

FINITENESS: ALL OVER THE CLAUSE

Though routinely employed in the morphological and syntactic analysis of many languages, if not all, the descriptive content and theoretical import of this category is so unclear as to render it arbitrary and meaningless. The aim of this volume [*Finiteness: Theoretical and empirical foundations*, edited by Irina Nikolaeva, OUP 2007, based on a conference at the University of Konstanz, convened by Irina Nikolaeva & Frans Plank, 10-12 May 2001] is to shed light on this category by focusing on this list of questions:

- Is FINITENESS an elementary notion or is it defined in terms of more basic notions (such as marking for tense, mood, person/number/ other agreement, being in construction with a non-oblique subject)?
- Assuming FINITENESS is not elementary, what are the patterns of more basic categories that render such a derived category meaningful? (For example, are there systematic correlations between being marked for tense, mood, person/number/other agreement and being in construction with a non-oblique subject?) Are such patterns language-particular or are they universally predictable?
- What kinds of units can be said to be FINITE or NON-FINITE?
 - words or word forms?
 - constructions?
- If both, how is the FINITENESS of words related to that of constructions?
- As a word category, how does FINITENESS bear on word classes? (Is FINITE what verbs are, and NON-FINITE what not-so-verby verbs are, with basic nouns and adjectives unrelated to verbs being outside the scope of this category altogether?)
- As a word category, is FINITENESS part of inflectional or derivational morphology?

- What subclasses of FINITE and NON-FINITE words or word forms are there (infinitive, participles, gerund, masdar, nominalizations, ...) and how do they differ? What role do they play in different languages or kinds of languages?
- As a construction category, how does FINITENESS bear on construction classes? (Is FINITE what sentences and perhaps clauses are, and NON-FINITE what phrases and perhaps clauses are, if desentential? Further, how do FINITE and NON-FINITE distribute over main and subordinate clauses?)
- How do FINITE and NON-FINITE constructions differ as domains for syntactic rules (e.g., binding, anaphora, case marking)?
- What about FINITENESS is subject to change? (For example, can finite forms or constructions become non-finite, and vice versa? If so, what are the mechanisms of change?)

Overall and in individual chapters of this volume, the angle on such questions will be typological and theoretical: empirically determining crosslinguistic variation and its limitations are taken as seriously as explaining what has been found, in whatever theoretical framework.

1. Can FINITENESS be meaningfully considered a **property**?
 (Property concepts, of medium time-stability, are what adjectives are typically supposed to denote – and the term chosen [by who?] for what is at issue here, also used in mathematical and musical senses, is an adjective, *finite*, a resultative participle, *finitus*, from the verb *finire* ‘to put an end to’, itself from the noun *finis* ‘end, limit’)
 If not, what could it be considered as? A property bundle perhaps?

2. What is its logical structure (assuming FINITENESS is a property or at any rate a category)?
 - categorical (finite vs. non-finite) or gradient (more or less finite)
 - prototypical vs. marginal
 - equipollent or privative (finite – nonfinite; finite – not finite; nonfinite – not nonfinite)
 - unary, binary, or n-ary
 - further subdivided (finite; non-finite: INF1 ..., GERUND, GERUNDIVE, ACTION and other NOMINALS, MASDAR; PRTCPL1, PRTCPL2, SUPINE, other ADJECTIVALS; CONVERB; MEDIAL, SAME/DIFFSUBJECT, INJUNCTIVE, ...)

3. What is FINITENESS a property of (again assuming it is one)?
 - of words or word forms: verbs only, other words involved in predicating
 - of constructions: verb phrases, clauses; sentences (or utterances); (close-knit) paragraphs
 - of both, percolating from constructions to their constituents,
 or inherited from words by the constructions they enter,
 or independent (within limits)

4. a. Is FINITENESS a basic-level or a higher-level property?
4. b. If higher-level: In terms of which more basic properties is it defined?
 Is it merely abbreviatory of (structured) sets of more basic properties, or does it add something that can claim (more-than-terminological) existence in its own right (and can non-circularly be referred to by rules of grammar)?

5. What purposes is FINITENESS used for?
 - for stating morphological and syntactic rules/regularities/patterns,
in particular languages, or also crosslinguistically
 - which (kinds of) rules? (see below)
 - for identifying, or at any rate labeling, paradigmatic subsets of
inflectional forms, in particular languages, or also crosslinguistically
 - for identifying, or at any rate labeling, a construction class, or set of
such classes, in particular languages, or also crosslinguistically
6. Can FINITENESS be acquired, altered, and lost in change (by whatever it is a property of)?
7. Assuming FINITENESS is variable in time and across languages, is such variation random or subject to limitations?
8. Assuming there are such limitations, are they due to timeless laws (constraining change) or do they reflect laws of change (forcing or constraining reanalyses by successive generations of learners)?
9. ~~Why~~ are FINITENESS things the way they are, language-particularly and crosslinguistically?

Where FINITENESS has been considered to be implicated:

- relational clause structure (relation between predicates and arguments, primarily subject):
 - rules of subject–verb agreement (cross-reference too?)
 - rules of subject–predicate nominal/adjective agreement
 - rules of subject case-marking (direct vs. oblique or “genitive”)
 - rules of relational marking of direct objects (verb-governed vs. free)
- linear order, especially that of verbs:
 - rules for positioning verbs (V2, V1, V-final; Sbj–Aux Inversion)
 - rules for positioning light material relative to verbs
- verb ellipsis:
 - (marginal/marked) rules of omission/ellipsis of grammatical verbs (auxiliaries, modals) without identity licensing
- relation between main and subordinate clause:
 - rules of “status” government: main verb governing subordinate verb
 - choice of complementizer in complement clauses
 - argument sharing (identity deletions, esp. of subordinate subject) and control of coreference
 - constraints on extraction from subordinate clauses
- binding of nominals with dependent reference (pro):
 - domain within which “anaphors” have to be bound
- verb inflection:
 - rules for marking for agreement-in-person/number/... , tense, mood (marked maximally only once per clause?)

