

Finite Noun Phrases
Rachel Nordlinger¹ and Louisa Sadler²
University of Melbourne, Australia¹ and University of Essex, UK²
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Abstract

A common view of finiteness, particularly prevalent in the transformational grammar traditions, associates it with the marking of tense/aspect/mood and subject agreement on verbs. However, since nominal predicates as well as verbal predicates may be temporally located (e.g. ex-soldier, former friend, future President), there is no reason in principle why nominal predicates might not bear TAM marking also. Indeed, in a wide range of languages cross-linguistically, nominals are marked for tense which serves to temporally locate the nominal predicate itself, independently of the temporal specification of any governing (verbal) predicate. Drawing on data from a number of genetically and areally diverse languages, this paper explores many aspects of the phenomenon of non-propositional nominal TAM marking and its implications for the notion of finiteness.

1 Introduction

Traditional views of finiteness frequently associate it with the presence of subject agreement and tense/aspect/mood (TAM) marking on verbs.¹ The *Oxford Companion to the English Language* (McArthur 1992) defines *finite* as ‘A term for any occurrence of a verb inflected for grammatical features such as person, number and tense’ and *finite verb* as ‘A form of the verb with a distinction in tense’. Crystal’s (1985) *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics* defines a finite verb as ‘...a form that can occur on its own in an independent sentence (or main clause): it permits formal contrasts in tense and mood’. Beyond dictionary definitions, we find the association between finiteness and tense/agreement made explicit in the framework of transformational grammar and its descendants. Radford (1988) states that ‘a Clause is *finite* if it contains a *finite Verb* (i.e. a Verb inflected for Tense/Agreement), and *nonfinite*

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if it lacks a finite Verb (e.g. if it is a verbless Clause, or if it is a Clause containing a *nonfinite* tenseless and agreementless Verb)' (p. 287). In the Principles and Parameters approach (e.g. Chomsky 1981 and subsequent work) this means that finite clauses are those with both [+TENSE] and [+AGR] specifications (see Haegeman 1994:112-3 for discussion).

This association has been challenged on many grounds (see Vincent (1998, this volume) for detailed discussion). For example, infinitival verbs inflected for person-number agreement are found in a number of languages including Portuguese (Raposo 1987), Old Neopolitan (Vincent 1998) and Rembarrnga (Nordlinger and Saulwick 2002), suggesting that the presence of person-number agreement alone is not sufficient to determine the status of a verb as finite. The correlation between tense and finiteness has been similarly questioned: infinitival verbs can be marked for tense in Latin (Vincent 1998), and finite clauses in English can be headed by verbs which are *not* inflected for tense (such as imperative and jussive clauses which require the verb in its base form (Huddleston 1988)). In this paper we question the tense-finiteness correlation from another perspective, namely tense-inflected nominals.

Since nominal predicates as well as verbal predicates may be temporally located (e.g. ex-soldier, former friend, future President), there is no reason in principle why nominal predicates might not bear TAM marking, and indeed (contrary to widely-held assumptions), nominal TAM marking is attested across a wide range of languages. Drawing on data from a number of genetically and areally diverse languages, this paper explores many aspects of the phenomenon of nominal TAM marking which serves to temporally locate the nominal predicate itself, independently of the temporal specification of any governing (verbal) predicate.² We show that TAM marking in these languages is not simply a morphological category of nominals, but has the same semantic functions as TAM marking with verbs. Indeed, in some languages the same set of inflections, with the same semantic interpretation, is used with both word classes. The existence of tense-inflected nominals has many interesting implications for notions of finiteness: if finite verbs are finite by virtue (at least partially) of their TAM marking, are tense-inflected nominals finite also?; or alternatively, if finiteness is considered a property of clauses (e.g. Givón 2001:25, among others) does the existence of TAM-inflections on (clausally-dependent) nominals in fact demonstrate the total independence of finiteness from the categories of tense/aspect/mood?

