



## Book Review

**Bingjun Yang.** 2022. *Non-finiteness: A process-relation perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, xx+230pp. ISBN: 978-1-316-51341-5 (hbk).

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Non-finiteness is a theoretical concept noticed by scholars hundreds of years ago, perplexing linguists heretofore due to its opaqueness and universality in natural languages. Opinions vary, with one general agreement being that verbs of non-finiteness will not be affected by grammatical tense, nor will they possess the qualities of aspect, mood, or voice. However, this agreement neglects the case of non-inflectional languages (e.g. Chinese). Thus, the question arises to what extent generalizations can be made that apply cross-linguistically. It is in the book being reviewed that cross-linguistic generalizations can be better approached by adopting a process-relation framework with systemic functional linguistics (SFL) as the basis. This book recasts Yang's extensive interest in and study of non-finiteness (also see Yang 2004), offering a comprehensive investigation and adding to the current body of knowledge on this phenomenon. The book will increase readers' interest in non-finiteness, especially in this burgeoning area of artificial intelligence, where language segmentation and annotation encounter difficulties, particularly in the identification of finite and non-finite components.

In Chapter 1, Yang leads us into the atmosphere in which the exploration of non-finiteness in both inflectional and non-inflectional languages is necessary. And then the chapter specifies the author's research purposes, research questions, and methodology. In this chapter, Yang shows briefly the issues of finite and non-finite forms in theoretical exploration, natural language processing, and typological studies.

Chapter 2 combs through a rich bank of viewpoints revolving around the determining factors for a finite/non-finite distinction, from traditional grammar, typological perspectives, Generative Grammar, and Cognitive Grammar, to Systemic Functional Grammar, and to other theories including Semiotic Grammar, Role and Reference grammar, and Functional Discourse Grammar. This chapter indicates that despite variations in the finite/non-finite distinction from disparate theories, the general trend emphasizes the ideas that the distinction is a gradient phenomenon and that finiteness is a feature of the clause. This chapter also suggests that firstly there are intermediate realizations between the two poles of "finite" and "non-finite"; secondly, there are cross-linguistic similarities in children's use of non-

finiteness prior to their Optional Infinitive (OI) stage (Wexler 1994, 1998); thirdly, a functional perspective is recommended to better explore the finite/non-finite distinction.

Yang's book's eight chapters are well organized and his arguments in this book can be condensed into four aspects. Firstly, the three parameters of "moodlessness", "clause dependency", and "incompleteness" are necessary for determining the status of non-finiteness in non-inflectional languages (e.g. Chinese), although "incompleteness" may not be obligatory when identifying non-finiteness in inflectional languages (e.g. English) (Chapter 3). Secondly, Yang suggests that ideational grammatical metaphor (IGM) is not only the underlying mechanism that motivates the transferring from event, status, or process to entity, but also the window for observing the continuum of embedding, non-finiteness, and rankshifting. Along this cline, non-finiteness is situated between congruent and metaphorical forms as the intermediate realization (Chapter 5). Thirdly, the FRP (Full Realization Principle), the LFVP (Limit of Finite Verb Principle), and the three parameters are introduced as important strategies for ironing out puzzling phenomena in English and Chinese clause constructions concerning non-finiteness (Chapters 6 and 7). Fourthly, holding a divergent view from the traditional theory of clause and clause complexes, Yang proposes eight process-relation types (Chapter 4) and three inter-clausal relations (Chapter 5), which are expected to shed new light on the current theories in linguistics.

Chapter 3 lays a solid theoretical basis for defining non-finiteness in this book and serves as a major pillar for the development of chapters 4 through 7. This chapter begins by introducing the concepts of "cryptotype" (Whorf 1945) and "cline" (Halliday 1961) for comprehending grammatical categories after establishing a clear distinction between written grammars and spoken grammars in exploring non-finiteness. The three metafunctions and the taxonomy of six process types theorized by Halliday are considered to be universal. Process as the basic semantic unit is classified into major, median, and minor processes. Accordingly, clause as the basic syntactic unit consists of major, median, and minor clauses. To address the issue of embedding status in relation to ideational grammatical metaphor, the FRP is advocated for categorizing metaphoric syndromes from raw realization, to intermediate realization, and to full and demetaphorized realizations. This principle clarifies the three situations of rankshifting, embedding, and non-finite clauses. Then, the LFVP is put forward to address the issue of finite verbs in clauses, which is crucial not only for analyzing Chinese but also other non-inflectional languages. Finally, non-finiteness is defined in terms of function towards the end of this chapter, in view that "finiteness belongs to the grammar of inter-clausal connectivity" (p. 99). In this way, this chapter lays a solid theoretical foundation for exploring non-finiteness in subsequent chapters.

