

The meanings of NOT WAIT TO

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Overview

- Six types of implicative constructions
- 'not hesitate to X'
- The two meanings of 'not wait to X'
Excluding the 'can't wait' idiom
- A syntactic ambiguity?
- A third meaning of 'not wait to X'?
- Why the ambiguity of 'not wait to X' does not translate to other languages



A quote from 1971

"It is evident that logical relations between main sentences and their complements are of great significance in any system of automatic data processing that depends on natural language. For this reason a systematic study of such relations, of which this paper is an example, will certainly have a great practical value, in addition to what it may contribute to the theory of the semantics of natural languages."

[The Logic of English Predicate Complement Constructions](#), Lauri Karttunen, Indiana University Linguistics Club Publications, Bloomington, Indiana, 1971.



Implicative constructions

- ++/-- manage to, happen to, bother to, remember to, ...
Ed managed to sleep. ==> Ed slept.
Ed didn't manage to sleep. ==> Ed didn't sleep.
- +/-/+ not, fail to, forget to, neglect to, shy away from, ...
Ed failed to respond. ==> Ed didn't respond.
Ed didn't fail to respond. ==> Ed responded.
- ++ force to, cause to, ...
Ed forced Kim to leave. ==> Kim left.
- + prevent from, distract from, dissuade from, ...
Ed prevented Kim from leaving. ==> Kim didn't leave.
- have a chance/time/money..., be able, can, ...
Ed wasn't able to speak. ==> Ed didn't speak.
- + hesitate
Ed didn't hesitate to call. ==> Ed called.



not hesitate to X

What is the relation between "Ed didn't hesitate to call" and "Ed called"?

- Entailment?
- Conventional implicature?
- Generalized conversational implicature?

Standard dictionaries have no information about the meaning of "not hesitate to X". See *The American Heritage Dictionary*, *Merriam-Webster*, *Compact Oxford English Dictionary*, *WordNet*. The common definition for *hesitate* is 'to be reluctant to do something'.

But "Ed was not reluctant to call" doesn't mean that Ed called.

What about "Ed didn't wait to call"?



The 'can't wait' idiom

"Oh, I **can't wait to suffer** at the hands of my robot master. Will you be really cruel and wicked, please."

I **cannot wait to dance** on the man's political grave.

I **cannot wait to hear** what he'll say next!

'be eager to', 'look forward to ...ing'
The scope of the negation is outside the modal: not [can [...]]

Non-idiomatic uses:

The research proves it... We **cannot wait to measure** the customer experience.



The ambiguity of NOT WAIT TO

Ed did not wait to call for help.

... **Instead** he left the scene in a hurry.
==> Ed did not call for help.

... **But it** was too late.
==> Ed called for help right away.

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NOT WAIT TO X ==> NOT X

A subcontracted technician came to my house & replaced hard drive on Oct 13, but **didn't wait to see** if new one worked.

Deena **did not wait to talk to anyone**. Instead, she ran home.

He **did not wait to hear Ms. Coulter's response**, but immediately walked up the balcony stairs and left.

He **didn't wait to be served** - he served. He **didn't wait to be waited on** - he labored.

They **didn't wait to open** the Biosphere doors, they simply plowed through them forcefully.

At the top of the stairs Jill **didn't wait to make sure** John had kept up, but immediately kicked the door open and burst inside.

He was so excited to get his Thomas set that he **didn't wait to take off** his coat.

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NOT WAIT TO Y ==> Y right away

Michael Schiavo's attorney said **his client didn't wait to call** for help. If Michael Schiavo had not called 911 immediately Terri Schiavo would have died that day.

It hurt like hell, but I'm glad she **didn't wait to tell** me.

"We **didn't wait to do** water conservation. We've been doing it," Klein said.

Kalamazoo **didn't wait to strike** back. The K-Wings scored two goals in less than 90 seconds

The young Amazon unfolded her arms and opened them in offer. The bard **didn't wait to fall** into her friend's arms and become surrounded by her warmth.

I **didn't wait to open** the gift. Heck, I **didn't even wait to wear** them. They're the softest most comfy overalls I've ever owned.

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Birthday presents

Happy Almost My Birthday



This is Neil on his third birthday - he was so excited to get his Thomas set that **he didn't wait to take off** his coat.



My bestest friend Andrea gave me these for my birthday. I'm a weenie and **didn't wait to open** the gift. Heck, I **didn't even wait to wear** them. They're the softest most comfy overalls I've ever owned.

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What *didn't wait to Z* means

... X ... Y ...

X = Prelude

Take off the coat
Hold until birthday

Y = Main act

Play with the train
Open the gift

What "A didn't wait to Z" entails is that A skipped X and proceeded to directly to Y.

But it does not tell us whether Z is X (==> no X) or whether Z is Y (==> Y right away).

