direct interaction with speech phenomena) contribute to the accumulation of the necessary information for the purpose of its further generalization and introduction into the general language theory.

Unfortunately a completely different situation is observed in the field of the so-called “absolutely” used units, the interest in which among theoretical grammarians arose at the beginning of the last century [1; 2], when an attempt was made to describe the philosophical concept of “absolute” implemented in the language. This phenomenon, even now after a hundred years, is perceived as an exclusively theoretically described problem which can develop only on the basis of the opinions of linguists, grammarians and other specialists in the field of theoretical grammar. However despite the contentious discussions and numerous arguments, many aspects of the theory of “absolute” units remain undeveloped. There are not even such points which are natural for any disci-

pline as the formation of the necessary terminological system covering the basic concepts as well as an inventory of absolute units because most grammarians neither define the grammatical term “absolute” at all nor reveal its content. In addition the statements of scientists about “absolute” units are often quite contradictory.

Thus the researchers still do not know at all which units have the status of “absolute”. This situation is aggravated by the almost complete absence of results from the analysis of the functioning of “absolute” units in discourse (with the possible exception of the so-called “Absolute nominative construction”), since, as already mentioned, the problem of compiling the inventory of absolute units has not yet been solved.

Nevertheless it seems that a way out of this situation can be found if we gradually begin to study text corpora, and based on the results, with the figures and facts obtained from examining real texts, help theorists to form objective points of view on the position which is occupied by “absolute” units in the language system.

Analysis of the latest research and articles.

The authors have to note the following fact. As mentioned above, the lack of an accurate definition of the “absolute” unit itself as well as characteristics of its

grammatical status significantly affects the selection of the inventory of such units. This situation leads to the fact that the younger generation of linguists, even those who are interested in their (“absolute” units) analysis in order to form theoretical conclusions and obtain material for applied linguistics, cannot take part in this kind of research. Therefore, the analysis of the latest articles is carried out on the basis of those sources that function in the scientific literature at the moment.

The study of a large number of literary sources on theoretical grammar has showed that they contain only brief references to the semantics and use of language units which have the conditional name “absolute”. First of all we are talking about the “Absolute nominative construction” which has already been mentioned above. But even here the opinions of scientists are extremely contradictory and do not make it possible to create a clear definition of the term “absolute” that is understood by everyone. Such well-known grammarians as G. Poutsma [3], J. Nesfield [2], O. Jespersen [1], J. Kerm [4], R.A. Quirk [5], L.S. Yampolsky [6], Z.V. Sulimovskaya [7] and others presented their viewpoints on this issue.

The scope of the article does not allow dwelling on the description of the points of view of all participants in the discussion about the place of “absolute” units in the language system, their properties and functions. However a detailed analysis of the literature available makes it possible to distinguish two main characteristics of the term “absolute unit” which theorists worked out in the course of discussions: 1) the syntactic independence of a particular language unit from other components of the sentence; 2) the use of such a unit without the component with which it is usually combined. It is easy to see that the second of these two characteristics includes the first one.

So, the authors propose a working version of the content of the grammatical concept of the term “absolute unit” and define it as “used without anything with which it is usually combined”. This definition has been chosen among all others in the previous paper [8].

In the future, when describing the language units that they consider to be “absolute” the authors will proceed from this definition.

Unsolved parts of the problem. The main unresolved problem in such a grammatical phenomenon as the absolute usage of language units is the lack of results of the study of factual material, i.e. samples, text corpora, etc. which could contribute to the formation of the correct thesis of theoretical grammar in this matter.

Thus the analysis of the syntax of speech sources, and, in particular, works of fiction where such grammatical phenomena are quite frequent is topical and timely.

Goal of the article. The purpose of the article is as follows: consideration of the following language units – verbs in the form of an infinitive, verbs in imperative sentences, reflexive and reciprocal verbs, which are discussed by grammar theorists as possible absolute units – from three positions: theoretical positions presented in the works of specialists in the field of theoretical English grammar; data of normative dictionaries published abroad; examples with absolutely used units taken from a text corpus of 2.5 million tokens compiled by the authors and based on several literary works mentioned below.

