FINITENESS, SUBJUNCTIVES, AND NEGATION IN ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

This paper pursues the analysis of finiteness and subjunctives in English proposed in Anderson (2001b), in the context of the approach to finiteness adopted in Anderson (1997, 2001a, 2006b, 2007). Thus it defends the position that the Present-day English subjunctive is non-finite, if finiteness is equated with the capacity to license independent sentencehood. In particular, I present here some further evidence for such an analysis deriving from the syntax of negation. Specifically, the position of the negative with the "present" subjunctive is the position associated with the negating of a non-finite form. And positional behaviour under negation is also in accord with the idea that the subjunctive "periphrasis" with *should*, as well as the "past subjunctive" is also non-finite. The phenomena addressed are incompatible, however, with definitions of finiteness based on the presence of particular morphological categories.

1. Finiteness and the subjunctive

Anderson (2001b, 2004a: §3) suggests that the subjunctive forms of Present-day English, where they survive systematically, mark a syntactically non-finite predication.[1] Such predicators do not license independent predications, which he takes to be the role of the grammatical category of finiteness (see Anderson 2001a, 2006b: §8.2.1, 2007 – cf. too e.g. Jespersen 1924: 87; Anderson 1990, 1997: §2.3.3; Givón 1990: ch.19; Dik 1997: 144-168). Of course, this does not mean that finite predications are excluded from subordinate clauses, merely that they are not limited to them. Such a limitation defines non-finites.

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[1] The formulation of what follows benefited from conversations with Fran Colman, who also commented on pre-final versions of this paper, as she has on others I have submitted to *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia* – to whose progenitor and midwives I offer my heartiest congratulations and wish continuing success.

The occurrence of the subjunctive form in (1) is limited (if we ignore a few idioms – *God save the king*, *God help us*, etc.) to dependent clauses, including particularly the type of (1), in which its presence reflects rection by a superordinate verb (thus necessarily subordinate status):

1)   They demanded (that) he leave.

The form in (1), descended from the "present subjunctive", lacks overt inflexion. The occurrence of the *leave* form in the subordinate clause, as an alternative for some speakers to the formally indicative *leaves*, is sanctioned by the semantic class of the main verb.

Leave lacks any indication of the morphological dimensions usually associated with unmarked finites in English (though this is of course not necessarily true of the forms labelled "subjunctive" in other languages). In declarative sentences in English (main or reported) finiteness is associated with the combination of marking of the predicator with person/number or tense and the licensing of unmarked ("nominative") subjecthood. The subordinate verb in (1) has no person-number marking, and no deictic tense (cf. e.g. Anderson 2001b, 2004a: §3; Huddleston – Pullum 2002: 80-89). However, since, historically, the English subjunctive was tense-marking, and such tense terminology is still applied to it, let us look more carefully at the alleged absence of tense.

Some speakers also allow (2) alongside (1):

2)   They demanded (that) he left.

But the *left* form does not represent a deictic (or primary) tense: it does not signal that the time of leaving was or is to be prior to the moment of speaking; it reflects in this case (optional) "sequence of tense" (e.g. Declerck 1990). *Left* is impossible if the main verb is non-preterite. The tense of the subordinate verb is in "harmony" with that of the main verb (cf. Anderson 2004b: §3.2).

In the colloquial language, (2) could as well be a (for many speakers, optional) variant of the indicative in (3), rather than of (1):

3)   They demanded (that) he leaves.

There is, whatever, no semantic contrast in morphological tense with the use of this subjunctive, whether or not (2) is a variant of (1). More on tense below, where we also take up the analysis of (2) and motivations for regarding the subordinate verb in it as indeed indicative.

We cannot define definiteness in terms of the presence of particular morphosyntactic properties (other than the licensing of independence). However, lack of (some of) the morphological properties associated with finiteness in declara-

tives in a particular language is what we generally expect of non-finites. Syntac-tic non-finiteness of a predicator may be associated with reduction in morpho-logically-signalled "verbal" or the presence of "nominal" categories, as well as by position and other syntactic differences in the predication headed by that predicator (Anderson 2001b, 2004a). And there seem to be typological correla-tions among the categories selected to mark finiteness (see e.g. some of the contributions to Nikolaeva 2007).

