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## Finiteness Features in Modals - Telugu

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### Abstract

The present paper concentrates on the finiteness and its relationship with the sentence structure in modals. In most of the languages, clauses have been classified into two types: finite and non-finite clauses. The decisive feature of finiteness may differ from language to language and it depends on the nature of the respective language. This paper tries to investigate the relevant feature which is responsible for finiteness, in Telugu, with respect to modals. Finiteness in Telugu is a complex phenomenon and it does not lend itself to a strait forward analysis. It is said that there are no principled grounds for establishing which feature is responsible for finiteness. In generative theory, tense and agreement play an important role to decide finiteness.

**Key words:** Finiteness, modals, (abstract) tense, agreement, embedded clauses.

### 1. Introduction

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It is noticed that only finite verb is able to form an independence utterance in the languages. The notion of finiteness has been widely described by linguists in different ways.

*Denoting a form of a verb or auxiliary which can in principle serve as the only verb form in a sentence and which typically carries the maximum in morphological marking for such categories as tense and agreement permitted in a language.* (Trask 1993: 103-4)

Cross-linguistically, finiteness has been observed that neither tense nor agreement comes under universal category. Therefore, anything which is chosen from the above two will be absent in a number of languages. For instance, if agreement is taken to be the relevant category, where verbs inflect for tense but not agreement, we can say that languages like Japanese which lack agreement lack finiteness altogether. If tense is considered as a decisive feature, the finite/non-finite opposition appears to be absent in languages like Lango, where verbs do not inflect for tense (Noonan 1992).

## 2. Modal Auxiliaries –*wacch* and –*āli/-wāli*

This paper examines what determines finiteness in Telugu with respect to modals. In Telugu, the notion of finiteness is considered as a morpho-syntactic feature. In English the modal verb precedes the main verb whereas Telugu modal verb follows the main verb. In most of the modals, we don't find the agreement markers as shown below. In this paper, we examine two modals in Telugu with respect to agreement and tense. They are '*-wacch*', (*may*), and '*-āli/-wāli*' (*should/must*).

The modal auxiliary *-wacch*, which is similar to '*may*' in English, has the meaning 'it comes' when it is used as the main verb (probabilitative-permissive, allowed to, permitted to) and '*-āli/-wāli*' (Obligative-*should/must*).

1. a. wāru ā sinima cūḍa-**wacch**.  
they-nom the movie watch-may  
They may watch the movie.

- b. wāḍu ā sinima cūḍa-**wacch**.

he-nom the movie watch-may  
He may watch the movie.

2. a. nīvu wārini kalav-**āli**.  
you-nom they-acc meet-should  
You should meet them.

b. āme atanni kalav-**āli**  
she-nom he-acc meet-should  
She should meet him.

Sentences (1, a-b) and (2, a-b) contain the modal *-wacch* ‘may; and *-āli/wāli* ‘should/must. These clauses have default present tense reading. These modals don’t show any PNG features and they are not overtly marked for tense. Both the features are not present overtly.

So, we assume that these clauses are finite clauses and they can stand alone. They also have nominative NPs.

In Old Telugu, ‘*-walay-un*’ ‘is needed’ got grammaticalized as an auxiliary verb and then as a mere bound morpheme ‘*-āli/-wāli*’, (Krishnamurti 2003).

3. ataḍu kāryālayani-ki veḷḷawalayun  
he-nom office-dat go-should  
He should/must go office.

4. āme ā pustakamu konawalayun  
she-nom the book buy-should  
She should/must buy the book.

These sentences (3-4) have the present tense reading. They are independent clauses and they also have the nominative subject NPs. So, it is clear that they are finite. In this way, Old/Modern Telugu modal verbs don’t overtly inflect for tense and agreement so it is difficult to

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say which decides finiteness. So, we will look at the examples in which one of them is absent or present. Consider the examples below:

### 3. Declaratives

5. atadu            āme-nu            kott-tā-**ḍu**  
he-nom            she-acc            beat-non-pst-3<sup>rd</sup> sg.M  
He beats her.

6. āme            atanni            kott-**in-di**  
she-nom            he-acc            beat-pst-3<sup>rd</sup> sg.F  
She beat him.

In the above examples, finite (main) verb inflects for tense and agreement. In Telugu, we have two morphemes which represent past and non-past morphemes. They are *-in* and *-tā* respectively. In these sentences, tense and agreement both are morphologically present. Cross linguistically, it is observed that the nominative Subject NP gets case from tense. So, we assume tense is the finiteness marker in Telugu. Now, we will look at the negative construction and how the finiteness can be found in this.

### 4. Negatives

In Telugu *-a* and *-lē* negative markers which represent non-past and past.

7. jān            ra-**a-ḍu**  
John-nom        come-neg-3<sup>rd</sup> sg.M  
John does not come.

