Subordination in Kannada: Evidence against finiteness constraint

Anuradha Sudharsan

I. Introduction

This paper argues against [1]'s view that "in every sentence" in Dravidian languages "there is but one finite verb, which is the last word in the sentence…..and all other verbs which express subordinate actions assume an indeterminate and continuative character, as verbal participles and gerundials," so that sense and time "wait in suspense for the authoritative decision of the final governing verb". [2] makes a similar observation about Kannada: "a Kanarese sentence rarely tolerates more than one finite verb". On the basis of these observations, scholars have proposed what they call finiteness constraint according to which every Dravidian sentence can have only one finite verb which means that all subordinate clauses are non-finite. [3] takes a typological perspective of the Dravidian subordinate clauses and observes that Dravidian languages strictly adhere to the SOV trait according to which they lack finite subordinate clauses.

Several factors are responsible for this misconception about finiteness in the Dravidian: firstly, these conclusions are reached on the basis of intuitive judgements without supporting empirical evidence; secondly, the data examined is inadequate; thirdly, no morpho-syntactic or semantic criteria have been used to arrive at this conclusion; thirdly, the morphological make-up of Dravidian languages is partly responsible for this misconception.

The main purpose of this paper is to examine Kannada clauses by using a series of criteria such as the presence of tense/agreement, of an overt nominative NP, of the auxiliary iru, and modals, etc, to show where finiteness resides in Kannada clauses and to provide supporting evidence for my claim that subordination in Kannada is overwhelmingly finite.

My main arguments are as follows: firstly, I will argue that the subordinate clauses which are viewed as non-finite are finite morphosyntactically and also in their internal structure as they have a clausal structure. Secondly, I will show that the criteria we use to determine the finiteness of root clauses can be used to determine the finite status of subordinate clauses also.

In considering the finite status of clauses, we need to take into account several criteria which are used widely in cross-linguistic analysis. There is no single unitary definition of finiteness and that there is a huge variation across languages. In addition to these criteria mentioned above, I use another parameter, proposed in [4]. Clausal force is another parameter which seems to decide verbal morphology in Kannada. In Kannada, agreement occurs in affirmative declarative clauses and is totally absent in negative illa clauses, as illa 'not' is shown to be an invariant auxiliary verb in [4]. The modals beeku 'should/have to' bahudu 'may/might' etc, are also invariant and do not inflect for tense and agreement. So agreement is a defining feature of affirmation in contemporary Kannada, although it occurs only in finite clauses. Following this, I argue that it is tense which renders a clause finite. Finally, this conclusion argues against [5] 's hypothesis that only the quotative endu-clause can embed finite predicates.

II. Root clauses in Kannada

To set the stage for our discussion, we will consider different types of root clauses in Kannada and examine their verbal morphology. Consider the three types of clauses in (1-3).

(1) raaju iidina skuulige beega hodanu
  Raju today school-to early went.3sm
  Raju went to school early today.
(2)avanu skuulinalli adhyaapakanu
  He.nom school.loc teacher.sm
  He is a teacher in school
(3) avaLige obbanee maga.
  She.dat one only son.
  She has only one son.

We know that these clauses are finite since they have an independent status and they have a time reference too. Independent status of a clause is an important factor which renders a clause finite. Besides, these clauses are propositional in that they make a statement. Sentence (1) has a finite verb with tense and agreement

inflections. Sentences (2-3) are verbless clauses with a nominal predicate. The nominal predicate shows gender and number features but lacks person feature. Although the sentence lacks a verb it has present tense reading. In Kannada when a clause is not specified for tense, it will invariably have a default reading of present tense. In [6], it has been argued that person feature is mandatory for licensing a pro subject, since person feature is crucial to identifying the referential content of pro. So phi-features without person feature do not count as agreement for licensing a null subject in a finite clause.

Consider again (4) which is a clefted sentence with a gerundive predicate. The gerund has 3rd person, singular, neuter ending –udu.

