Insubordination and the grammaticalisation of interactive presuppositions

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1. Insubordination: what it is

(1) *If you could just sit here for a while please.*
   [Free-standing conditional, functioning as request]
   [, you would be doing me a favour / I would be happy [etc.]]

(2) *Ob wir richtig sind?*
whether we right are
‘[It’s possible/I doubt/you were wondering (etc.)] whether we’re right?’
[Free-standing ‘whether’ clause, representing imputed question/position]

(3) *Alza-r-si, porc-i, av-ete cap-ito? Rifa-re*
get_up-INF-REFL pig-PL have-2PL understand-PstPTCP make-INF

i lett-i, ma presto! Puli-si le scarp-e.
the.M.PL bed-PL but quickly clean-INF-REFL the:F.PL shoe-PL

‘(To) get up, pigs, understand? (To) make your beds, and hurry! (To) clean your shoes!’ [Source: P. Levi: La tregua]

(4) *あれを見て！*
*Are wo mi-te!*
that ACC look-CNJ
‘Look at that!’ [Free-standing chained-form verb functioning as informal imperative;
<are-wo mite kudasai ‘looking at that, give down [=please]!]

(5) *Kajakaja-ntha dali-jurrk?*
daddy-COBL come-IIMM:COBL
‘(Have you seen / do you know) whether/that daddy has arrived?’
**Definition of insubordination:**

*the conventionalised main-clause use of what, on prima facie grounds, appear to be formally subordinate clauses* (Evans 2007:367)

English (1): free-standing conditional clause, introduced by *if*

German (2): free-standing whether clause, introduced by *ob* ‘whether’ and with verb-final subordinate verb order

Italian (3): use of infinitive as command

Japanese (4): chained -*te* clause as command/request, normally non-finite, non-final predicate chained to final predicate bearing tense/mood, politeness markers etc.

Kayardild (5): finite subordinate clause, each word of which bears a ‘complementizing oblique’ case suffix marking the clause as the complement of some main predicate

Note that, in principle, any structural feature associated with subordinate clauses may turn up in insubordination, e.g. subordinating conjunctions (*if, ob*); subordinating verbal morphology (*infinitive in Italian, -te construction in Japanese*), case use characteristic of subordinate clauses (Kayardild), subordinate-specific word order (German).

Diachronic process: insubordination
Synchronic product: insubordinated constructions

2. Why insubordination is a problem for standard claims about grammaticalisation

The literature on morphosyntactic change concentrates on diachronic developments by which subordinate clauses develop from material in main clauses. Insubordination proceeds in the opposite direction (i.e. subordinate clauses recruited to provide material for new main-clause types)

Insubordination is a counterexample to the ‘normal’, ‘unidirectional’ direction of grammaticalisation:

*[G]rammaticalisation is unidirectional [...]. [I]t leads from a ‘less grammatical’ to a ‘more grammatical’ unit, but not vice versa. A few counterexamples have been cited (e.g. ... Campbell, in press.) ‘They concern either degrammaticalisation or regrammaticalisation... The former is present when the direction of grammaticalisation is reversed, that is, when a more*
grammatical unit develops into a less grammatical one, while the latter applies when forms without any function acquire a grammatical function. Although both degrammaticalisation and regrammaticalisation have been observed to occur, they are statistically insignificant and will be ignored in the remainder of this work. Note that many cases of alleged degrammaticalisation found in the literature on this subject can be shown to be the result of an inadequate analysis (see Lehmann 1982:16-20). [Heine, Claudi & Hünnemeyer (1991:4-5)]

From the diachronic point of view, (grammaticalisation - N.E.) is a process which turns lexemes into grammatical formatives and renders grammatical formatives still more grammatical. [Lehmann (1982:v), italics mine]

[grammaticalisation is a process] whereby linguistic units lose in semantic complexity, pragmatic significance, syntactic freedom, and phonetic substance, respectively. [Heine & Reh (1984:15)]

A possible counter-move: insubordination isn’t grammaticalisation, but reanalysis:

The discussion so far has focused on unidirectionality, and what kinds of unidirectionality are characteristic of grammaticalisation. Virtually nothing is exceptionless, and there are of course instances of change in languages that are counterexamples of tendencies that can be characterised as “less>more grammatical”, “main clause>subordinate clause”, etc. In these volumes the papers by Campbell and Greenberg explicitly raise counterexamples to unidirectionality...... It is likely that all these examples are strictly speaking actually not cases of grammaticalisation (although once they have occurred they may be subject to the generalisation, reduction, loss, and other changes typical of grammaticalisation). Rather, the examples Campbell and Greenberg cite can be regarded as instances of reanalysis. (Traugott & Heine 1991:6-7)

However, the usual definitions of reanalysis don’t fit insubordination very well:

.. a mechanism which changes the underlying structure of a syntactic pattern and which does not involve any immediate or intrinsic modification of its surface manifestation (Harris & Campbell 1995:61)

‘change in the structure of an expression or class of expressions that does not involve any immediate or intrinsic modification of its surface manifestations’ (Langacker 1977:59).