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NOT WAIT TO X TO Y ==> NOT X, Y RIGHT AWAY

My biggest regret is that I **didn't wait [to get married] [to have kids]**," says Gerald, a father of three. "If I had it to do over again, I'd wait until I was married to become a father."

==> I didn't get married.

==> I had kids right away.

Also, people with high risk for HIV **should not wait [to get symptoms] [to take the HIV-antibody test]**.

==> People with high risk for HIV should not get symptoms.

==> People with high risk for HIV should take the HIV-antibody right away.

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NOT WAIT TO X TO Y ==> NOT X, Y RIGHT AWAY

FRANKEN: As President Bush prepared to speak before the U.N. General Assembly, Kerry demanded he convene an immediate summit to try and repair international relations over Iraq. The president **did not wait [to come to New York] [to charge that Kerry was changing his mind again]**.
==> The president did not come to New York right away.
==> The president charged right away that Kerry was changing his mind again.

GEORGE W. BUSH, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES:
Today, my opponent continued his pattern of twisting in the wind with new contradictions of his old positions on Iraq.



More “not wait [to X] [to Y]” examples

As I remarked above, they **didn't wait [to see the civilian reaction in America] [to start another offensive]**, so your version might be wrong.

I raised my hand above my head, as if I were in school or something, but **didn't wait [for anyone to give me the "okay"] [to start talking]**.

When Marshall was charged he **didn't wait [to get in front of a judge] [to start trying to destroy you]**, Jess.

Chances are, you probably **didn't wait [to get permission from the scientific establishment] [to start believing in the creative power of thought and the underlying spirituality of the universe]**.



Optionality of [to X] and [to Y]

The president **did not wait [to come to New York] [to charge that Kerry was changing his mind again]**.

The president **did not wait [to charge that Kerry was changing his mind again]**.
==> The president charged right away that Kerry was changing his mind again.

The president **did not wait [to come to New York]**.
==> The president did not come to New York.



Unambiguous cases

If the content of either one of the two infinitival complements is expressed in some other way, the remaining one is unambiguous.

The OTP **did not wait [for the demand from Belgrade] [to start this investigation]**.

==> The demand from Belgrade did not come right away.
==> The OTP started this investigation right away.

Researchers **did not wait [to publish journal articles about the SARS outbreak] [before notifying the media about many of their findings]**.
==> Researchers did not publish journal articles right away.
==> Researchers notified the media about many of their findings.

Did not wait [for a local building inspector] [before calling FEMA].

Wearing a Rockies T-shirt, Lecocq said he **did not wait [a day] [to change to American attire]** when he arrived in The US this time around.



Unambiguous commands (pagmatically)

Y RIGHT AWAY

Don't wait to take advantage of Meriwest eStatements! Get these great saving benefits today.

NO X

Don't wait to suffer from hair loss! Stop hair loss before it starts.



... or maybe not after all

Don't wait to suffer to become spiritually sensitive!

'Suffer right away and become spiritually sensitive as a result.'

Don't wait [] [to suffer [to become spiritually sensitive]]!

(Suffering makes a person spiritually sensitive, and therefore more spiritually aware.)



WAIT TO X ==> X IS COMING

When the subject of *wait* is thematically a patient of the [to X] complement, we seem to get an implicature from 'wait to' that something is going to happen to him.

Watching this torture, Ball decided **not to [wait to] suffer a similar fate**. One night shortly thereafter, he ran away, hoping to go south and join the Seminoles in Florida.
==> Ball decided not to suffer a similar fate.

International lawyers generally agree that a state **need not [wait to] suffer the actual blow** before defending itself, so long as it is certain the blow is coming.

It is beneficial **not to [wait to] suffer from lung disease**, emphysema, chronic bronchitis or severe allergy.

Do not [wait to] suffer from illness, discomfort or exhaustion **before looking into** whether a solution of a mineral supplement can take care of a calcium and insomnia issue.



Summary

- *wait* can take two optional infinitival complements:
wait [to X] [to Y]
- *wait* is in the -- class, together with *have the time/money/etc.* and *can*, with respect to the [to X] complement
- *wait* is in the -+ class, together with *hesitate*, with respect to the [to Y] complement
- If the subject of *wait* is thematically a patient in the [to X] complement, we seem to get a conversational (?) implicature that X will happen to her unless some action is taken to avoid it.



Explanation

Why is it that we cannot translate
I did not wait to get married.

into French/Dutch/German/Finnish/... in a way that preserves the ambiguity?

The ambiguity comes from the two optional [to X] [to Y] complements that do not translate homomorphically to these other languages. You can translate either one of the two meanings but the ambiguity is lost.

Finnish:

En malttanut mennä naimisiin. 'I did not **have the patience** to get married.'

Menin heti naimisiin. 'I got married **right away**.'

Cannot use *odottaa* 'to wait/to expect' in either of these two constructions.