The structure of this paper is as follows. We begin with a discussion of the encoding of propositional TAM on nominal predicates, both of main and subordinate

²Using the terminology introduced in Nordlinger and Sadler (to appear), we will be concerned with both non-propositional TAM marking on nominals and the marking of propositional TAM on nominal predicates.

clauses (section 2). We then turn in section 3 to the encoding of non-propositional or independent TAM on dependent nominals within verb-headed clauses.

2 Nominal predicates

Nominal clausal predicates are commonly found in subordinate clauses headed by nominalized verbs. Such clauses (as in (1)) are traditionally seen as classically non-finite, and consequently lacking in any tense/aspect/mood marking (e.g. Radford 1988:287):

- (1) *Her eating all the food* left the rest of us hungry.

However, in many languages such nominalized clauses do show TAM distinctions.³ Consider the following examples from Manjiljarra, a dialect of the Australian Western Desert Language (Pama-Nyungan) (Clendon 1988:196).

- (2) *Mutuka punkarnu karru-ngka wati-wayi-nja-ngka.*
car fell creek-LOC across-flow-NMZR-LOC
'The car fell into the creek, which is in flood.
- (3) *Mutuka punkarnu karru-ngka wati-wayi-rnu-nja-ngka.*
car fell creek-LOC across-flow-PAST-NMZR-LOC
'The car fell into the creek, when it was in flood.

In these examples the subordinate verb is nominalized with the nominalizing suffix *-nja*. The nominal status of this deverbal predicate is indicated by the fact that it receives case marking (here, locative) in agreement with the locative NP which it modifies. These nominalized predicates also signal tense distinctions as shown by the contrast between present tense (unmarked) in (2) and past tense in (3).

In the Manjiljarra nominalized predicates the tense marking is inside the nominalizing suffix. Thus, it may be argued that the tense distinctions here are really properties of the verbal stem, and only acquired by the nominalized form indirectly. In many languages, however, TAM distinctions encoded on nominalized predicates can be clearly shown to be properties of the nominalized form itself. For example, in many Australian languages case marking morphology is used with subordinate (nominalized) verbs to mark tense relative to the main clause predicate. In the following examples from Warlpiri (Pama-Nyungan), the allative case suffix marks the subordinate clause event as happening at the same time as the main clause event (4),

³Givón (2001:27) considers such tense/aspect/mood marking on nominalized clauses to be an example of their being *refinitized*, thus reinforcing the (traditionally perceived) close association between tense/aspect/mood marking and finiteness.

while the dative case marks the subordinate clause event as following, and being a purpose of, that of the main clause (5):

- (4) *Ngarrka-ngku marlu pantu-rnu marna nga-rninja-kurra.*
 man-ERG kangaroo spear-PAST grass eat-NMZR-ALL
 ‘The man speared the kangaroo while it was eating grass.’ (Simpson 1988: 205, ex. 2)
- (5) *Yarnka-mi-rni ka-rnalu paka-rninja-ku+lku.*
 set.out-NPST-HITHER PRES-1PL.EXC.S hit-NMZR-DAT+now
 ‘We set out to hit (them – donkeys, cows).’ (ibid, p. 215, ex. 28)

In other languages the tense distinctions may be encoded in the nominalizing morphology. This is the case in Turkish, where the distinction between the nominalizing suffixes *-dik* (6) and *-ecek* (7) marks a contrast between non-future and future tense, respectively.