In (1) (compared with 2, say), however, we seem to have loss of overt "ver-bal" morphology simply. And it is this that correlates with non-finiteness in this case, even though the subordinate clause in (1) contains an unmarked ("nomina-tive") subject – often associated with finiteness. However, licensing of subjec-thood is not to be mistaken for licensing of independent status for the predica-tion; these are in principle independent. The equivalent of the subordinate clause in (1) cannot stand alone as an independent sentence; non-finiteness here is associated with the morphological reduction. This in itself does not render a predicator non-finite; but it frequently reflects non-finiteness, lack of the capac-ity to confer syntactic independence.

The verbal inflexion that descends historically from the "preterite subjunc-tive", and which we find in the protasis of "unreal conditional" sentences such as (4), is also not a marker of the traditional tense distinction marked on the first (main-clause) verb in (1-3). As in (1), the subjunctive in (4) marks a degree of "irrealis", stronger in (4), further from factivity:

4)   If it fell it would shatter.

Leave in (1) and *fell* in (4) do not contrast in tense. The latter inflected form is the marker of another variety of subjunctive, not a simple preterite tense marker (Anderson 2004a: §3.3), nor a tensed subjunctive. I shall call it simply the "in-flected subjunctive", which contrasts with the other subjunctive form in the circumstances in which it can occur.

The occurrence of the "inflected subjunctive", though always in a subordinate clause, is not limited to the protasis of conditionals. It, as well as a "periphrasis" (with *would*), occurs in the complements of verbs of volition, for instance, as in *I wish they lived nearer/I wish it would shatter*. But I do not pursue this here: see again Anderson (2004a: §3.3) for discussion. Consideration of this other circum-stance of occurrence does not fundamentally alter the picture. I use the term "pe-riphrasis" rather loosely for analytic expression of secondary syntactic categories such as tense and mood that are often expressed morphologically.

In (1) we find what, in recognition of its present-day status, I shall call the "bare subjunctive" (which is a bare stem) rather than the "inflected". The sub-junctives do not contrast in tense; neither of them participates in the morpho-

logical contrast in semantic tense found in finite forms. The inflected subjunctive, despite the presence of an inflexion, can still be said to be morphologically reduced, in not marking person/number or tense, but merely, like the bare subjunctive, some form of irrealis whose character is determined by the conditioning factors for its occurrence. This is true even of the copula, which otherwise is richest in verbal inflexions: the two subjunctive forms, *be* and *were*, are invariant. And again, in accordance with its non-finite status, the clause *it fell* cannot occur as an independent sentence with the meaning it has in (4).

This introduces another important aspect of non-finiteness: it may be only on one interpretation of a form that it is incompatible with the licensing of an independent sentence. The same form may be parsed in different ways. In the present case, preterite *fell* is finite, but inflected subjunctive *fell* is not. Similarly, *should* may be either finite, as a modal verb equivalent to *ought*, or non-finite, as a subjunctive "periphrasis" (Anderson 2001b, 2004a) – see further §§2 and 3.

The traditionally-labelled "past tense" in English may in general be parsed as either a modal (irrealis) form or a temporal marker. Historically in English, this form involves the collapse in expression of indicative and subjunctive past tense (in forms other than *be*). And even with *be* the historically indicative *was* has been drawn into marking the subjunctive, so that in (5) either form is available:

5)   If Fred was/were here, he would not agree.

Both forms in (5) indicate irrealis not tense. And they are non-finite, under this interpretation. When marking the category of tense, however, *was* realises a finite predicator. In general, then, the morphological markers of irrealis in English that we label as the subjunctives are non-finite.

There are other non-finites that retain more of the properties associated with finites than the English subjunctives do. For instance, the participle in (6) is arguably marked for tense, and in (7) it is in temporal (whatever else) contrast with the present participle:

6)   The project has failed.