‘another well-known source of grammaticalisation is reanalysis ... in which old boundaries are reinterpreted.’ (Traugott 1980:49)

Insubordination doesn’t fit any of these definitions very well – so remains a stubborn set of empirical problems that need to be integrated into generalising theories of morphosyntactic change

3. Steps and argumentation

The historical trajectory for insubordination:
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A note on what ‘ellipsis’ means:

Quirk et al (1972:536 ‘words are ellipted only if they are uniquely recoverable, i.e. there is no doubt about what words are to be supplied ... What is uniquely recoverable depends on the context.’

A better alternative: define ellipsis as involving ‘some recoverable elements that are grammatically acceptable’, and then allow a range of situations from uniquely-recoverable to non-uniquely recoverable (with perhaps an infinite range of possibilities).

An example of these 4 steps, with respect to German subordinate clauses:

3a. **FULL CONSTRUCTION WITH OVERT MAIN CLAUSE.** [‘normal’ state – not insubordination yet]

(6)  
Ich erinner-e mich nicht,  
I remember-1SG me not

*ob sie eine Karte gekauft hatte.*

whether she a.F.NOM ticket bought had.3SG

‘I don’t remember whether she bought a ticket.’ (Durrell 1997:387)

3b. **ELLIPSIS OF MAIN CLAUSE.** Main clause is ellipsed. The same insubordinated construction (here *ob* + subordinate clause) is consistent with a range of ‘restored’ material.

(7)  
*Was mein-st du dazu,* Ob ich mal wegen meiner Galle frag-e? ii
what think-2SG you to.it if I just because my gall.bladder ask-1SG

‘(What would you think), if I just ask about my gall bladder?’ (Buscha 1976)

(8)  
*Ich zweifl-e,* Ob wir richtig sind? (Buscha 1976)
I doubt-1SG if we right are

‘(I doubt), whether we are right?’
(9) Ob diese Wortstellung zulässig ist? [erscheint mir fraglich.]
if this word order permissible is appear-3SG 1SGDAT doubtful
‘Whether this word order is permissible, (seems doubtful to me).’
(Weuster 1983:33)

3c. CONVENTIONALISATION OF ELLIPSIS. Certain syntactically permitted reconstructions become excluded by convention. E.g. insubordinated wenn (if-) clauses in German (as in English) are compatible with a range of restored elliptical material, but they should involve positive rather than negative evaluation – wishful thinking in (10), and permissions/suggestions in (11):

(10) a. [Es wäre schön, ] / Wenn ich deine Statur hätte.
it be.3.SG.SBJV lovely if I your build had
b. [Ich wäre froh, ] /
I be.1.SG.SBJV glad
c. *[Es wäre schlimm, ] /
it be.1.SG.SBJV bad

‘a. [It would be lovely] / if I had your build’.
‘b. [I would be glad]’
‘c. [It would be bad]’

(11) Wenn Sie sich vielleicht die Hände waschen möchten?
if you self perhaps the hands wash-INF might

a. [, können Sie das hier tun. ]
could you that here do
b. [, wäre das sehr nett von Ihnen. ]
were that very nice of you
c. *[, können Sie das nicht tun ]
could you that not do
d.* [, wäre das nicht sehr nett von Ihnen]
were that not very nice of you

‘If you would maybe like to wash your hands.
[, that would be very nice of you.]
[, you can do it here.]
*[, you can not do it]
*[, that would not be very nice of you.]’
3d. **CONVENTIONALISATION OF THE WHOLE CONSTRUCTION (CONSTRUCTIONALISATION).** The construction now has a specific meaning of its own and it may not be possible to restore any ellipsed material.

(12a)  Wo Zehntausende verreck-en müs-s-en.

where ten.thousands die-INF must-3PL

‘Where tens of thousands must die.’ [LIT.]