- (6) *Çocuk-lar-a asağiya inip kendisi-ni sokak-ta*
 child-PL-TO downwards having.descended her-DO street-in
bekle-dik-leri-ni söyle-di.
 await-VN:NF-their-DO say-3SG.PAST
 ‘She told the children that they went (had gone) down and waited for her in the street.’ (Comrie and Thompson 1985: 362, ex 50)
- (7) *Çocuk-lar-a asağiya inip kendisi-ni sokak-ta*
 child-PL-TO downwards having.descended her-DO street-in
bekle-yecek-leri-ni söyle-di.
 await-VN:FUT-their-DO say-3SG.PAST
 ‘She told the children that they would go down and wait for her in the street.’ (ibid, ex 51)

A similar situation is found in many Carib languages such as Apalai (Koehn and Koehn 1986) and Panare (T. E. Payne and D. L. Payne, MS). In the following examples from Apalai, resultant objects nominalizations are formed with *ny-...-ry* in the present tense and *ny-...-hpyry* in the past tense. The possessive prefix is used to mark the subject of the deverbal nominal.

- (8) *y-ny-mero-ry*
 1-NOMLZR-write-NOMLZR
 ‘the thing I am writing’ (p. 91, ex. 309)
- (9) *o-ny-mero-hpyry*
 2-NOMLZR-write-NOMLZR.PST
 ‘the thing you have written’ (p. 92, ex. 310)

This is also the case with Latin participles, which can encode future tense, as in (10).

- (10) *Morituri te salutant*
'Those who are about to die salute you.'

Being associated only with dependent clauses, such TAM marking can be easily argued to be orthogonal to the notion of finiteness – if it is to be defined as something relevant to independent clauses, or more specifically, to clause types that *can* stand as independent clauses, although they may sometimes function also as dependent ones.⁴ Indeed, Givón (2001:26-27) contrasts languages such as the Carib group – for which such nominalization is the major subordination strategy – with what he calls *finite* languages. In the latter type no nominalization takes place in subordinate clauses, and thus all clauses are 'fully finite' (i.e. having the same form as main clauses).

However, well-known in the literature are languages in which nominal predicates of verbless *main* clauses receive TAM marking just like verbs, without showing any signs of undergoing morphological derivation to form a verb. In some languages such nominal predicates also receive subject agreement marking. Examples include the following from Turkish (11), and Bininj Gun-wok (12, 13). In the Bininj Gun-wok example in (13), the presence of the regular gender marker on the predicate noun *kun-dad-niwirrinj* 'NEUT-leg-IRR' clearly shows it to have retained its nominal category.

- (11) *Mühendis-ti-m.*
engineer-PST-1SG
'I was an engineer' (Lehmann and Moravcsik 2000:742) that grammar?)
- (12) *Mayh na-mekke nakka bininj-ni.*
bird MASC-DEM MASC.DEM human-PAST
'Those birds, they were human then,' (Evans to appear:680, 13.27b)
- (13) *Yawkyawk bokenh na-wu bene-berd-djenj-ni yimankek*
young.girl two MASC-REL 3.DU-tail-fish-PAST CTRFAC
kun-dad-niwirrinj.
NEUT-leg-IRR
'There were two young girls who had tails like fish, they didn't have legs.'
[lit. 'there were no legs'] (ibid:437, 8.96)

Such TAM-inflected NPs would seem to satisfy all of the standard criteria for finiteness: they head main clauses; they combine with nominative subjects (e.g.

⁴This is the definition of finiteness suggested by Crystal (1985) (see the quote in section 1), among many others.

Koptjevskaja-Tamm 1994:1245); they are inflected for tense/aspect/mood and, in some cases, are even inflected with subject person-number agreement (e.g. (11)). Furthermore, these inflections are the same in form and function as those used with verbal predicates. There are, therefore, no reasonable grounds on which analogous verb-headed clauses could be considered to be finite in these languages, while these clauses are not. Moreover, if the verbs that head these finite clauses are also considered to be finite (e.g. by virtue of being inflected for TAM), then there is no reasonable option but to consider the nominal heads in (11 – 13) to be finite also. We are then left with the obvious conclusion that finiteness, to the extent that it is a useful concept at all, must potentially apply to both verbs and nouns. This is in stark contrast to the standard definitions of finiteness which always associate it with verbs (see, for example, the various definitions provided in section 1).⁵

It seems fairly clear, then, that tense-marked nominals which function as predicates of main, verbless clauses should reasonably qualify as belonging to finite NPs. In some languages, however, tense-marked nominals may also function as arguments or adjuncts of verb-headed (main) clauses. It is to this type of nominal tense, and the more complex issues it raises for notions of finiteness, that we turn in the next section.

