Finiteness in Phrases

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Finiteness

(1) a. We expect [John will win the race]
   b. We expect [John to win the race]

• What is the difference between these two clauses?

• The bracketed clause in (1a) is tensed, whereas (1b) is untensed (i.e. unspecified for tense).

(2) a. I didn’t know [John wears glasses]
   b. I’ve never known [John to wear glasses]

• In (2a), the verb wears agrees with its third person singular subject John, but (2b) does not.

• (2a) is inflected for agreement, but the verb in (2b) lacks agreement.

(3) a. We expect [he/*him will win the race]
   b. We expect [him/*he to win the race]

If we replace John with a pronoun it has to be a pronoun marked for nominative case he in (3a) but the objective form him in (3b).

We say a verb is finite if it inflects for tense/agreement and has a nominative subject, and non-finite if it doesn’t inflect for tense or agreement and doesn’t have a nominative subject.

Exercise

In relation to the sentences below, say what case each of the bracketed pronoun or noun expressions carries, and whether each verb(auxiliary is finite or non-finite.

a. [She] loves [you]
   b. [Mary] thought [he] had hidden [the money]
   c. [Someone] has stolen [the president's] papers
   d. [People] want [politicians] to reduce [taxes]
   e. [The FBI] don’t want [the CIA] interfering in [their] affairs
   f. [You] mustn’t let [friends] pressurise [you]

Using pronouns

a. [She] loves [you]
   b. [She] thought [he] had hidden [it]
   c. [He/She] has stolen [his] papers
   d. [They] want [them] to reduce [them]
   e. [They] don’t want [them] interfering in [their] affairs
   f. [You] mustn’t let [them] pressurise [you]
Finiteness (Case, tense and/or agreement)

a. [She\textsubscript{Nom}] loves [you\textsubscript{Acc}]

b. [She\textsubscript{Nom}] thought [he\textsubscript{Nom}] had hidden [it\textsubscript{Acc}]

c. [He/She\textsubscript{Nom}] has stolen [his\textsubscript{Gen}] papers

d. [They\textsubscript{Nom}] want [them\textsubscript{Acc}] to reduce [them\textsubscript{Acc}]

e. [They\textsubscript{Nom}] don’t want [them\textsubscript{Acc}] interfering in [their\textsubscript{Gen}] affairs

f. [You\textsubscript{Nom}] mustn’t let [them\textsubscript{Acc}] pressurise [you\textsubscript{Acc}]

Finiteness (Case, tense and/or agreement)

a. [She\textsubscript{Nom}] loves \textit{(present tense)} [you\textsubscript{Acc}]

b. [She\textsubscript{Nom}] thought \textit{(past tense)} [he\textsubscript{Nom}] had hidden \textit{(past perfect tense)} [it\textsubscript{Acc}]

c. [He/She\textsubscript{Nom}] has stolen \textit{(present perfect tense)} [his\textsubscript{Gen}] papers

d. [They\textsubscript{Nom}] want \textit{(present tense)} [them\textsubscript{Acc}] to reduce \textit{(no tense)} [them\textsubscript{Acc}]

e. [They\textsubscript{Nom}] don’t want \textit{(present tense)} [them\textsubscript{Acc}] interfering \textit{(no tense)} in [their\textsubscript{Gen}] affairs

f. [You\textsubscript{Nom}] mustn’t \textit{(modal verb=tense)} let [them\textsubscript{Acc}] pressurise \textit{(no tense)} [you\textsubscript{Acc}]

Finiteness (Case, tense and/or agreement)

a. [She\textsubscript{Nom}] loves \textit{(present tense)} [you\textsubscript{Acc}] *I loves you X

b. [She\textsubscript{Nom}] thought \textit{(past tense)} [he\textsubscript{Nom}] had hidden \textit{(past perfect tense)} [it\textsubscript{Acc}]

c. [He/She\textsubscript{Nom}] has stolen \textit{(present perfect tense)} [his\textsubscript{Gen}] papers

d. [They\textsubscript{Nom}] want \textit{(present tense)} [them\textsubscript{Acc}] to reduce \textit{(no tense)} [them\textsubscript{Acc}]

e. [They\textsubscript{Nom}] don’t want \textit{(present tense)} [them\textsubscript{Acc}] interfering \textit{(no tense)} in [their\textsubscript{Gen}] affairs

f. [You\textsubscript{Nom}] mustn’t \textit{(modal verb=tense)} let [them\textsubscript{Acc}] pressurise \textit{(no tense)} [you\textsubscript{Acc}]