Aspect as an indicator of finiteness in Kannada

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In this paper, we begin by observing the many ways in which gerunds in Kannada pattern with *bona fide* finite expressions cross-linguistically. We suggest that these behaviors are licensed by the presence of aspect marking in these constructions, with the conclusion that Aspect is at least a partial indicator of finiteness in Kannada. This leads to a puzzle however, wherein Kannada infinitival clauses do not seem to show analogous finiteness properties, despite previous claims that they indicate perfective aspect. Here, we argue against this claim, proposing instead that Kannada infinitivals *never* denote aspect regardless of where they appear – whether in negative assertions where they seem to convey past tense, or as complements to clause-taking verbs like *try*, where they convey unrealized/simultaneous tense relative to the matrix clause. This supports a unified analysis of infinitivals in the language, in contrast to the received view that separates their two aforementioned types of uses. The various tense interpretations that seemingly arise with Kannada infinitivals are explained by appealing to factors outside of the nature of the infinitival itself.

Kannada gerunds are finite. Gerunds in Kannada exhibit three core properties of 'finite' clauses across languages: namely, (i) the ability to license nominative subjects, (ii) the ability to appear in stand-alone clauses, and (iii) the ability to denote independent tense when they appear as subordinate clauses. (1) shows an example of a nominative subject appearing within a Kannada gerund construction. By contrast, in English, where it is well-established that gerunds are indeed non-finite, overt nominative subjects aren't licensed – as seen in the translation for (1), where the subject receives genitive case instead.

(1)   Avan-u   ban-d-iddu   Rashmi-ge   hiDisal-illa.
       He-NOM come-PRF-NOM Rashmi-DAT like-NEG   ("His/*He coming did not please Rashmi.")

Amritavalli (2014), who assumes Kannada gerunds to be non-finite leaves their ability to license nominative subjects as an open puzzle, but suggests the possibility that the nominative Case licensed by gerunds in Dravidian are *weak*, as opposed to *strong* nominative Case licensed in truly finite clauses. Here, we raise another possibility: that Kannada gerundive constructions are at least partially finite – sufficient to license regular, nominative subjects. Some other novel observations speak in favor of this latter conclusion. For instance, when gerunds in Kannada appear as subordinate clauses (2), they may carry a temporal signature independent of the matrix clause, patterning with finite clauses cross-linguistically.

(2)   Raama vanavaasa-kke hoog-uv-udu/hoogi-d-du   namage tiLid-ittu.
       Raama exile-to   go.NON-IMPF-NOM/go-PRF-NOM to.us   was.known
       "Raama's going/having gone to exile was known to us."

More strikingly, gerunds can appear in stand-alone clauses within focus constructions. Analogous constructions aren't permitted in English; notice that the underlined English verbs corresponding to the gerundive element in the examples below are finite, carrying regular tense marking:

(3)   Gaurav ishTa paTTi-d-du   aa   huDugi-anna.
       Gaurav like   do-PRF-NOM that girl-ACC   ("It is that girl that Gaurav liked.")

(4)   Pushpa nill-uv-udu   aa   baagila munde.
       Pushpa stand-IMPF-NOM that door   in.front.of
       "It is in front of that door that Pushpa stands / will stand."

Mithun (2016) discusses several diachronic pathways by which nominalized clauses across languages regain their finiteness status, usually to show special pragmatic relations in discourse. Our suggestion here is that this is precisely what has occurred with gerunds in Kannada, so that they are finite in the language today.

Aspect as a partial indicator of finiteness in Kannada. Many recent discussions in the literature view finiteness as a morpho-syntactic concept characterized by the presence of certain, language-specific types of syntactic features. If Kannada gerunds are finite, as we have claimed above, we are led to ask what syntactic feature is responsible for making them so. Here, we propose that it is aspect marking in the gerundive clause.

