

The nature of finiteness

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I argue that finiteness is a purely syntactic property, licensing case on the subject and agreement on the verb (Binnick 1991: 69, Jespersen 1924: 314). While finiteness itself has no inherent semantic content, certain semantic properties, such as the ability to have independent temporal interpretation, are frequently associated with it. Semantic properties that appear to be due to finiteness itself instead follow from the position of this syntactic feature relative to the position of the interpretable features of the clausal spine. Specifically, [FINITE], (consisting of uninterpretable case and φ), is a (possibly optional) property of whichever syntactic head—usually T—carries the feature that makes a clause denote a proposition (1) rather than a bare event (2).

- (1) a. We understood [that Mary was doing her homework]. (finite proposition)
- b. We understood [Mary to be doing her homework]. (nonfinite proposition)
- (2) a. We saw [Mary do her homework]. (perfective bare event)
- b. We saw [Mary doing her homework]. (imperfective bare event)

This claim raises questions about a variety of constructions cross-linguistically that exhibit one or both of nominative case licensing and φ -agreement, but which differ in important respects from other finite clauses in the language. Some of these are listed in (3).

- (3) a. Inflected and personal infinitives in Romance null-subject languages (Raposo 1987a,b, 1989; Pountain 1995; Quicoli 1996)
- b. Personal infinitives in West Flemish (Haegeman 1985)
- c. Southern Calabrian *modo* clauses (Ledgeway 1998)
- d. Modern Greek *na*-subjunctive clauses (Kyriakaki 2006)
- e. Turkish agreeing gerunds (George & Kornfilt 1981)

Focussing on these possible counterexamples, I show that Romance personal and inflected infinitives are characterized by a *pseudofinite* Infl, available only in null-subject languages. A pseudofinite Infl lacks [FINITE], but bears an unvalued case feature available only in null-subject languages. In finite clauses, this feature is valued within Infl by [FINITE], but in pseudofinite clauses it must be checked by a case-assigner external to Infl, explaining Raposo's observation that inflected and personal infinitives appear only in case-marked contexts. An interesting twist is provided by the Southern Calabrian *modo* construction: it contains a pseudofinite Infl, but case-checking is provided by the *modo* element, which Ledgeway (1998) argues appears below various Comp elements. Once checked, this case feature in Infl mimics [FINITE] in licensing nominative case on the subject and being spelled out as φ -agreement on the verb. However, the picture is complicated by the fact that, not all personal or inflected nonfinite constructions are pseudofinite. I argue that the West Flemish personal infinitives are actually finite, headed by a hybrid Comp/Infl head, while Turkish agreeing gerunds have fully nominal syntax. Finally, Modern Greek *na*-subjunctive clauses with nominative subjects are fully finite and always denote propositions, while those whose subjects receive ECM-type accusative case marking may denote bare events and are best treated as non-finite. From this it follows that in Greek, uninterpretable φ -features on verbal heads have nothing to do with case licensing, and indeed appear on a variety of functional heads in the verbal system. Taken together, these diverse phenomena support the conclusion that finiteness is an optional syntactic feature of the head bearing the interpretable feature PROPOSITION. [FINITE] consists of nominative case and unvalued φ , but either, and sometimes both, of these components can arise by other means.

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