Base material. The text corpus, from which the illustrative material was taken, was created using the continuous sampling method based on the following literary works: Aldridge J. *The Sea Eagle*; Bonds P.A. *Sweet Golden Sun*; Francis D. *For Kicks*; Francis D. *Wild Hand*; Green B. *Morning is a Long Time Coming*; Hailey A. *Airport*; Ludlum R. *The Matlock Paper*; Maleod R. *Six Guns South*; Maugham W.S. *The Summing Up*; Snow C.P. *Last things*; Stone I. *The Greek Treasure*, and others. The volume of the text corpus amounted to 2.5 million tokens, the number of examples selected to illustrate “absolute” units exceed 5 thousand units. The above units (verbs in the infinitive form, verbs in imperative sentences, reflexive and reciprocal verbs) were considered step by step, which were conditionally classified as “absolute”.

Below we demonstrate the examples that are, in our opinion, quite convincingly demonstrate the presence of the “absolute” hue (in accordance with the definition accepted and presented above).

1. Sentences with an absolutely used infinitive. Some theorists [9] believe that in a sentence like “*To do her justice, she was a good-natured woman*”, the infinitive ‘to do’ is used absolutely. Indeed, the infinitive at the beginning of a sentence, if it is not the subject, most often refers in one way or another to the subject of the sentence, for example, “*To provide his workman with good water Henry hired the oldest Dramali boy to fill barrels from a cold spring*”. In this sentence, ‘To provide’, in Deep Structure, is related to the subject ‘Henry’ (Henry provided his workmen with good water). Since in the previous statement the infinitive ‘to do’ does not refer to the subject of the sentence ‘she’, it is used absolutely. J. Nesfield [2] rightly refers to the absolute ones in such constructions as “*To think that he should have told a lie*”. J. Nesfield does not explain why the infinitive

functions absolutely in such cases. This, however, follows from the definition of the content of this term, which it was decided to take as a basis.

Indeed this statement is the elliptical component of, for example, sentences such as “*For one/me/her/them etc. to think that he should have told a lie*” would be preposterous [(It would be preposterous for one/me/her/them etc. to think that he should have told a lie) and as a consequence “*It/this (=for one)/me/her/them etc. to think that he should have told a lie*” would be preposterous]. Whence it follows that the pronoun ‘he’ in the initial statement does not refer to the subject in this sentence.

2. Absolute use of verb forms in imperative sentences. J. Nesfield [2] refers to the absolute also the use of the verb forms in imperative sentences, which does not contain a subject, which he calls the imperative mood.

E. Ya. Palatova’s dissertation shows [10] that in 96% of imperative sentences in modern English the subject (‘you, somebody’, etc.) is not used. The subject is also not used in the segment of speech cited as an example by J. Nesfield [2] (“*A few men – say twelve – may be expected shortly*”), which, in accordance with the working definition of the content of the term “absolute”, means that the verb form in such cases is not actually used.

The majority of linguistic theorists suppose that in imperative sentences, for example, Большинство англистов считают, что в повелительных предложениях, например, “*Come here*” the subject is expressed implicitly [1; 2; 3; 4; 5]. The others on the contrary claim that there is no subject in such kind of sentences at all even implicitly. In the cases when it is present the utterance takes another sense, for example, the shade of rough, brutal attitude [11; 12], and the personal pronoun in them is not the subject, but the word-address.