7)   the failed (*vs.* failing) project

In French, the construction in (8) is, in this instance at least, past rather than perfect (however one characterises the latter), but the tense is carried by the participle – as is perhaps even clearer in (9):

8)   <u>Ils</u> sont part<u>is</u> à six heures
      'They left at six o'clock'

9)   La partie fin<u>ie</u>, il l'emmena dans un coin (*Flaubert*)
     'When the game was finished, he led him into a corner'

And, as in these examples, the participle may also agree in number and gender with the subject, which itself is an "unmarked (nominative) subject". This undermines any simple-minded identification of finiteness with inflecting for "tense" (see below). At the very least, there needs to be some clarification of what it means to be "inflected for tense".

2. Finiteness and negation

What I want to discuss here is further evidence, not in itself unfamiliar, for the non-finiteness of English subjunctives. This consists in restrictions on the syntax of sentences of the character of (1) under negation. If the subordinate clause in such a construction is negated, then for many speakers only the formally indicative form (11), negative equivalent of (3), is permissible, but not (10), that is, what would seem to be the equivalent of (1) (in Standard English), given that the subjunctive otherwise lacks person/number marking:

10)   *They demanded that he don't leave.

11)   They demanded (that) he doesn't leave.

And for those who accept (2) we have the negative (12):

12)   They demanded (that) he didn't leave.

This appears to confirm that (2) is indeed formally indicative: (2) has the negative equivalent (12), just as indicative (3) has the negative equivalent (11), whereas there is no such equivalent to the subjunctive (1). So subjunctives do not even show morphological differentiation of preterite/non-preterite by tense harmony (as envisaged initially in §1 in relation to (2); subjunctives lack the morphological tense associated with finites entirely.

   The absence of (10) is unsurprising if subjunctives are indeed non-finite, as Anderson (2001b, 2004a: §3) suggests: tensed "periphrastic *do*" is obligatory in negative indicative clauses. And non-finiteness of the subjunctive is further confirmed by the existence for some speakers of negative variants such as that in (13), which simply lack the "periphrastic *do*":

13)   They demanded (that) he not leave.

The negative here occurs, moreover, in the position we expect it to occupy in non-finite clauses, such as (14):

14)   We saw him not reply.

I have used an example with the "bare infinitive" (identical in form to the bare subjunctive) to avoid the issues raised by the variability in positioning associated with the "periphrastic infinitive" of (15):

15)   They told him (not) to (not) go.

However, if both the *to* in (15) and the following verb are non-finites (Anderson 1997: §3.6.2), then these positionings are in accord with those in (13) and (14), whatever else may be involved in the case of the variants in (15).

This all confirms that the Present-day English subjunctive is non-finite. The occurrence with the subjunctive of the negative construction associated with non-finites is otherwise a puzzle – or recourse has to be had to "coincidence". (13) also illustrates (if further illustration is needed) that licensing of unmarked subjecthood is not restricted to finite, or tensed clauses.

Such a conclusion is denied by proponents of the analysis of the subjunctive that is presented in Haegeman and Guéron (1999). There they observe approximately what has been exemplified here concerning the subjunctive, and suggest something apparently not dissimilar as concerns analysis: "… what we referred to as the subjunctive form of the verb is indeed the bare infinitive" (1999: 325), for them a "non-finite" form. The subjunctive is indeed incompatible with their definition of "finite" forms: "Verbs inflected for tense or agreement are *finite*" (1999: 34). "However", they go on:

> … there are two arguments which indicate that clauses containing subjunctive verbs are finite clauses. First, … clauses with a present subjunctive verb are introduced by the complementizer *that*, the complementizer which typically selects finite clauses. Second, clauses with a subjunctive verb have a nominative subject, suggesting that the inflectional nodes are finite.

