

The Syntax of Finiteness

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My dissertation project deals with the morphosyntactic dimension of finiteness, and is couched in a generative-minimalist framework. Believing that a large set of morphosyntactic phenomena can only be properly understood if their pragmatic-semantic effects (functions) are taken into consideration as well, I also plan to extend my study towards (and possibly somewhat beyond) the syntax–pragmatics and/or the syntax–semantics interface. My ultimate goal is to provide a generalised and unified as well as cross-linguistic valid theory of whatever finiteness might turn out to be.

What is finiteness?

The issue at the heart of finiteness as a linguistic phenomenon seems to be its ‘ontological’ status: Does it exist as a substantial property of morphosyntax in some form, associated with a specific functional value (so-called *anchoring*; cf. Enç 1987, Bianchi 2003), or is it only an illusion evoked by other, independent phenomena (possibly tense, case, agreement, etc.; cf. Cowper 2003)? If finiteness should turn out to be a real characteristic of morphosyntax, another question would concern its constitution in terms of projections, features, etc., and how it is mapped externally to pragmatics/semantics. Is finiteness thus a primitive feature [\pm Fin] of some head (as proposed by Rizzi 1997), associated with a specific functional value, or is its function derived syntax-externally, as the output of a compositional derivation of more primitive elements?

Morphological finiteness

Traditionally, finiteness is seen as a morphological property of a large subset of the forms in a verbal paradigm (verbs marked for the verbal categories tense, aspect, and (verbal) mood, as well as for the nominal categories person and number). Nonfinite forms, however, which in English essentially comprise participles, gerunds, and infinitives, constitute a considerably smaller subset mostly considered defective (or, unmarked/default) in some sense. This dyadic categorisation of morphological forms proves insufficient in the light of intermediate forms such as infinitives inflected for person in Portuguese (cf. Raposo 1989), or for tense in Latin (cf. Cecchetto & Renato 2001).

- (1) Eu vi os meninos a lerem esse livro.
I saw [the children-ACC] to-PRTCL read-INF-3PL [that book]-ACC

(Raposo 1989:277)

- (2) Vellem hoc scripisse.
would-like-1SG that-ACC write-INF-PAST

(Cecchetto & Renato 2001:15)

Syntactic finiteness

Within syntactic analysis, it has become custom to implicationally correlate the (non)finiteness of a clause with other aspects of a derivation, namely with subject-verb agreement ([\pm Agr], Agr_S, ϕ -features), subject case ([NOM], exceptional [ACC], gerundival [GEN]), and, most importantly, with tense ([\pm Tns]). These rather descriptive correlations have in principle persisted throughout the evolu-

tion of (mainstream) generative syntax since the early 1980s (i.e. since Chomsky 1981 *et seq.*) in one or another form.

- (3) a. [+Fin]: [+Tns] → [+Agr] → [NOM]
b. [-Fin]: [-Tns] → [-Agr] → ([ACC])

So, [\pm Fin] has been nothing more than some label (e.g. Infl_[\pm Fin]) restating the correlation in (3). What this treatment *did* capture, however, was the role of Infl as a mediator of subject-verb-agreement.

Within the contemporary revision of generative theory, phase theory (cf. Chomsky 2000 *et seq.*), T/Infl has lost its status, prominence being shifted to the phase head C (for theoretical reasons not relevant here). In addition, it has long been known that in some languages, Cs – normally considered static ‘functional’ items – are inflected for agreement. These connections between C and Infl has led Fortuny (2008) to formulate a C–Infl link, a phenomenon that I like to investigate into with respect to finiteness.

Interestingly, this link had in some sense already been anticipated by Rizzi (1997), who proposes a richly structured C-domain, consisting of a hierarchy of (roughly) discourse-related projections (a so-called split C(P)).

- (4) C → Force > Top > Foc > Fin (>T...)

As the lower bound of the C-domain, Rizzi assumes a Fin(iteness) projection which interfaces with the propositional TP in its scope, determining its finiteness status (i.e. [\pm Fin]). This shift of the syntactic locus of information concerning finiteness from within the Infl-domain to the C-domain might open a door for a generalised examination of finiteness.

Semantic/pragmatic finiteness (aka anchoring)

A construal of finiteness as the ‘anchoring’ of an event time ET (carried by the verb, or projecting independently as the Davidsonian event argument *e*) to the speech time ST of an utterance (cf. Enç 1987) can be extended to other languages, which do not make use of the Tense/time dimension for anchoring. As opposed to Indo-European (and other) languages like English, where finiteness correlates with Tense-marking on the verb, there exist languages where other morphology than Tense appears, i.e. for example locative markers in Halkomelem Salish, and speech event participant markers in Blackfoot (cf. Ritter & Wiltschko 2005). Interestingly, these three types of markers – temporal, locative, and personal – coincide with the three dimensions of the Bühlerian deictic centre – the speaker’s *ego–hic–nunc* (person, space, time). It is thus that a complex syntactic element like Fin might provide the means for the interpretation of the temporal, spatial and personal variables occurring in syntactic structures, with varying morphosyntactic realisation. This variation is a rather strong argument against the common conflation of Tense with finiteness. An attempt to put forth a unified and generalised fine structure of syntactic finiteness – in particular of the functional category Fin – should thus pay close attention to this cross-linguistic observation.

Cartography

Syntactic analyses of the kind sketched above rely heavily on richly structured syntactic domains (so-called cartographies), for example the Rizzian C-domain consisting of Force > Top > Foc > Top > Fin,

rather than a simplex head C. Often, these cartographies go hand in hand with an enrichment of syntax with pragmatic and semantic notions (e.g. the syntactic encoding of point of view roles in Speas & Tenny 2003; dedicated Topic projections in Rizzi 1997). In this respect, an important issue concerns the modularity of the architecture of FL: Are cartographies only a reflection of the conditions imposed on syntax by external systems (e.g. López *forthcoming* proposes to dispense with Top phrases in favour of multiple topics in SpecFin, subsequently evaluated by an external system), or are they real, as advocated by cartographers (e.g. Rizzi 1997)? A third possibility might be to unify reductive with cartographic approaches, reducing the apparent distinction to syntax-internal factors (cf. e.g. Boeckx 2008). I hope to be able to address these broader issues as the concluding portion of my dissertation.

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