(4) naavellaru   huTTiddu maisuru(inalli)
   We all.nom born.ger   mysore(loc)
   It was in Mysore that we were born.

So sentences (2-4) fail to meet an important criterion for finite status, that of having tense and agreement inflection. However, [7] rightly observes that the clauses with nominal predicates are finite as their non-verbal predicates occur in the position where a finite verb occurs. Following this observation, he says that a noun can also be the finite head of a predicate phrase. In section 4, we will consider [5]'s analysis in detail.
Consider again the negative illa and the modal verbs beeku and bahudu, which also lack tense or agreement inflection. [8] is of the view that agreement renders a clause finite and independent in Kannada. Applying [9]'s criterion of paradigmaticity , he further hypothesises that the invariant illa renders a clause finite because it shares a paradigmatic relationship with agreement. It has been argued in [4] that the negative illa marks a clause finite not because it is paradigmatic with agreement but because it is an invariant negative auxiliary, not a particle as it is generally considered to be; it is a negative auxiliary on a par with the affirmative auxiliary iru as it can render a verbless clause finite and complete just like iru. However, there is one difference between illa and iru: whereas iru inflects for tense and agreement, illa does not.

(5) avanige makkaLee illa
   He.dat children.emph.neg
   He has no children at all.
(6) naanu maisurige hoogabeeku
    I.nom   Mysore.dat go. Have to
    I have to go to Mysore.

In these sentences the negative and the modal verbs illa and beeku do not inflect for tense and agreement. But they are finite. What   renders the clauses finite is the invariant finite verbs illa and beeku. These sentences also can occur in past tense as shown in

(7)raajanige makkaLe iralilla
    Raja.dat   children.emp have.neg
   The king had no children at all.
(8) naanu maisurige hoguvudilla/hogalilla
    I.nom Mysore.dat go.pres.neg/go.al(past).neg
    I will/did not go to Mysore.
(9) naanu maisurige hogabeekaagittu
    I.nom Mysore.dat go.had to.was.3sn
    I had to go the Mysore.
(10) naanu maisurige hoogabeekaagiralilla.
    I.nom Mysore.dat go.have to.iru+al.neg
    I did not have to go to Mysore.

We notice that there are asymmetries between affirmative and negative illa clauses. Firstly, in the negative sentence there is no agreement; secondly, past tense is indicated by iral(iru+al), in which the infinitival –al is attached to the aux iru. There are other discrepancies between affirmative and negative verbal morphology which are discussed in detail in [9]. Again, since the modal beeku does not inflect for tense and agreement just like illa, past tense has to be expressed by the use of auxiliary verb iru which shows tense and agreement; but it is default agreement as it does not agree with the nominative subject . In Kannada affirmative sentences, tense and agreement are incorporated in a single portmanteau morpheme, which means that tense and agreement are inseparable. Hence the default agreement. Default agreement cannot be taken as agreement since it does not

match with phi-features of the nominative subject. In the corresponding negative sentences, there is no default agreement.

What we observe in these sentences is an opposition between agreement and negation. Affirmative clauses show agreement whereas negative sentences and also modals lack agreement. However, what they both share is tense. So we can say that tense is mandatory in all finite clauses and agreement is mandatory in non-negative clauses. Agreement, of course occurs only in finite clauses and its presence is dependent upon the presence of tense.

We also notice that in all tensed clauses, there is a nominative subject or at least a nominative NP. The presence of a nominative subject has been used as an important criterion for the finite status of a clause. In Kannada, tense and a nominative NP co-occur. In Hungarian, which is also an SOV language, agreement licenses a nominative subject. This way languages differ in the way finiteness gets realised.

III.   Subordinate clauses

In this section we will examine subordinate clauses in Kannada by using the same criteria we used for root clauses and show that agreement occurs only in affirmative declarative force and that it is tense that ultimately marks a clause finite.

In Kannada, and in Tamil and Telugu also, subordinate clauses can be broadly classified as CP and IP clauses. CP clauses are all finite and IP clauses can be finite or non-finite. The verb in CP clauses inflects for tense and agreement and has a nominative subject; the finite IP clauses also carry tense inflection, but lack agreement. They also have a nominative subject. Consider the endu-, embudu- and emba-clauses given in (11-13).