8. nēnu        ra-**a-nu**  
I-nom        come-neg-1<sup>st</sup> sg.N  
I don't come.

Both of them show agreement but they have present tense reading but they lack overt tense marker. And they cannot occur with *ninna*, ‘yesterday’.

9. \*nēnu **ninna** ra-*a*-nu  
I-nom yesterday come-neg-1<sup>st</sup> sg.N  
I did not come yesterday.

However, we observe (10) and (11) lack agreement. But they can also be considered to be complete finite clauses. Because they can stand there own and they have a nominative subject.

10. jān ra- *lē* -dhu  
John-nom come-neg-def.agr  
John did not come.

11. wāru ra- *lē* -dhu  
they-nom come-neg-def.agr  
They did not come.

12. \* wāru rēpu ra- *lē* -dhu  
they-nom tomorrow come-neg-def.agr  
They won’t come tomorrow.

In these sentences we can see the absence of agreement. It is noticed that - *lē* negative marker can occur only in past tense. It represents the completion of the time. In the same way it can’t occur in future reading as in sentence (12). This observation leads that there is an abstract tense which assigns nominative case. So, they are finite clauses.

Now, let us go back to modals, in some constructions, tense is realized overtly as shown in the below.

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13. pillalu            ninna/ippḍu       akkaḍi-ki    veḷḷ-i-un-ḍalis-**in**-di  
children-nom    yesterday/now    there-dat    go-cpm-aux-should-pst-def.agr  
Children should have gone there yesterday/now.

14. \*pillalu            rēpu            akkaḍi-ki    veḷḷ-i-un-ḍalis-**in**-di  
children-nom    tomorrow    there-dat    go-cpm-aux-should-pst-def.agr  
children should have gone there tomorrow.

The example (13) is grammatical, in this, adverbs decides the time reference as we see ‘*ninna/ippḍu*’. In this sentence, there is no change on the verbal inflection, the agreement is absent, and the past tense morpheme ‘*in*’ is presented. If the adverb place is replaced by the adverb ‘*rēpu*’ tomorrow in the same construction (14), that is ungrammatical. So, we assume, in Telugu, there are only two tenses past and non-past. Tense plays an important role to determine finiteness in this language.

15. āme            ī            kānpharens-ki    vacciunḍawacch  
she -nom    this    seminar-dat       come-cpm-aux-might  
She might have come to this conference

16. wāru            ī            kānpharens-ki    vacciunḍawacch  
they-nom    this    seminar-dat       come-cpm-aux-might  
They might have come to this conference

It is clear that the above clauses are finite. In these clauses, we can observe that the presence of aux and the nominative subjects which make us to claim they are finite and moreover they are syntactically independent.

17. rādha            akkaḍi-ki    veḷḷ-i-un-ḍalis-**in**-di  
Radha-nom    there-dat    go-cpm-aux-should-pst-def.agr

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Radha should have gone there.

18. kṛṣṇa            akkaḍi-ki    ve||-i-un-ḍalis-**in**-di  
krishna-nom    there-dat    go-cpm-aux-should-pst-def.agr  
Krishna should have gone there.

Agreement is absent in these clauses as we have seen earlier. As sentences (17-18) show overt past tense marker *-in*, it is assumed that tense determines finiteness in these clauses. These clauses also have the aux and nominative NPs, and moreover they are syntactically independent. It is assumed that (abstract) tense is finiteness marker in Telugu.

## 6. Modals in Embedded Clauses

19. [nīvu            pāḍa-**valas-in-a**]            pāṭa    nēnu    pāḍ-ā-nu  
[you-nom    sing-should have-pst-rel] song    I-nom    sing-pst-1<sup>st</sup> sg.N  
I sang the song which you should have sung
20. [ataḍu            cēya-**valas-in-a**]            pani    nēnu    cēs-ā-nu  
[he-nom    do-should have-pst-rel] work    I-nom    do-pst-1<sup>st</sup> sg.N  
I did the work which he should have done

The above embedded verbs don't inflect for PNG features but they inflect for tense marker *-in*. So, we assume in many sentences the non-past lack overt tense marker whereas past tense generally has a tense marker. These modals don't appear in non-finite clauses. It is clear that tense is finiteness marker in Telugu.

## Conclusion

The present paper focuses on the modal auxiliaries in Telugu with respect to finiteness and it also describes whether the modal verbs inflect for tense and agreement or not. The main objective of the paper is to find out what determines finiteness in Telugu. Modals never occur in

non finite context. Therefore, this paper shows (abstract) tense is the main feature to decide finiteness.

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### Abbreviations

acc = accusative	neg = negative
aux = auxiliary	nom = nominative
cpm = conjunctive participial marker	non-pst = non-past
dat = dative	pst = past
def.agr = default agreement	rel = relative

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