Finiteness in Kannada clauses has been previously investigated in detail by Amritavalli & Jayaseelan (2001), Amritavalli (2014) *et seq*., where the authors have concluded it is not Tense but Mood – realized

overtly as agreement in positive assertions, the negation marker *illa* in negative assertions, or modal auxiliaries – that marks finiteness in this language. They make the strong claim that Kannada clauses lack a Tense projection altogether, with aspect-marking being instead responsible for tense interpretation. In particular, imperfective aspect is read off as default non-past tense, and perfective aspect as past tense. For instance, in (5), the imperfective aspect in the gerund leads to non-past tense meaning, while Mood, encoded here by *illa*, leads to finiteness. Importantly here, aspect does not contribute to finiteness, only to temporal interpretation.

(5)   Raama mane-ge bar-uv-ud(u)-illa.

        Raama house-to come-IMPF-NOM-NEG ("Raama does not/will not come to the house.")

Our current proposal differs from this established view in two main ways. First, we assume that Aspect not only contributes to temporal interpretation but also to finiteness – in addition to Mood – so that Kannada clauses are graded with respect to finiteness (cf. Nikolaeva 2010). In particular, we propose the scale in (6) to represent the finiteness hierarchy from least to most finite (with Mood still being the primary finiteness feature, following Amritavalli 2014, and due to certain distributional patterns with finite complementizer *-anta* that we omit here for space reasons but will discuss in the full paper). According to this, Kannada sentences that carry only Aspect but not Mood – such as relative clauses – are not non-finite, but semi-finite.

(6)   [-Mood, -Asp] < [-Mood, +Asp] < [+Mood, -Asp] < [+Mood, +Asp]

Second, we propose that infinitivals in Kannada, like in (7), do not indicate any Aspect at all – and thus directly contribute neither to finiteness of the clause nor to tense interpretation. This is in contrast to Amritavalli's (2014) claim that infinitivals can carry perfective aspect, leading to a past tense reading in (7) (where finiteness, again, is due to *illa*). An aspect-less analysis of Kannada infinitivals can explain why these items, unlike gerunds, do not satisfy finiteness diagnostics such as nominative subject licensing or appearing in stand-alone clauses. But a different explanation is needed for how the past tense reading arises in (7).

(7)   Raama mane-ge bar-al(u)-illa.

        Raama house-to come-INF-NEG   ("Raama did not come to the house.")

An aspect-less analysis of Kannada infinitivals. The received view on Kannada infinitivals from Amritavalli (2014), inspired from Stowell (1982), is that there are two different types of infinitivals in the language: one corresponding to the use in (7) where it appears with *illa* and indicates past tense (by way of perfective aspect), and another, possibly case-marked use appearing as complement to verbs like *try / decide*: see (8), and denoting simultaneous / unrealized temporal interpretation relative to the matrix clause.

(8)   Saatvika haNNu tar-al(-ikke)   nooDidanu/nirdharisidanu.

        Sathvik fruit   bring-INF(-DAT) tried.3.SG.M/decided.3.SG.M

        "Sathvik tried/decided to bring fruit."

We argue against such an ambiguity analysis, claiming instead that Kannada infinitivals are uniform in never directly contributing to temporal interpretation, regardless of where they occur. As part of this argument, we engage with Amritavalli & Jayaseelan's (2001) point that such aspect is what licenses infinitival morphology on passive verbs in the language, by appealing instead to Hallman's (2021) arguments that passive meanings of the verb arise by virtue of the context that they appear in, and not due to the specific morphology of the passive verb. Instead, for (8), we follow Wurmbrand (2007) in taking the simultaneous or unrealized tense interpretation (with *try* and *decide* respectively) to arise by virtue of the semantics of the matrix predicate (where *decide* but not *try* independently embeds the future modal *woll*), together with the restructured status of the embedded infinitival predicate so that it shares its temporal interpretation with the matrix clause. We will suggest that the case-marking in (8) is licensed for reasons other than the nature of the infinitival itself, thus also explaining why the infinitival in (9) cannot be case-marked, despite denoting unrealized tense.

(9)   AvaLu   hoog-al-(*ikk)-ee   beeku.

        She.NOM go-INF-(DAT)-EMPH must   (She must go.)

On the other hand, the past tense interpretation in (7) will be claimed to arise simply a result of infinitival morphology instantiating the 'elsewhere' case in the Kannada negation paradigm – where imperfective-marked gerunds are already dedicated to denoting default non-past tense.

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