

NON-FINITE FORMS IN ROOT CLAUSES

Gabriela Alboiu (York University) and **Virginia Hill** (University of New Brunswick-SJ)

This paper focuses on the puzzling use of non-finite verbs in root clauses, such as seen with infinitives in Middle French-MF (1) and Acadian French-AF (2), and gerunds in Old Romanian-OR (3). The **question** is twofold: (i) what makes it possible for these forms to function on a par with an indicative; and (ii) why do they disappear towards the modern stages of the language? Note: AF constructions are also lost, but speakers still have solid grammatical judgments.

- (1) [*il s'éloigna tout honteux*] et [*nous de rire*] **MF**
 he departed very embarrassed and we to laugh
 'he was receding very embarrassed and we were laughing' (Luker 1916: 174)
- (2) *On brûlait du bois. Faire du feu pis avoir des couvertes pour s'abrier.*
 we burned of wood make of fire and have covers for refl cover
 'We burned wood. We made a fire and had blankets to cover ourselves.' **AF**
- (3) [*Postindu-mă*] și *voiū dezlega a mânca, și nu mă voiū arăta.*
 fasting=REFL and will.1SG stop to eat and not me=will.1=show
 'I will fast and will stop eating and will not show myself.' (Coresi EV {4}) **OR**

The data **sources** are: for MF, mainly Rabelais and La Fontaine (we use MF for convenience, although La Fontaine is just beyond that border); for OR, texts of 16th-17th century; for AF, Péronnet's corpus of naturalistic data plus our elicited data (questionnaires) from native speakers (e.g. (9)). The general observation is that non-finite forms in root clauses are unproductive across the board, and disappeared towards the modern stages of these languages (i.e., the construction was lost by the beginning of modern standard French or Romanian, but lingered until recently in AF, where speakers heard it in their grand parents' speech but do not produce it themselves).

First, we list the various **properties** of non-finite root clauses:

- Lexical subjects: ok in MF (see *nous* in (1)) and OR, but not in AF.
- Verb movement: V-to-T in MF and early OR; but V-to-C in AF and 17th c. OR
- Clitics: proclitics in MF and early OR; enclitics in 17th c. OR; no clitics in AF
- Constituent fronting: ok in MF and OR, but not in AF
- Out-of-the-blue occurrences: ok in MF and OR; but not in AF (context is obligatory)
- Auxiliaries: absent across the board
- Clause typing: declarative only across the board

In terms of the **analysis**, we adopt Meinunger's (2004) proposal that an Assert(ion) OP(erator) in Spec,CP is required for declarative clause typing. This is a null operator, inherently [realis] and selecting a finite T. First, we look at the earliest attested occurrences of non-finite root clauses in MF and OR. In both languages, we see relatively low verbs, lexical subjects, proclitics and the possibility of constituent fronting (4)/(5)/(6).

- (4) *Lors Oudart se revestir.* (Rablais B. ii, Le quart livre, Chap. xiv: 32) **MF**
 then Oudart refl.3 cloth.inf 'Then Oudart clothed himself.'
- (5) *j'avons vu les deux hommes tout a plain, qui nous faisiant signe de les aller querir;*
 we have seen the two men all in clear who to.us made sign to them go fetch
et moi de tirer auparavant les enjeux. (M; Festin II, 1)
 and I to get.out in.advance the bets 'and I immediately got my bets out'
- (6) *Iar cuconū Mirele cu ochi negri le privind.* **OR**
 and mister groom.the with eyes black them= Watching
 "The groom watched them [the earrings] with black eyes" (Gabinschi 2010: 83)

We argue for V-to-T in these clauses, given (i) presence of proclitics (i.e., V not in C); (ii) their obligatory adjacency to the verb; (iii) that a T related adverb interferes between the infinitive in (5) and its direct object (V not in v). While V-to-T occurs in regular infinitives as well, the difference is that in (4)-(6) T is not anaphoric (-tense), but becomes valued independently by the pragmatic context (hence, it is +tense): in (5) the inflected verbs are in continuous past, whereas the infinitive is interpreted as a present perfect, despite the absence of a perfect auxiliary. We attribute this difference to the type of operator that binds T, i.e., a matrix T/Zeit operator in regular infinitives (Bianchi 1997) vs a null Assert OP in the local CP of root infinitives; see (7).

(7) [_{ForceP} Assert OP [_{FinP} Fin_{[+realis]/[+finite]} [_{TP} T/V_{inf.} ...]]]

There is evidence that in later diachronic stages, Assert OP undergoes weakening. E.g., MF starts to display an obligatory particle *de* in these contexts in La Fontaine (see also (1)), which was only optional in Rabelais - see (4)/(5). This is a visible marker providing clues for Assert OP by signaling a Fin with marked properties. Likewise, in OR we see the option for V-to-Fin/C (see (3)) with similar effects. The weakened Assert OP is completely lost in standard French and modern Romanian, as is the non-finite root option, but it has been preserved until recently in AF. AF preserved the Assert OP by having V-to-C/Force signalling it (instead of *de* in Fin) – see (8). The high level of verb movement is indicated by the placement of T-past related adverbs, such as *autrefois* in (9) (T-past is the highest head in the IP field in Cinque 1999), and the ban on constituent fronting above the infinitive verb (i.e. nothing can precede).

(8) [_{ForceP} Assert OP [_{Force} **pelleyer** [_{FinP} Fin_{[realis]/[+finite]} [_{TP} [_T <pelleyer> [_{VP} [_v <pelleyer>]]]]]]]]

(9) *On avait une pelle pis [pelleyer aut' fois devant le cheval]* (adapted from Wiesmath 2007)

we had a shovel and we shovelled other.time in.front.of the horse

‘We had a shovel and in the past we shovelled in front of the horse.’

Independent evidence for the presence of the Assert OP in root non-finite clauses comes from the inability of AF root infinitives and OR root gerunds to occur in interrogative contexts: the Assert OP blocks an Interrog OP; this incompatibility is not found with indicatives. The syntactic differences between AF root infinitives and OR root gerunds are accounted for via Miyagawa’s (2010) feature typology at C, following from contrastive parametric settings for pro-drop and SV/VS word order (i.e., whether both ϕ and δ feature sets are transferred to T or not). Crucially, the shared property indicates that the same derivational mechanism occurs cross-linguistically, which is identified here as the merge of the Assert OP.

Accordingly, the loss of non-finite root clauses follows from the loss of the Assert OP. Refining on Meinunger (2004), we argue that the Assert OP is mapped to syntax only in non-finite root clauses, and not in root indicatives, where morphology is sufficient to make up for its function (phi-features on the verb value tense, an impossibility for non-finite forms). We point out that the loss of the Assert OP coincides with a more general loss of null operators which are replaced with lexical operators or non-operator options. AF preserved the Assert OP longer because null operators (and non-quantificational chains) are pervasive in this grammar (e.g., in *que* ‘that’ relatives, orphaned prepositions and expletive subjects; *-tu* interrogatives, etc.).

In **conclusion**, this paper relates the occurrence of non-finite forms in root declarative clauses to the presence of a null Assert OP. This option is marked and unproductive, competing with the default option for root indicatives, by which it is eventually replaced. The replacement takes place at a different pace cross-linguistically, depending on the rate at which null operators are eliminated more generally from the language.