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**Towards a typology of finiteness: a canonical approach**

In typology finiteness is usually understood as the clausal property that has different morphosyntactic realizations across languages. The latter have to do with the opposition between the prototypical (morphological) properties of nouns and prototypical (morphological) properties of verbs. Finiteness represents a cross-linguistic ‘cline’ or a ‘continuum’, i.e. it is ‘gradual’ or ‘scalar’ (Palmer 1986; Noonan 1985; Hengeveld 1998; Ledgeway 1998; Vincent 1998; Givón 1990, 2001). The scalar notion of finiteness is essentially functionally/iconically motivated and reflects the degree of integration of a dependent event into a higher clause as represented by the degree of downgrading of the dependent clause with respect to the prototypical main clause (‘desententialization’).

One problem with this approach is that we are not comparing the same things. If finiteness is defined in terms of conformity to the independent clausal pattern, different criteria are used for different languages and constructions. There is no reason to assume that they instantiate the same grammatical category. In addition, it is often difficult to see how the degree of finiteness correlates with the degree of semantic integration, as predicted by the iconicity principle. The finiteness scale may lead to totally unmotivated results within individual languages and it is difficult to know what it could actually mean. Finally, the traditional typological notion of ‘scales’ suggest implications of the form ‘if A then B’. For instance, it has been suggested that for all languages, if person and/or number and tense are marked on non-finite forms, then they are also marked on finite forms (Vincent 1998). However, the parameters crucially involved in the definition of finiteness appear not to stand in obvious implicational relations.

I therefore suggest an approach to the typology of finiteness that relies on the notion of independently motivated canons, rather than scale-like implications. The canons are understood as theory-independent constraints on finiteness based on observable linguistic behaviour (no underlying structure, no empty categories). The relevant canons belong to three large domains: morphology (featural content), syntax (the status of the clause, subject licensing, etc.) and semantics (the condition for an independent interpretation of a sentence). Existing theoretical approaches to finiteness each rely on one of these domains, but in the canonical typology they are of similar importance and no priority is given to one domain over the other two.

I will discuss several canons within each domain and show cases where they diverge, i.e. the construction may be canonically finite in terms of morphology but not syntax, or it may be canonically finite in terms of semantics but not morphology, and so on. I will also address possible advantages of the canonical approach to finiteness for linguistic theory and language diachrony. Importantly, the suggested typological approach is easily compatible with any syntactic framework, because it does not advocate the primacy of one aspect of finiteness over another. Different instances can be specified based on how far they are from the canonical point, but some theories might be better than others at capturing certain constraints/canons, and how exactly the deviations are handled is a theory-internal concern.