(11) [taanu Saaliniya swabhaavavannu bahaLa meccuttiini endu]
     [self.Nom Shalini's nature.Acc   very   admire.pres.1S Comp]
     raaju rameSanige heeLidanu
     Raju.Nom Ramesh.to said.past. 3 M.S.
     Raju said to Ramesh that he(self) admires Shalini's nature very much.

(12)[Saalini ameerikaage hooguttaaLe embudu] ellarigu tiLidide.
      Shalini America.Dat will go.3sf   Comp] everybody.Dat is known.3sn
      Translation: It is known to everydbody that Shalini will go to America.

(13) [Saalini ameerikaage hooguttaaLe emba] viSaya]] ellarigu tiLidide.
      Shalini America.Dat will go.3sf   Comp] everybody.Dat is known.3sn
      Translation: The news that Shalini will go to America is known to everybody.

The embedded clauses (11-13) are all CP clauses with the functional head C occurring clause finally, as Kannada is a head-final language. And the embedded verbs in these clauses are fully inflected for tense and agreement. However, the negative clauses in (14), which corresponds to the affirmative clause in (11) is tensed but lacks agreement, as the invariant illa lacks tense and agreement inflection. Tense in the negative clause is realised on the main verb, not on illa.

 (14).[taanu Sa:liniya swabha:vavannu iSTapaduvudilla/iSTapaDalilla endu]
      [self.nom Shalini's nature.acc   like.pres.neg/like.past. neg Comp]
       ra:ju rameSanige heeLidanu
      Raju.Nom Ramesh.to said.past. 3 M.S.
      Raju said to Ramesh that he(self)does/did not like Shalini's nature.

Both negative and affirmative clauses are finite in these sentences. As these examples show, agreement occurs only in affirmative clauses.

We will now move on to IP clauses. Gerundive clauses, participial relative clauses and adverbial clauses are all IP clauses. They lack an independent functional head C. Rather, the clause markers are attached to the embedded verb. These clauses are tensed, but lack agreement and have a nominative subject. None of these clauses are declarative in force and hence they lack agreement.

(15)[ni:nu   meriyamanege ho:guvdu/ho:giddu/ho:guttiruvudu]
    [You-Nom Mary's house-Dat go.pres.ger/g.. past.ger/go.non-past.prog.ger]
    Nanage iSTavilla.
    I.Dat liking.not

Translation: I do not like your going to Mary's house.

(16) [ni:nu   avaLige koTTiruva/koTTidda/koDuttiruva/koDuva]
    You.Nom she.dat give.perf.pres/go. perf.past/go.pres.prog/go.non-past-Rel]
    si:re]   bahaLa cennagide
    saree] very   good.is.3SN
    The saree you have given/had given/are giving…. is very good.
(17) naanu avvaLa manege hoodaaga, avaLu niddemaaDuttiddaLu.
    I.Nom she.gen   house.dat went.when she sleep.making.iru.3sf.
    When I went to her house, she was sleeping.

        Look at the non-finite clauses in (18-20) which do not share any of the characteristics of the finite clauses discussed above. These sentences contain what are called conjunctive participial clauses. These are control structures.

(18) radha[PRO haaDta,] aDige maaDtaaLe.
    Radha[PRO sing.prog] food   makes.3SF.
    Singing, Radha makes food.
(19) radha [PRO newspaper oodi],   aDige maaDtaaLe.
    Radha [PRO news paper read.perf] food makes.3SF.
    (After) having read the newspaper, Radha makes food.
(20)*[radha newspaper oodi],   naanu aDige maaDtiini.
    Radha news paper read.perf] I.Nom food make.1S
    Radha having read the newspaper, I make food.

