

Finiteness in Akhvakh

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The traditional distinction between finite and non-finite verb forms relies on the idea that, syntactically, the function of head of independent clauses expressing statements is the most typical function of verb forms, and that the ability to fulfill this function normally goes with some degree of morphological completeness: in their morphology, non-finite verb forms lack argument indexation and/or TAM distinctions obligatorily expressed by finite forms; syntactically, they head phrases whose internal structure can be recognized as clausal, but clauses headed by non-finite verb forms cannot function as independent sentences.

However, the morphological completeness of verb forms is not always easy to evaluate, in particular with respect to TAM distinctions, and the inability to head independent clauses does not always correlate with a reduced set of verbal features. Moreover, some languages have verb forms productively used as heads of independent assertive clauses, but occurring also in dependent clauses in which they behave in the same way as typical non-finite verb forms.

Akhvakh has independent verb forms whose use in dependent clauses implies subordination mechanisms comparable to those applicable to clauses headed by finite verb forms in other languages. Akhvakh has also strictly dependent verb forms: infinitive and converbs. But Akhvakh has a third type of verb forms that question the notion of finiteness: these forms can be used as typical participles (i.e., behaving as the adjectival dependent of a head noun and at the same time heading a phrase whose internal structure is identical to that of an independent clause), but they are also used as independent verb forms.

In its independent use, one of these forms (which as a dependent form can be characterized as positive perfective participle) is in complementary distribution with a typical independent verb form: in independent assertive or interrogative clauses, with 1st or 2nd person subjects, the TAM value 'perfective positive' is carried by a form used also as a participle, but with 3rd person subjects, the same TAM value is expressed by another form having a distribution typical of finite verb forms.

In Akhvakh, there is no correlation between argument indexation and the ability of verb forms to head independent clauses: independent verb forms may be devoid of any agreement mark, and some strictly dependent verb forms have obligatory agreement with their absolutive argument.

This study of finiteness in Akhvakh is based on data collected in Axax-dərə, Zaqatala Rayon, Azerbaijan.