3 Temporal restriction of dependent nouns

More striking, and less discussed in the literature, are languages in which dependent nominals – i.e. nominals functioning as arguments or adjuncts – are inflected for TAM categories independently of the clause to which they belong. Such non-propositional TAM marking is found in many languages around the world, and can be illustrated with the following examples from Guaraní (Tupí-Guaraní) (14a, 14b) and Tariana (Arawak) (Aikhenvald, to appear) (15a, 15b).⁶

- (14) a. *O-va-ta che-roga-kue-pe.*
 3-move-FUT 1s-house-PST-in
 ‘He will move into my former house.’
- b. *A-va-vaekue hoga-rã-pe.*
 1s-move-PST 3.house-FUT-in
 ‘I have moved into his future house’.

⁵Presumably the standard association of finiteness with verbs *only* is related to the fact that tense, aspect and mood are also considered traditionally to be only properties of verbs – see Nordlinger and Sadler (to appear) for discussion, and extensive evidence to the contrary.

⁶The Guaraní examples were kindly collected for us in July 2002 by Dagmar Jung from Sebastiana Ertel, a native speaker of Guaraní from Asuncion now resident in Cologne, Germany.

- (15) a. *Diha di-sa-do-pena* *dalipa di-a*
 he 3SG.NF-spouse-FEM-FUT near 3SG.NF-go
di-ka-tha-pidana.
 3SG.NF-see-FR-REM.PST.REP
 ‘He went (in vain) to look at his wife-to-be.’
- b. *pi-ruku* *pi-uka* *hĩ*
 2SG-come.down 2SG-arrive DEM:ANIM
panisaru-miki-ti-naku *pĩra.*
 abandoned.village-PST-NF-TOP.NON.A/S 2SG.order 2SG-vomit-IMP
 ‘When you come to an abandoned ex-village, order (him) to vomit.’

In these examples tense markers on nominals temporally locate the NP itself. In (15b), for example, the past tense marker on *panisaru* ‘abandoned village’, encodes the fact that the time at which the property denoted by the nominal holds of the referent is in the past (i.e. ‘ex-village’). In the other examples (14a – 15a), in which the tense marked nominal is also possessed, the nominal tense marker is ambiguous between temporally locating the nominal property (as in (15b)) – ‘my thing which used to be a house’ – and temporally locating the possessive relation itself – ‘house which used to be mine’.⁷ In either function the tense marker is still interpreted internally to the NP, having no direct bearing on the tense of the propositional as a whole. That this nominal tense specification is independent of propositional tense is shown by the fact that the two can vary independently of each other: in (14a) we see an example of a future tense clause containing a past tense nominal, while in (14b) and (15a) we have the opposite situation – a past tense clause containing a future tense nominal.

As indicated in the English translations of the examples above, the functions of these nominal tense markers are similar to those expressed by derivational morphology in English such as ‘ex-’ (‘ex-President’) and ‘-to-be’ (‘mother-to-be’). In languages such as Guaraní and Tariana, however, tense is an inflectional category for nominals, and as such is fully productive. The affixes ‘ex-’ and ‘-to-be’ in English, on the other hand, are quite restricted in their semantics, being most common with nouns denoting occupations (‘ex-director’, ‘ex-teacher’, ‘mother-to-be’) and non-kin relationships (‘ex-wife’, ‘ex-boyfriend’, ‘husband-to-be’). They are substantially less appropriate with common nouns such as ‘dog’ and ‘house’ (?ex-dog, ?ex-house). Such restrictions are not found in the true nominal tense examples, as can be verified in the examples throughout this section.