        The verb in these clauses lacks both tense and agreement; it has aspectual inflection. Besides, the subject is non-overt and is coreferential with the matrix subject. They are control structures. In (18), the non-finite verb denotes an activity in progress, and it is simultaneous with the activity expressed by the matrix verb. In (19), on the other hand, the non-finite verb expresses a completed activity and it precedes the activity expressed by the matrix verb. Sometimes these clauses stand for a cause-and-result relationship also. The ungrammatical sentence in (20) shows that this participial clause cannot have its own independent overt subject. Another characteristic of these non-finite clauses is that neither the auxiliary verbs iru and illa nor the modals can occur in these clauses, as these verbs lack a non-finite form. English, however, has both finite and non-finite forms of the auxiliaries be and have, which means that these auxiliaries can occur in non-finite clauses. Consider (21), which has an infinitival clause, which is also a control structure. The infinitival clause lacks even aspect since it generally expresses a purposive meaning.

(21)Ramesa [PRO tarakaari   taralu] maarkeTTige hoodanu
    Ramesh [PRO vegetables to bring] market to went.3SM
    Ramesh went to market to bring vegetables

        We have noted that finite clauses are all tensed and have a nominative subject. The finite verb will inflect for agreement only if it is affirmative declarative. The non-finite ones lack tense and an overt subject, but shows aspect.

IV.   Steever's analysis
        Following [1] and [2], [5] does assume that Dravidian languages allow only one finite verb per sentence, but proposes his own criteria for determining the finiteness of a clause. However, he considers the quotative endu-clause and what he calls conditional aadare clause as exceptions to this constraint because he is of the view that these clauses alone can embed finite predicates.
        Steever is of the view that finiteness is a grammatical category and that the morphological view of finiteness offered by Caldwell and Spencer "incorrectly predicts the existence of sentences whose predicates are all non-finite verb forms"(pg 4). This is because their definition of finiteness depends crucially on a verbal predicate and thus fails to "recognize that predicate nominals themselves are finite predicates"(pg. 4) In his view, finiteness is not just a morphological property , it is a property of sentence structure. He goes on to say that "certain syntactic rules identify a specially designated position in the constituent structure of a sentence where only finite predicates can occur"(pg. 2). So one can assume that a constituent which occurs in that designated position is finite.   Therefore, he considers predicate nominals to be finite as they occur "in the same grammatical environment as ordinary finite verbs"(pg 2).

However, Steever goes on to remark that "although nominal predicates behave syntactically like finite verbs, they cannot be considered to be finite verbs" (pg 3)as they do not mark for tense and agreement. Hence he concludes that nominal predicates cannot be embedded. Similarly, he observes that the modal beeku, imperatives, and also indirect speech with verbs of reporting have all "skewed distribution" in that their occurrence is restricted to root clauses. Implicit in all these observations is his assumption that subordinate clauses in the Dravidian is invariably non-finite and that only those verbs which have non-finite counterparts can be embedded. Following Caldwell's and Spencer's observations and his own criteria for determining the finite status of predicates he proposes a rule to prohibit embedding of finite predicates in Dravidian languages.

However, Steever observes that there are exceptions to this constraint against embedding multiple finite predicates. He goes to say that there are two types of clauses based on the verbs en 'say/think' and aa,'become' which alone can embed finite predicates. Some of the main characteristics of the endu-clause are as follows: The conjunctive participle form of the verb en is used as the complementizer in the quotative endu-clause in Kannada and enru-clause in Tamil. This CP clause is a verb complement clause. The endu-clause is versatile in that it can embed all types of clauses. The complementizer endu takes a clausal complement, not an object as Steever says. Another important characteristic that Steever fails to notice is that the Comp endu has [+ declarative] feature and it is this property that allows it to embed all kinds of structures. It roughly corresponds to the that-clause in English, although the Comps in these clauses differ significantly. Whereas endu originates from a verb via process of grammaticalization, that originates from a demonstrative pronoun. In fact, the comps emba and embudu(see eg.12-13) are also derived from the same verb root en, but they are relativized and nominalised forms of en. All of these comps share the feature [+declarative].

