Insubordination and the Grammaticalisation of Interactive Meaning

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ABSTRACT

In insubordination (Evans 2007), erstwhile subordinate clauses get reanalysed as main clauses. Examples of the phenomenon from English, German, Japanese and Kayardild, include:

(1) *If you could just sit here for a while, please.*
    [Free-standing conditional, functioning as request]
(2) *Ob wir richtig sind?*
    '[It's possible/I doubt/you were wondering (etc.)] whether we're right?'
    [Free-standing 'whether' clause, representing imputed question/position]
(3) あれを見て! *Areo mite!*
    Look at that!
    [Free-standing chained-form verb functioning as informal imperative]
(4) *Kajakaja-ntha   dali-jurrk?*
    daddy-Complementizing.oblique   comeImmediate:Complementizing.oblique
    '(Have you seen / do you know) whether/that daddy has arrived?'

In each example a free-standing sentence has morphosyntactic features of a subordinate clause. While in some cases it is still possible to argue they can be derived by ellipsis (and are therefore 'really' main clauses), in others this approach becomes implausible: either the semantics has become conventionalised in ways that ellipsis can't account for, or the insubordinated clause displays other syntactic features that wouldn't be permitted in a main clause. We must then conclude that there has been a diachronic development from subordinate to main clause.

The phenomenon of insubordination poses problems for theories of grammaticalisation which posit a unidirectional development from less to more grammaticalised structures.

Broadly, it appears that, in insubordination, complex morphosyntactic structures first allow ellipsis of main-clause elements, with interpretations constrained by what ellipsis is consistent with their grammatical specifications. Then the process of interpretation gets conventionalised, eliminating some logically possible ellipsis candidates. Finally these conventionalised readings get associated directly with the remaining material, without requiring the calculation of ellipsed material. This means that interpretation is first opened up (against the normal direction of grammaticalisation), then narrowed again (as in normal grammaticalisation).

This talk will focus on the argumentation, methods and data we need to integrate if we are to understand this apparent exception to widely cited generalisations about grammaticalisation. Most importantly, we need to incorporate what may appear rather marginal data from multi-party settings, and additionally we need to employ more interactionist functional typologies that do not seek to replace structural with

functional account, but rather examine how various functions – including pragmatic interpretation—intricately interdepend with language-particular structure.

REFERENCE

Evans, Nicholas. (2007) Insubordination and its uses. In Irina Nikolaeva (ed.), *Finiteness: Theoretical and Empirical Foundations*. Oxford: OUP. pp. 366–431.