⁷Clearly, however, this ambiguity is often easily resolved by context, as in the Guaraní examples above: it makes little sense to talk about moving into something that ‘used to be a house’ or ‘will be a house’. A more natural interpretation is that the tense marker here is referring to the possessive relation ‘house that used to be mine’, ‘house that will be his’.

Many languages with this type of nominal tense system also use it with nominal (including deverbal) predicates of subordinate clauses. In these examples the nominal tense marker encodes relative tense – taking the time of the main predicate as the tense locus. Consider the following examples from Tariana. In (16) the nominal predicate is marked with future tense to express the fact that the subordinate event (i.e. the presence of manioc beer) follows that of the main clause (which is marked with the ‘remote past, reported evidentiality’ marker). In (17) a tense-marked nominalised verb functions as the predicate of a relative clause.

- (16) *Payaru-pena-ka na: nheta na:-pidana.*
 manioc.beer-FUT-SUB 3pl.go 3pl.take 3pl.go-REM.P.REP
 ‘Since there is going to be manioc beer (i.e. a drinking feast), they went to take (the down off the eagle, to make festive decorations).’
- (17) *ihya nu-na matfa-pu-mha i-ni i-wake-ta [nuha*
 you.pl 1sg-OBJ good-AUG-PRES.NONVIS 2pl-do 2pl-join-CAUS I
awakada-se ka-ñale-pena-nuku].
 jungle-LOC REL-GET.LOST-NOM.FUT-TOP.NON.A/S
 ‘You helped me very well indeed, me, who was going to get lost in the jungle.’

Tense-marked nominalised verbs may also function as referential arguments, as the following examples from Guaraní demonstrate. In these examples the tense forms a portmanteau with the nominalizer – *vakwè* ‘NOMZ.PST’ – although the relationship to the regular nominal past tense marker (*kwé/kue*, as in (14a)) is obvious.⁸

- (18) *Rei-kwaá pa la o-hó vakwè.*
 2S-know INT-CM the he-go NOMZ.PST
 ‘Do you know the one who left?’ (Gregores and Suárez 1967:159)
- (19) *o-mo-no-ñové la o-man’õ vakwè h’ina*
 he-FACT-live the he-die NOMZ.PST PRES
 ‘She is reviving the one who died’ (ibid 1967:165)

Nominal tense systems function to locate a property in time with respect to a tense locus (usually time of speech, but sometimes the time of a matrix clause, as in (16, 17)) and thus are semantically equivalent to the more familiar tense systems of verbs (Chung and Timberlake 1985, Comrie 1994). This functional equivalence

⁸The following examples are taken from Gregores and Suárez (1967) and are provided in their orthography. This accounts for the orthographic differences with the Guaraní examples in (14a) and (14b), which use a modern orthography.

is demonstrated further by the existence of languages which use the same morphological means for encoding both verbal tense and nominal (non-propositional) tense. One such language is the Amazonian language Jarawara (Arawá) (Dixon, MS).⁹ In Jarawara nominals may be marked with a subset of the large number of tense, mood and evidentiality suffixes that are also used on verbs and auxiliaries to encode propositional TAM. Some examples of the use of these suffixes with nouns include:¹⁰

- (20) *Kimi-mata-mona-ka*
 K.-FPnm-REPM-DECm
 ‘It is said to have been Kimi.’ (Dixon MS, 10.58)

In (20) we see the use of suffixes encoding far past tense, reported evidentiality and declarative mood, all attached to the proper noun ‘Kimi’. That these are also used with verbs is shown by the first clause of this same example, in which the tense and evidentiality markers are attached instead to the verbal auxiliary:

- (21) *jama tii ne-mata-mona, Kimi;*
 thing(f) cut AUX-FPnm-REPM K.
 ‘He was said to have cut the things, Kimi did;’ (10.58)