As for the other clause type, aadare 'but/but still' which is derived from the linking verb aa, conjoins two independent clauses resulting in a coordinated structure. It is not an embedded structure, as Steever observes. Since aadare-clause is not a complex sentence we will not consider it here. Here are examples of endu-clause in Kannada.

(22)[raaju skuulinalli adhyapakanu endu] ellarigu tiLidide.
    [Raju   school-loc   teacher   comp]   everybody.dat is known.3sn
    It is known to everybody that Raju is a teacher in school.

(23)[avaLige obbane maga endu/anta] maduve huDugiya tandege tiLiside
    [she.dat one only son comp]bride's father –dat is known.3sn
    That he is her only son is known to the bride's father.

(24)[naavellaru maisurige hoogtiivi endu] naanu avarige   tiLiside
    We all.nom Mysore.dat will go.1pl. Comp] I.nom they-dat informed.1s
    I informed them that we will go to Mysore

The examples in (22-23) contain non-verbal predicates and (24) alone contains a finite verbal predicate. Again, examples (25-27) contain the auxiliary iru, the modal beeku and illa respectively.

(25) raajanu[tanage obbaLe magaLu(iddaLiddalu)endu]
    Raja.dat self.dat one only daughter was.3sf comp
    bahaLa dukkha.
    very sad
    The king was very sad because he had only one daughter.

(26)[naanu iidinanee maisuurige hoogabeeku endu] nanna baasge tiLiside.
    [I.Nom today itself Mysore.Dat go.must Comp] my   boss-Dat informed.1s
    I informed to my boss that I must go to Mysore today itself.

(27) [naanu iidina kaaleejige   baruvudilla endu] foon maaDi tiLiside.
    [I.Nom today college.Dat come.fut.neg Comp] make phone informed.1s.
    I phoned and informed that I will not come to college today.

These examples show that the endu-clause can embed all types of clauses, including a verbless clause. We notice that not all of these clauses show agreement. What is consistently present in all of these endu-clauses is tense and aspect. Secondly, they are declarative in force, affirmative or otherwise. These finite embedded clauses provide supporting evidence for my claim that it is tense that renders a clause finite.

Contrary to Steever's claim that only endu-clause can embed finite clauses, there are other types of embedded clauses which are tensed and which have a nominative subject in which modals, the auxiliary iru and illa can occur. Here are some examples.

(28) makkaLillada mane maneyee alla.

Children.neg.Rel home home.emph not

A home without children is not a home.

(29) Niinu maaDabeekaada kelasavannu, naanu maaDide

You.Nom do.should. aagu.Red work.Acc I.Nom did.1s

 I did the work that you were supposed to do.

(30)idu nii maaDabahudaada kelasavalla

This you do.can .agu.rel work.not

This is not what you can do.

The so-called participial relative clauses in these contain the negative illa and the modals beeku and bahudu giving evidence against Steever's claim that these finite forms cannot occur in any clause other than endu-clause.

V.   Conclusions

In the foregoing sections we examined root clauses by using several criteria and came to the conclusion that tense alone decides the finiteness of a clause. We saw that, in Kannada, agreement does not occur consistently in all root clauses, but tense is present morphologically in all finite clauses. We also noted that presence of agreement is contingent upon the presence of tense. In other words, agreement occurs only in finite clauses, but occurs exclusively in an   affirmative declarative clause. This means that clauses which are not affirmative lack agreement. We applied the same criteria to subordinate clauses. We observed that in all finite clause, tense is mandatory and agreement is present only in affirmative declarative clauses. The quotative endu-clause, embudu -clause and emba-clause are all declarative in force and hence agreement is present in these clauses when the verb is affirmative. The relative clause, the adverbial clause and the gerundive clause are not declarative and hence lack agreement inflection on their verbs. But they are undoubtedly finite as they are tensed.

The present study has shown that Kannada morphology is complex and that in considering the finiteness of a clause, one has to take into account factors such as clausal force, etc, since Kannada verbal morphology is sensitive to these factors.

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