(Haegeman – Guéron 1999: 325). And they reconcile these observations concerning "finiteness" with the suggestion that "the subjunctive mood in English is associated with a non-overt modal auxiliary, the equivalent of the overt modal *should*". They also point out that for many speakers the complementiser is not optional in the kind of subjunctive sentence we have been looking at. And they argue that "the finite complementiser *that* is required to identify the non-overt modal".

However, as concerns this last point, since many other speakers allow the complementiser to be absent from such subjunctive clauses (as indicated in my

examples), clearly it cannot be said to be "required", whether or not we take the role of the complementiser to be to "identify the non-overt modal", rather than (on an analysis that does not posit such) simply to "identify" the (non-saliently expressed) subjunctive. Moreover, Haegeman and Guéron's first argument is heavily dependent on the second. We can replace their formulation with the statement that *that* typically selects clauses with an unmarked ("nominative") subject. That leaves open the question of whether such clauses are finite or not or either. Whether or not *that* marks clauses as finite depends on whether we regard presence of an unmarked subject as a sign of finiteness.

We are faced, then, unless some other analysis still is appropriate, with a choice between an account in which "nominative" subjects are not restricted to finite clauses and one in which such a restriction (of "nominative" subjects to finites) is maintained at the cost of invoking yet another non-overt element. Observe that on the latter account the non-overt modal will also have to inflect (non-overtly) for tense or agreement if it is to be "finite", unless it is simply stipulated as finite: neither is a happy suggestion. The choice of account also involves a generalisable notion of finiteness (as espoused here) vs. a definition of finiteness (in terms of the presence of certain morphological categories) that is patently not generalisable (see Koptjevskaya-Tamm 1993 and much recent work on the typology of finiteness).

For me the choice seems to be straightforward: apart from anything else, analyses invoking covert categories extend, and seriously weaken, the theory of syntactic categories, and indeed considerably restrict access to potential falsification (cf. e.g. Anderson 2006a). The positing of yet another type of covert category represents another undesirable weakening. Such a point of view concerning covert categories is, however, contentious, surprisingly enough. But there are already apparent other, less general, less theory-laden problems with the covert-modal analysis, and with Haegeman and Guéron's characterisation of "finiteness".

Observe, in the first place, that the covert-modal analysis is not obviously extendable to the inflected subjunctive, illustrated in (4). As we have seen, it also is not inflected for tense or agreement, as indicatives are, though it bears an inflexion which has the same form as the past (except in part in the case of *be*), on account of the collapse in morphological expression of the indicative/subjunctive distinction in these historically past forms. The collapse in expression between indicative past and subjunctive past meant that the subjunctive lost the category of tense (and tensed verbs lost the subjunctive).

The inflected subjunctive too is non-finite. But if having a "nominative" subject is a sign that a clause is "finite", then a non-overt modal must apparently be also associated with the protasis of (4). But overt modals do not take the inflected form of (4) but the bare forms of (16):

16) If it should fall it would shatter.

or the "*to*-periphrasis" of the protasis in (17):

17) If it were to fall it would shatter.

The putative non-overt modal of (4) would then display some very unmodal-like requirements.

  Further, Haegeman and Guéron's suggestion concerning subjunctives merely extends the paradox that the allegedly "finite" form of (18) shows marking for neither tense nor agreement, but is invariable in these respects in Present-day English:

18)   They demand(ed) (that) he should leave.

The "finite" form in the second, subordinate clause (18) is again incompatible with their definition of "finiteness", which I repeat: "Verbs inflected for tense or agreement are *finite*" (Haegeman – Guéron 1999: 34). *Should* here is invariant, and is compatible with either a preterite or non-preterite main verb; it is again a subjunctive "periphrasis" and behaves accordingly. But if the non-overt modal is to confer finiteness on its clause then, apparently unlike *should*, it should inflect for tense or person-number. We have either an extension of the paradox (yet another "finite" element that fails to meet the definition) or an apparent contradiction: the "covert modal" postulated for (1) is "finite", so presumably it is "inflected for tense or agreement", but the overt modal of (18) is overtly not "finite".

