

WHEN NON-FINITE VERBS ARE NOT VERBS: THE ROLE OF PARTS OF SPEECH SYSTEMS IN A TYPOLOGY OF FINITENESS

Eva Schultze-Berndt

University of Manchester

Typological discussions of finiteness (e.g. Hopper & Thompson 1984, Cristofaro 2003, Klein 1998, Maas 2004, Nikolaeva 2007, Bisang 2007) are in agreement that the distinction between (morphologically) finite and non-finite verbs is a strategy of signalling independency vs. dependency of predications which is both iconic (in that the absence of “anchoring” information such as tense or person indicates dependency) and economic (in that predictable information is not provided in dependent predications). There is also wide agreement among linguists of all persuasions that strategies of making a distinction between dependent and independent predications (“semantic finiteness”) are not restricted to the traditional distinction between finite and non-finite verbs, but extend to clause-level phenomena such as TAM particles, markers of subordination and the use of different case marking in dependent clauses.

Another logical possibility for signalling dependency has, however, never been explored in the literature. This is the employment of distinct parts of speech in predicative function in dependent vs. independent predications. In this paper, I will argue that this strategy is not only attested but in fact widespread in the languages of the world (co-existing with the other strategies mentioned above), especially if the concept of “dependent predication” is taken to include not only subordinate clauses, but also complex predicates and predicative expressions in modifying function. The existence of parts of speech restricted to dependent predications will first be demonstrated on the basis of languages where this phenomenon manifests itself in a particular striking way, found in a linguistic area of Northern Australia (see McGregor 2002 for an overview). These languages have two parts of speech corresponding to verbs in a language like English: a class of inflecting verbs (often a closed class in these languages), and an open class of non-inflecting elements variously termed “preverb”, “coverb”, “uninflecting verb”, or indeed “main verb”. The latter occur both in complex predicates together with an inflecting verb and as the main predicate in subordinate or other dependent constructions, but never as the main predicate in independent clauses. It will further be argued that these uninflecting verbs finds parallels in other, more minor parts of speech attested in the languages of the world which are equally restricted to dependent predications or modification of predications, such as ideophones, adverbs and verbal particles. Finally, it will be argued that the distribution of such “uninflecting predicates”, as opposed to, e.g. morphologically non-finite verbs, in signalling dependency on different levels is not random, but can be explained by drawing on a different type of iconic motivation, that of expressiveness achieved by absence of explicit anchoring information.

Bisang, W., 2007. Categories that make finiteness: discreteness from a functional perspective and some of its repercussions. In I. Nikolaeva (ed.), *Finiteness. Theoretical and empirical foundations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 115-136.

Cristofaro, S., 2003. *Subordination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hopper, P. J. & S. A. Thompson, 1984. The discourse basis for lexical categories in Universal Grammar. *Language* 60, 703-753.

Klein, W., 1998. Assertion and finiteness. In N. Dittmar & Z. Penner (eds.), *Issues in the theory of language acquisition*. Bern, 225-245.

Maas, U., 2004. “Finite” and “non-finite” from a typological perspective. *Linguistics* 42: 359-385.

McGregor, W. B., 2002. *Verb classification in Australian languages*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Nikolaeva, I., 2007. Constructional Economy and nonfinite independent clauses. In I. Nikolaeva (ed.), *Finiteness. Theoretical and empirical foundations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 138-180.

Contact: Eva Schultze-Berndt, School of Languages, Linguistics and Cultures,
University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL, UK
Tel.: +44 161 3061732; Email: eva.schultze-berndt@manchester.ac.uk