3. Absolute use of reflexive and reciprocal verbs. M.Ya. Bloch [13] includes the use of reflexive verbs in cases where the pronouns ‘myself, himself’, etc. are omitted. The authors give such uses with the verbs ‘wash, shave, dress and prepare’. M. Ya. Bloch considers the use of verbs without implicit reciprocal pronouns to be absolute, for example: “*The friends will be meeting tomorrow. Unfortunately, Nellie and Christopher divorced two years after their magnificent marriage. Are Phil and Glen quarreling again over their toy cruiser?*” Let us consider, however, the relevant semantics of these verbs, as revealed in WBD [14]:

to wash – v.t. to clean with water or other liquid: to wash a floor, wash one’s hands, wash clothes.

... **v.i. 2. to wash oneself; wash one’s face and hands: He washes before dinner. Syn.: bathe.**

to shave – v.t. 1. to cut hair from (the face, chin, or other parts of the body) with a razor: The actor shaved his head in order to portray a bald man.

... **v.i. 1. to remove hair with a razor: Father shaves every day.**

to dress – v.t. 1a. to put clothes on: She dressed the baby quickly.

... **v.i. 1. to put clothes on oneself: He is dressing for dinner.**

to prepare – v.t. 1. to make ready; to put in condition for something: to prepare a room for a guest, to prepare a boy for college: He prepares his lessons while his mother prepares supper.

... **v.i. to get ready; put oneself, or thing in readiness: to prepare for a test. The thunderbolt hangs silent; but prepare. I speak, it falls.**

to meet – v.t. 1a. To come face to face with (something or someone coming from the other direction): Our car met another car on a narrow road.

... **v.i. 1. to come face to face: Their cars met on the narrow road.**

to divorce – v.t. 1. to end legally a marriage between: The judge divorced Mr. and Mrs. Jones.

... **v.i. to separate by means of a divorce: There are, of course, those who divorce, but I suspect that the high rate of divorce in America comes from the tremendous expectation placed on marriage**

to quarrel – v.t. 1. to fight with words; dispute or disagree angrily; break off friendly relations; stop being friends: The two friends quarrels and now they don’t speak to each other.

2. to find faults; complain: It is useless to quarrel with fate because one does not have control over it.

As we can see, all verbs except for the last one, are marked ‘v.t.’ and ‘v.i.’. The last verb is only marked ‘v.t.’. In grammar and English dictionaries published abroad, only verbs followed by a direct object are considered to be transitive. In the studies by Slavic scientists, such verbs are called ‘object verbs’.

Approximately 80% of English verbs can be used both as transitive (more precisely, objective) and as intransitive (more precisely, objectless). Moreover when they are used without an object, the presence of an object is included in the meaning of the verb itself.

Thus at the modern stage of the English language development all the above verbs with the exception of the last one are regularly used as both object and objectless. Therefore it is not possible to speak of their absolute use in accordance with the above working definition of the term “absolute” which would be fair at certain stages of the development of the English language, if one or another of

these verbs was then used only in one of these two meanings.

As for the verb 'quarrel' as it follows from the examples given in WBD [14], it is predominantly objectless, although in the example illustrating the second meaning it is used with a prepositional object and is objective. Compare: "She quarreled with fate", therefore 'fate was quarreled with by her'. And this verb, therefore, cannot be used absolutely.

Conclusions. Thus based on the theoretical conclusions made by well-known grammarians, examples taken from real texts of literary works, as well as data from normative lexicographic resources, we can say the following. The interaction of these three components, which are necessary in any linguistic research, makes it possible with a high degree of

probability to determine the "absolute unit" of the language, in our case – the verb.

The verb was considered in several grammatical statuses: 1) in the form of an infinitive; 2) in imperative sentences; 3) reciprocal and mutual functions.

It was found that the verb in the form of the infinitive is certainly an "absolute unit". The verb is not used absolutely in imperative sentences, since this contradicts the working definition of the term "absolute" adopted above. With regard to the absolute use of reflexive and reciprocal verbs, it has been proven that although grammarians [2; 9] tend to consider such types of verbs as "absolute units", lexicographic data as well as the examples extracted from the text corpus do not support this assumption, so they do not can be referred to the inventory of "absolute" units.

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