  There seem to be only desperate remedies to this situation – including stipulation of finiteness in both cases. Alternatively, if the non-overt modal inflects non-overtly, perhaps so does the overt modal *should*. Or is there a non-overt modal with *should* that confers "finiteness" despite the non-finiteness of the latter? Surely any of these ways lies a madness brought on by the concentrated contemplation of covert categories. It seems, however, to be an ailment shared by an increasing number of sufferers.

  The non-finiteness of the *should* of (18), however, is compatible with the position that it is a "subjunctive periphrasis" (Anderson 2004a: §3.1), and so in this case, like the bare subjunctive, indeed non-finite; they are respectively (potentially stylistically differentiated) analytic and synthetic manifestations of the same categories. The use of *should* in (16) is also as a functional near-equivalent to the inflected subjunctive, but potentially semantically distinct from it (Anderson 2004a), in being necessarily (irrealis) predictive rather than simply irrealis. But it is still non-finite; it cannot occur in this sense in an independent clause; and even in Haegeman and Guéron's terms it is "non-finite", it does not inflect for tense or agreement.

Of course, as anticipated above, *should* used as an ordinary modal (where it is usually paraphrasable by *ought*), rather than as a "periphrasis" (where it is not), is finite in the terms adopted here (Anderson 2001a), despite (overtly) again failing Haegeman and Guéron's definition. Compare with the "periphrastic" equivalent of the inflected subjunctive (16) the ordinary modal use (twice) in (19):

19) If I should leave, so should you.

For many speakers (19) can be rather closely paraphrased by (20):

20) If I ought to leave, so ought you.

The "periphrastic" use of (12) has no such paraphrase with *ought*:

21) *If it ought to fall it would break.

"Modal" *should* and *ought* are both unhappy in such a sentence. The form *should*, which is invariant, has both finite and non-finite "uses"; it has a "use", as a subjunctive "periphrasis", in which it cannot license an independent sentence, as well as its "normal" modal "uses", in which it can. These "uses" reflect a categorial difference.

"Finiteness" is controversial, but, whatever sense we make of it, clearly it has nothing to do with necessarily inflecting for "tense or agreement", though in many languages it may in many constructions be associated with the presence of such verbal inflexions – unsurprisingly, given that verbs are the core predicators and finiteness has to do with the licensing of (independent) predications. And, on the interpretation adopted here, the conferring by finiteness of potential independence on a clause is not a prerequisite for a clause's having an unmarked ("nominative") subject. The attempted reduction of "finiteness" to such other properties as these is not persuasive. If finiteness is going to be of any theoretical or descriptive interest, it cannot be yoked to such traditional Rameian definitions as: "Finite verbs are those to which person and number appertain" (Murray 1795: 113) – definitions that focus on the contingent rather than the essential. No insight is offered by simply labelling as "finiteness" the presence in a particular language and construction of certain morphological categories (particularly if they are non-overt); and such identification cannot be generalised (except by virtue of the self-confirming assumption that the categories may be covert). The significance of these categories is that in a particular language their (partial or total) absence can signal non-finiteness, i.e. the inability to constitute an independent predication.

3. Finiteness and negative placement

In the preceding section I argued that the fact that subjunctives and infinitives are preceded by the negative is not fortuitous. It follows from their shared non-finite status in English. Finite and non-finite predicators differ in the relative position to them of a negative which "modifies" them semantically. – I am not interested here in the categorisation of the negative, or in the precise nature of the semantico-syntactic relation between predicator and negative, which I am vaguely, as with the term "periphrasis", and, in the present case, more inaccurately, labelling "modification".

   We saw that the negative precedes non-finites, whether subjunctive (13) or infinitive (14), or, as in (22), participial:

22)   Not wishing to stay, she contrived an excuse.

But the negative follows finite independent (non-lexical) predicators that it "modifies" semantically:

23)   She need not leave.

Lexical verbs can be finite, i.e. they can incorporate a finiteness predicator: cf. *She left*, where the verb form is complex, and includes finiteness and a lexical component. Finite lexical verbs and negation, however, are incompatible in Present-day English:

24)   *She left not/She needs not to leave.