In (20) the TAM suffixes are used with a nominal predicate, and thus appear to be encoding propositional TAM just as they do with verbs. It is also possible for these same suffixes to be used with dependent nominals, in verb-headed clauses, in which case they encode non-propositional tense instead. Consider the following examples:

- (22) *ee kaa hemejo-ba fonai mada ne-ba ee-ke*
 linc POSS medicine-FUT F. send AUX-FUTm linc-DECf
 ‘FUNAI will send the medicine for us (i.e. F. will send our future medicine)’
 (10.70)
- (23) *oko jibotee-ne o-katomi-ne*
 1sgPOSS spouse-IRR 1sgA-fight.with-CONTf
 ‘I fought with (and killed) one who could have been my wife (he said).’
 (10.68)

⁹Another language which uses the same markers to encode propositional tense with verbs and non-propositional tense with nominals is the Salish language Halkomelem, see Galloway (1993) and Burton (1997) for discussion.

¹⁰The abbreviations used in the glosses (retained from the original) are: DEC ‘declarative mood’, f ‘feminine gender’, FP ‘far past’, m ‘masculine gender’, n ‘non-eyewitness’, REP ‘reported evidentiality’.

- (24) *mee tabori-mete-mone jokana boto joro*
 3nsg home(f)-FPnf-REPF real clearing(f) sit(du.S)
ni-kimi-ne-ke
 AUX-TWO-CONTf-DECf
 ‘The two clearings of their reported past villages are there.’ (10.67)

In these examples we find TAM inflections attached to both verbs (or auxiliaries) and to dependent nominals. In (22) both the verbal auxiliary and the object NP are inflected for future tense. The semantic scope of these two tense markers is quite distinct, however: the future tense on the auxiliary encodes tense for the clause as a whole, whereas the future tense marker on the object nominal has scope internal to the object NP – ‘our *future* medicine’. That the nominal and verbal inflections in these examples are functionally independent despite the similarities in form is shown by the fact that they can vary independently of each other, as in (23) and (24).

Such data has interesting implications for notions of finiteness. In section 2 we argued that TAM-inflected nominal predicates exhibit just the same ‘finiteness’ properties as verbal predicates, and thus should be considered equivalently finite.¹¹ In other words, any arguments by which one considers a TAM-inflected verbal auxiliary such as *ne-mata-mona* (AUX-FPnm-REPM) in (21) to be finite, must also apply to a TAM-inflected nominal predicate such as *Kimi-mata-mona-ka* in (20).

It seems reasonable to consider nominal predicates, especially those inflected with the same TAM suffixes used with verbs, to be finite. However, the situation is further complicated by the fact that these same TAM-inflected nominals can appear functioning as arguments of regular verb-headed clauses (as in (22)-(24)). Are such TAM-inflected dependent nominals also finite? If so, then we have defined finiteness in purely morphological terms according to whether or not a form is inflected for TAM. If not, then we must allow the same TAM-inflected word form to be both finite and non-finite depending on whether it is functioning as a clausal predicate or a clausal dependent, respectively. Thus, in this latter case, we have defined finiteness in functional terms: a (TAM-inflected) word form is finite if it functions as the predicate of a main or independent clause. A third possibility is that the existence of TAM-inflected dependent nominals supports the position that finiteness is not a property of individual word forms at all, but only a property of clauses (e.g. Huddleston 2002, among others).

Some authors (e.g. Vincent (1998, this volume?), Barron 2000) have suggested that finiteness is correlated not with TAM marking in general, but more specifically with mood. However, this does not resolve the dilemma of TAM-inflected dependent nominals since in some languages these can be inflected for mood categories also. In

¹¹Or equivalently not finite, as the case may be. See section 4 for further discussion.

the Jarawara examples above, we saw examples of dependent nominals inflected for evidential mood categories (24), and irrealis mood (23). In the Macro-Jê language Iate (spoken in the vicinity of Pernambuco, Brazil) nouns can be inflected for one of three tenses (past, present and future) and one of two moods (‘realis’ and ‘possible’), as shown in Table 1 (Lapenda 1968:77).