Adopting a unique process-relation view that differs from the orthodox SFG, Yang in Chapter 4 deals with the situations where non-finiteness occurs. This has been well-demonstrated by analyzing the construction types within a single clause. Specifically, eight types of process configurations are summarized: (i) the basic construction, (ii) para-relation of processes, (iii) hypo-relation of processes, (iv) the participant conflated, (v) process as primary participant, (vi) process as secondary participant, (vii) process as circumstance, and (viii) the triple participant in a single process. Through the analysis, it is revealed that non-finiteness does not occur in para-relation of processes, but it is usually implicated in hypo-relation of processes (with or without a hypotactic relator) in a single clause. This chapter concludes by stating that the major difference between inflectional and non-inflectional languages is that incompleteness in ideation is not an essential parameter to determine non-finiteness in English, but is necessary for modern Chinese.

Chapter 5 seeks to address the question of how non-finiteness operates as a crucial strategy for inter-clausal connectivity, with a brief review of clause combining in English and Chinese. Critical viewpoints put forward in this chapter include that “subordinators in English are frequently used together with non-finite clauses” (p.121), and that “non-finiteness has to be present as a useful strategy to perform the function of conjunctions in non-inflectional languages like Chinese” (p.125). Additionally, this chapter indicates that the clause continua provided by Lehmann (1988) as well as non-finiteness as a basic category of clause conjoining are useful for examining clause relations. To get rid of the confusion of concepts such as subordination, coordination, embedding, projection, and expansion, regarding clause combining, Yang summarizes three clause relations: paratactic relations, circumstantial relations, and participial relations, and explains that non-finite clauses are involved in all these types of relations but relatively scarce in paratactic relations. Lastly, when observing metaphoric syndrome, Yang regards non-finite clauses as the “bridge” for process compression, which straddle the metaphorical and the congruent realizations.

Chapter 6 incorporates the theoretical underpinnings and applies the eight types of constructions to inspecting non-finite constructions in English. It suggests that observing the process types of the major verb can help separate causatives and non-causatives. Data from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) demonstrate that verbs employed as  $VP_1$  in the causal structure “ $VP_1+NP_2+VP_2$ ” are typically used to denote material processes. Subsequently, process relations are analyzed in typical English constructions that are identified by previous works, as well as those highly-debated constructions: “the serial verb construction (SVC)”, “the existential construction (EC)” and “the absolute construction (AC)”. With the process-relation perspective and the identification of major, median, and minor

processes in mind, informed interpretations could be made when analyzing ambiguous non-finite constructions.

Chapter 7 utilizes the process-relation perspective to revolve highly-debated Chinese constructions concerning non-finiteness. IGM is used as the underlying mechanism, and the FRP and the LFVP as the guiding principles. Yang begins by reviewing disagreements about the understanding of SVC in Mandarin. He proposes to divide SVCs into two major types from the process-relation perspective: explicit and implicit SVCs. Explicit SVC occurs when the hypo-relator is present and reversing the order of processes results in an unacceptable expression, while the absence of relators and changes in meaning based on process sequence will contribute to an implicit SVC. According to the process-relation perspective, an SVC consists of a major process and a median process, with the median process carrying the meaning focus.