The lexical verbs in (25), as non-finites, take a preceding negative:

25)   She did not leave/She doesn't need to leave.

As is familiar, *do* here realises a default non-lexical finite, present in negative (and other) clauses in the absence of a modal or other aspectually or diathetically relevant "auxiliary". As a result, in negative clauses lexical verbs appear in a non-finite form that is dependent on an independent finite, as in (25).

   We thus seem to have basically a simple correlation, in relation to sequencing, between negation and finiteness, as expressed in (26):

26)   *Finiteness and negative placement in English*
        its "modifying" negative precedes a non-finite
        a finite precedes its "modifying" negative

This formulation raises some questions concerning what is proposed in §2, however, questions which I now want to address. Let me first, however, extend slightly the range of expression-types to be considered.

In the constructions we have just been looking at, the negative "modifies" the preceding finite, as in (23), or the following non-finite, as in (25). It is also the non-finite that is "modified" in (27) (to illustrate with another modal):

27) She must not leave.

The contrast between *need* and *must* in this respect illustrates that modals can differ in whether they attract or repel "modification" by the negative; *need* in (23) attracts, *must* in (27) repels. The positioning of the negative between finite and non-finite is ambivalent: depending on the finite, it may be either "pre-modifying" with respect to the non-finite or "post-modifying" with respect to the modal.

Consider again (16) *If it should fall it might shatter*, and (18) *They de-mand*(*ed*) (*that*) *he should leave*.

On the analysis adopted here, the *should* of (16) and (18) is non-finite. How-ever, in (28) and (29) *should* might appear to take the "modifying" negative to the right, contrary to (26):

28) If it should not fall it might survive.
29) They demand(ed) (that) he should not leave.

This seems to call into question either the formulation in (26) or the claimed non-finiteness of "subjunctive" *should*. However, the negative in (28) "modi-fies" the following non-finite, not the preceding *should*. In conformity with (26) the negative should not "modify" the latter, since it is non-finite and it precedes. Just like the "periphrastic *do*" of (25), the *should* of (28) is not "modified" by the negative. The placement in (28) and (29) conforms to the generalisation in (26), even if *should* there is a non-finite "periphrastic".

Similarly, the subjunctive of *be* in (30) is non-finite, and the negative "modi-fies" the lexical verb:

30) If it were (not) to (not) happen she would be disappointed.

The behaviour of negation in (28), (29) and (30), rather than calling into ques-tion the approach to finiteness adopted here, is quite compatible with the present analysis of both the Present-day English subjunctive and its "periphrastic" *should* alternative as non-finite.

Note finally the possible problem that, as illustrated in (31), negation of the inflected subjunctive is associated with presence of a "periphrastic *do*", which otherwise is finite:

31) If it did not happen she would be disappointed.

But the *did* of (31) is not part of a tensed "periphrasis", as it is when it is finite; it is part of a subjunctive "periphrasis", which like all subjunctives is not finite. But, as with "periphrastic" *do* elsewhere (though finite), the negative "modifies" the following lexical verb, which is non-finite. Thus "periphrastic *do*", as well as *should* and *would*, can be either finite or non-finite, depending on how the form is interpreted.

I conclude that the generalisation in (26) can be maintained if English subjunctives are non-finite (whatever their status in other languages which have been identified as having such a form, such as Old English). The English subjunctive is a verbal form that, unlike the indicative, can neither itself incorporate finiteness (as in *She left*) nor depend on an independent finite predicator, unlike the non-finites in (23) and (25). Instead, the irrealis form in (17) depends on a finite modal categorised for a "periphrastic" function; and elsewhere, as in (16) and (18), it depends on a non-finite "periphrastic" modal, as an alternative to its own non-finite occurrence. The phenomena that we have looked at are another indication of the usefulness of the idea that finiteness is an independence-licensing category, and not to be reduced to a presence of a bundle of morphological categories, overt or covert.

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