Table 1: Nominal tense and mood suffixes in Iate

realis		
pres	<i>seti</i>	that which is a house or serving as a house
past	<i>se'ti-sê</i>	that which was once a house; that which stopped being a house
fut	<i>sêti-he</i>	future house, will be a house; house which is being built
possible		
pres	<i>se't-kěá</i>	a possible house; something which has the possibility of being a house
past	<i>se'ti-s -kěá</i>	something which would have been a house but wasn't; something which had the possibility of being a house

Thus, even if finiteness is correlated just with mood, rather than with TAM-marking in general, we are left with the same problem. Either we are forced to conclude that such mood-inflected nouns are finite also, in which case finiteness is essentially equivalent to the presence of mood-inflection, or finiteness is defined purely as a property of main clauses, in which case it becomes essentially equivalent to the independent status of clauses.

4 Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to explore the nature of the relationship between tense/aspect/mood and finiteness. On the basis of languages which have extensive and productive TAM-inflection on nouns and other NP constituents, we have argued that this relationship is not as straightforward as is traditionally assumed. The existence of TAM inflections on nominal predicates shows that, at the very least, finiteness must be a possible category of nouns as well as verbs. The fact that such nouns can also occur as arguments or adjuncts of verb-headed clauses, however, raises further questions as to the relationship between the presence of TAM inflection and finiteness: does TAM-marking alone make something finite (in which case all of the

nominals discussed above are finite)? Clearly the answer to this must be negative, since it would amount to finiteness constituting nothing more than the presence of tense/aspect/mood inflection.

An alternative would be to distinguish amongst different functions of TAM-inflection. If finiteness is largely a property of clauses, then perhaps it is only propositional TAM (i.e. TAM that is relevant to whole clauses) that is associated with finiteness. On this view, TAM-inflected nominal predicates (as in section 2) would be finite, but those functioning as dependents of verb-headed clauses (section 3) would not be. In the latter case, the TAM is relevant only to the NP to which it belongs, and is functionally independent from the TAM of the clause. Finiteness would thus be defined in terms of both form *and* function: TAM-inflected nominals could be finite, but only when functioning as clausal predicates. Note that this supports the view that finiteness is essentially a property of clauses, not individual forms, since in languages which allow TAM-inflected nominals as both clausal predicates and clausal dependents (e.g. Jarawara) the same form will be finite in the former case (or at least, the head of a finite clause) and not in the other.

This notion of finiteness, however, still faces problems when dealing with the TAM-inflected nominal predicates of subordinate clauses (as in (6) and (7)). These nominals are both clausal predicates and inflected for tense/aspect/mood. Yet according to most traditional views, they would be considered non-finite. This provides evidence for the view that finiteness may, in fact, have nothing to do with tense/aspect/mood at all, but rather with the ability of a clause to stand as an independent, main clause.¹² The perceived association between tense/aspect/mood and finiteness may simply be a byproduct of the fact that main clauses tend to be marked for tense/aspect/mood more often than dependent clauses are.

We argue, however, that the data presented above leads more naturally to another conclusion: that finiteness is simply not a universally applicable category. For the languages we discuss here a definition of finiteness must either be so broad in its scope that it cannot be distinguished from the presence of TAM-inflection, or so specific that it can not be distinguished from the ability to stand as an independent clause. Thus, for these languages, there is no grammatical generalisation that can be captured with reference to a notion of finiteness that cannot be captured just as easily without it. While finiteness may be a useful grammatical notion in some European languages, the evidence from TAM-inflected nominals suggests that it may not necessarily be relevant cross-linguistically.

¹²For definitions of finiteness along these lines see Crystal (1985), Koptjevskaja-Tamm (1994), among others.

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