Then, Yang shifts the focus to pivotal construction of “VP<sub>1</sub>+NP<sub>2</sub>+VP<sub>2</sub>”. He contends that this construction is better viewed as a contraction of two clauses, with IGM serving as the underlying mechanism, and the secondary process being a non-finite clause. Similar treatment from the process-relation perspective and IGM is also applicable to the analysis of EC. Finally, Yang applies the FRP and the LFVP to other frequently controversial examples regarding process relations, concluding that process type and construction type should be determined before detecting and analyzing non-finiteness. As is customary in academic writing, the final chapter of this book highlights its major contributions, acknowledges the limitations of the present study, and paves the way for future research, particularly in relation to the practical applications in various fields.

Previous studies on the distinction between finiteness and non-finiteness have mainly focused on the morphological and syntactic criteria of verbs, either based on the morphological markers carried by the verbs or the position of the verbs in the clause. For example, Cristofaro (2003: 54) suggests that “verb forms may be distinguished on the basis of the clause types in which they can occur. A verb form may be used in two ways only: either it can occur in independent declarative clauses, or it cannot”. Verbs that can serve as the central predicate in an independent clause are considered finite, while those that cannot are non-finite. In this way, finiteness and non-finiteness are treated as discrete phenomena in a binary system. Quirk et al. (1985) attempts to examine the gradience of a verb’s finiteness by looking at its broader syntactic environment, but the issue of cross-linguistic universality has not been addressed. While perspectives from Generative Grammar (e.g. Pollock 1989) further analyze finiteness and non-finiteness as more abstract clausal properties, they still rely on English tense and agreement markers as benchmarks for cross-linguistic research on this topic.

Compared with research from other perspectives, this book, which is theoretically grounded in SFL, offers several noteworthy contributions. Firstly, it extends the connotation of finiteness to be the property of the clause, not reducible to the property of the verb, thereby clarifying the status of finiteness and non-finiteness in diverse clause constructions. Secondly, the proposed standards are not restricted to inflectional languages such as English, but are also applicable to Chinese, a representative of non-inflectional languages that have received little attention in the literature. Thirdly, previous ambiguity around the identification of non-finiteness can be attributed to a hazy understanding of clausal relations. In Yang's research, non-finiteness is not only explained as a linguistic phenomenon, but also seen as a manifestation of clausal linkage. By emphasizing ideational grammatical metaphor and process-relations in determining non-finiteness, Yang provides a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon. The proposal of the FRP and the LFVP also offers a novel way to address puzzling phenomena in clause constructions involving non-finiteness.

Overall, this book gives a good summary of research concerning non-finiteness and presents an insightful and state-of-the-art picture of the finiteness/non-finiteness distinction with a logically organized structure and well-founded evidence. Moreover, it enriches the theoretical background by exploring the distinction from an SFL perspective, where no systemist has conducted such a detailed and well-grounded study regarding this phenomenon. The author has performed an excellent job of inheriting the essence of SFL, for instance, incorporating ideas of Halliday's meta-functions (condensed into the three parameters for non-finiteness identification) and proposing a felicitous classification of construction types and clause relations for identifying non-finiteness based on functional components. In a nutshell, this study offers an exemplary model for advancing SFL theory itself and has the potential to greatly broaden its application areas.

Future studies on other syntactic phenomena stand to benefit greatly from the theoretical underpinnings presented in this book. Application areas such as language processing, text segmentation, translation studies, and pedagogical studies may gain from this research as well. This book represents a significant breakthrough in linguistic theory research, especially in the domains of English and Chinese languages, and provides academics with a thorough resource for linguistic studies moving forward. However, to fully apply the approaches from this book, practitioners need to break away from traditional discussions and embrace the vision pioneered by the author.

As theoretical as it is, understanding all the information in this book requires expertise in SFL. Although Yang has stated explicitly in Chapter 1 that this study generally aims to provide a theoretical framework for the description of non-finiteness, readers without professional knowledge may struggle to link the

construction types and clause relations proposed by Yang throughout the book. Therefore, a more accessible display of the novel terms (i.e. parameters, principles, construction types, clause relations) should have been provided in a framework at the beginning of the book to facilitate understanding. Besides, the basis for comparison is currently limited to English and Chinese. Given that non-finiteness is a characteristic of all languages, a more varied set of languages should be considered to test the transferability of the principles, construction types, or relation types brought forward in this study.

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