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## **The care-to-VERB construction**

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### 33. The *care-to-VERB* construction

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*Care* is one of a small cadre of stance verbs in Modern English – including also *dare, like, love, hope, wish, hate, bother, stand, mind, trouble, abide...* – which profile a stance or attitude toward a possible situation, and which can license an actor/experiencer subject with a finite or non-finite clausal complement.

The *care-to-VERB* construction emerged in the late 17th century, when the use of [<sub>VP</sub> *care+to+VP*<sub>infinitival</sub>] became an idiomatic way of politely framing a refusal, prototypically as in (1b), in a negative clause with 1st person subject.

- (1a) The Bishop does not **care to** [stay long in this place not being for his health]. (In Fiennes’s ‘Through England on a Side Saddle’ 1698; Griffiths 1888)
- (1b) ... you must see why I don’t **care to** [say more on this head]. (In Walpole’s Letters 1748; Toynbee 1903)

This **refusal** use thrives in contemporary English, as does another where *care+to+VERB* takes a 2nd person subject and functions as an idiomatic way of politely framing an invitation. The **invitational** use typically occurs in an interrogative clause, but the examples in (2c)-(2f), from the British National Corpus, show that a wide range of other averidical operators can license its use as well.

- (2a) It’s not a decision I would care to [have to make]
- (2b) Would you care to [tell me what your quarrel with him was about]?
- (2c) You have a great opportunity here, my dear, if you care to [take it].

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- (2d) She is yours for as long as you care to [keep her].
- (2e) I would have believed any other person you care to [name] – but not Graham.
- (2f) The home secretary may care to [ponder this thought].

In these and all uses of the *care+to+VERB* construction, *care* appears to profile an actor (*a*)’s positive attitude toward a proposed activity (*p*), and in this sense seems to contrast notably with uses of the [<sub>VP</sub>mind+<sub>VP</sub>gerund] construction where the verb *mind* profiles an actor’s negative attitude toward a proposed activity. Both these constructions seem to share two important presuppositions: first, a proposal presupposition, that someone has or may propose *p* as an activity; second, a power presupposition, that *a* has the power to decide whether or not *p* happens.

The semantics of these constructions has led to their use as mitigators in the performance of certain commissive and directive speech acts. Thus because ‘I don’t care to dance’ signifies the absence of a positive reason for dancing, it works as an indirect expression of refusal. And because ‘I don’t mind waiting’ signifies the absence of an objection, it can indirectly express a willingness to wait. The table in (3) illustrates prototypical uses of these constructions as idiomatic ‘illocutionary force indicating devices’.

- (3) Typical illocutionary uses of *care+to+V* and *mind+Ving*

	<b>Commissives</b>		
	<b>REFUSE</b>		<b>ACCEPT</b>
1p~V:	I don’t care to say	I don’t mind saying	
2p?V:	Would you care to leave?	Would you mind leaving?	
	<b>INVITE</b>		<b>REQUEST</b>
	<b>Directives</b>		

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Apparently, frequent use in these functions has led to the conventionalization in both these constructions of the presuppositions noted above. Presumably this is why the construction is awkward or impossible with non-simple aspect, as in (4c)-(4d), and with most dynamic, deontic and epistemic modal constructions, as in (4e)-(4f), because these contexts don't allow the infinitival VP to be construed as something that has been, is being, or could be proposed to do.

- |      |                        |                                       |
|------|------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| (4a) | I don't suppose she... | (woul)d care                          |
| (4b) |                        | cares/cared to dance                  |
| (4c) |                        | ??has/had cared                       |
| (4d) |                        | *is/was caring                        |
| (4e) |                        | *can/may/could care                   |
| (4f) |                        | *should/must/ought-<br>to/has-to care |

These and other constraints suggest that the *care-to-V* construction is learned independently of other *care* constructions as a device for politely framing face-threatening speech acts.

### **References**

- Griffiths, E. W. (1888). *Through England on a Side Saddle in the Time of William and Mary, Being the Diary of Celia Fiennes*. London: Field and Tuer, The Leadenhall Press.
- Toynbee, Paget (1903). *The Letters of Horace Walpole, Vol. II*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.