Which morphological and syntactic **categories** have been considered to be implicated in statements made in terms of finiteness:

- marking (of verbs) for person and number; anything else? gender/class?
- marking (of verbs) for tense (absolute, relative to speech-act/reference-point time vs. relative to other tense)
- marking (of verbs) for voice/diathesis?
- marking (of verbs) for mood/illocutionary force (declarative, interrogative, imperative, optative, other irrealis)
- relational marking of subject (direct vs. oblique)
- relational marking of object (verb-governed vs. free)
- main clause vs. subordinate clause; initial clause vs. subsequent clause
- different subject vs. same subject subordinate/subsequent clause
- grammatical/light vs. lexical/heavy verb within single clause

FINITENESS as DIFFERENCE: a consensus view of what is at issue

independent and (less or more) **dependent predications** (sentences, clauses, verbs-in-constructions) are structurally similar but not identical:

(NON-)FINITENESS is a label for the **difference** between them, of whatever extent and kind.

Presumably all languages grammatically distinguish less/more dependent predications from independent ones; hence FINITENESS, as INDEP/DEP DIFFERENCE, is a universal dimension.

Where languages can conceivably differ from each other is in the extent and kind of the relevant differences:

- how different INDEP and DEP predications are;
- where the line is being drawn between INDEP and DEP;
- how many lines;
- for what purposes lines are being drawn where;
- what formal recognition is being given to INDEP/DEP DIFFERENCE.

If INDEP/DEP DIFFERENCE is all there is to FINITENESS, then language-particular rules can hardly make reference to such a notion. It is only what INDEP/DEP DIFFERENCE consists in, not FINITENESS in that sense itself, that can play a role in language-particular grammar.

But then, the notion of INDEP/DEP DIFFERENCE can be provided with more substance:

DIFFERENCE consists in independent predications having something that dependent predications have to a lesser extent or lack – and not surpluses or deficits in any arbitrary respects, but in precisely these three:

- independent speech-event anchoring (temporal, epistemic-attitudinal, local (?))
[illocutionary force, assertiveness]
- independent informational articulation (topic–comment, > subject–predicate)
- contextual autonomy (rather than contextual adjustments:
integration, subordination in clause combining)

Generalizing: INDEP/DEP DIFFERENCE is in the main a matter of deixis-inflectionally more or less distinctive forms used in informationally more or less highly articulated and contextually more or less unrestrained constructions.

From the point of view of dependent predications, independence is attained by **adding** to them, along these three major lines (rather than in any arbitrary respect – e.g., phoneme inventories, orders of numerals and nouns, cumulative/separatist exponence, ...);

from the point of view of independent predications, dependence means **loss**, again along these three lines. [cf. negation: adding neg marker/ omitting assertive marking]

But can **having** and **lacking** meaningfully be looked at as **gaining** and **losing**?

Yes, diachronically – in case independent predications arise from dependent ones or vice versa, by whatever kind of reanalysis (grammaticalization, analogy).

With INDEP/DEP DIFFERENCE thus narrowed down, the question is how particular languages code this universal dimension. Presumably there is still much room for crosslinguistic variation; but is it random?

Here is where consensus ends: on the evidence of some lgs claims have been made that individual choices that lgs have in coding INDEP/DEP DIFFERENCE are interrelated (e.g., subject case marking, person-number agreement between subject and verb, verbal tense and mood inflection); on the evidence of other lgs, such interrelations have been rejected.

Assuming that crosslinguistic variation in whatever domain is limited rather than random, such limitations can be due to **timeless laws** (constraining change) or they may reflect **laws of change** (forcing or constraining reanalyses by successive generations of learners).

Finding contradictory evidence in different languages is at odds with timeless laws, but it need not invalidate the assumption of regular change: even if possible reanalyses are highly constrained, what results from such reanalyses may still differ widely if the forms-in-constructions undergoing reanalysis have been widely different to begin with.

What should therefore be high on the agenda of crosslinguistic research into finiteness are **diachronic scenarios of gains and losses of predication independence**, with a view to **interrelations** of reanalyses along individual parameters of variation, to do with speech-event anchoring, informational articulation, and clause-combining adjustments:

How (from which sources and by what kinds of reanalyses) do forms-in-constructions come to have the properties that they (synchronically) have?

Direction and pathways of development in these domains:

- always, or mainly, from DEPENDENT to INDEPENDENT (upgrading rather than downgrading)?
- by means of
 - (i) grammaticalization of topic–comment as subject–predicate constructions,
 - (ii) analogical extension of (a) inflections (esp. for person and number to words-in-constructions not so far marked for these categories) or (b) of whole inflected word forms (e.g., of participles or infinitives in imperative function to 2nd person indicative),
 - (iii) insubordination (subordinate > main clause),
 - (iv) omission of an auxiliary (marked for person and number) in construction with a main verb (not marked for these categories, but for others, e.g., gender and number),
 - (v) other kinds of reanalysis?