Buscha (1976), in discussing examples like (11a), is unable to supply a paraphrase from which this can be derived by simple deletion, and replaces *wo* by the subordinating concessive conjunction *obwohl* in her expansion (11b):³

(12b)  Obwohl Zehntausende verrecken muss-en,

although ten.thousands die-INF must-3PL

mach-en sie sich keine Gedanken darüber.

make-3PL they self no thoughts about.that

‘Even though tens of thousands must die, they don’t think twice about it.’

3e. **Arguments and data regarding conventionalisation and ellipsis.**

It is only once stage (c) is reached that we have insubordination, rather than a specific case of ellipsis that happens to involve main clause elision. This makes information about the range of possible semantic interpretations crucial: only once we have conventionalisation (i.e. some structurally possible interpretations are eliminated) do we have Stage (c); and only when we can’t readily derive the interpretation synchronically from ellipsis at all do we have Stage (d).

To understand what is going on in a particular language, the most important data we can have therefore concerns the range of possible interpretations for prima facie insubordinated clauses and their relation to possible restored clauses. E.g. to determine whether elliptical Japanese -node or -kara ‘because’ sentences as in (13a, b) count as insubordination, we need to know whether there is any restriction on what material could be ‘restored’:
A second line of research is typological: even though there are clearly convergent cross-linguistic tendencies, there are also many cases where comparable input conditions lead to distinctly conventionalised final conditions.

3f. Conventionalisation and distinct pathways in the insubordination of conditional clauses

Insubordinated *if*-clauses are extremely common cross-linguistically, being associated time and again with requests and suggestions:

English

(14) A milkman’s sheet about Xmas deliveries, includingiv:
    If you would kindly indicate in the boxes below your requirements and then hand the completed form back to your Roundsman by no later than the 16th December 1995.

German: see above

Dutch:
(15) Hans, of je even naar Edith zou lopen.
    Hans whether you just to Edith will go
    ‘Hans, would you just go to Edith.’

French:
(16) Si on allait se promen-er?
    if one went REFL walk-INF
    ‘What if we went for a walk?’

Japanese:
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(17) お医者さんに行ったらいいと思う

\[ oishasan \ni \ \text{it-tara} \ \text{ii to omo-u.} \]

doctor LOC go-if good COMP think-PRES

‘I think that it would be good to go to a doctor.’

(18) お医者さんに行ったら

\[ oishasan \ni \ \text{it-tara?} \]

doctor LOC go-COND

‘Why don’t you go to a doctor?’

Spoken Mon:

(19a) ？a wòiŋ kwan mòn məkɛh, (ʔoa) cot mip

if PART go visit village Mon if I mind happy

‘(I) would be happy if (you) would visit a Mon village.’
[data from W. Bauer p.c.]

(19b) ？a wòiŋ kwan mòn məkɛh.

go visit village Mon if

‘(You) should visit a Mon village.’
[data from W. Bauer p.c.]

However, insubordinated if-constructions in Spanish (20a) and Swedish (20b) have a quite different interpretation. As an explanation for the Spanish development Schwenter (1999:8), who furnishes this example, suggests that the link from conditionality to disagreement is via an ellipted main clause along the lines of (in this example) *if it’s horrible, how can you say it’s great?*

(20a) [Sisters Q and R are looking at clothes in a shop window:]  

\[ Q: \text{Ah, } \text{¿mira qué chaqueta más chula!} \]

ah look.IMP what jacket INT great

\[ R: \text{Si es horrible.} \]

if it is horrible

‘Hey, look what a great jacket!’  
R: ‘But it’s horrible!’

(20b) om ni har nàn stug-katalog eller nât

if you have some cottage-catalogue or something

‘Do you have a cottage catalogue of something?’ (Lombardi Villauri 2004:210)
The fact that the meaning of insubordinated Spanish and Swedish *si*-clauses is quite different to English / French / German / Dutch / Mon / Japanese illustrates that the development is conventionalised, even though some pathways (> request) are much commoner and perhaps more readily explained from pragmatic principles, perhaps using accounts based on Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson 1987)

4. Typology of functions coded by insubordinated clauses

The descriptive task: charting the functions served by insubordinated clauses cross-linguistically

A very wide range of functions is attested. They can’t all be exemplified here – see Evans (2007) for relevant cross-linguistic data. In summary:

4.1 Indirection and interpersonal control: requests and commands, hints, warnings and admonitions.

Hints (Kayardild):

(21) *dathin-*a *yarbud-*a *thaari-juru-*y

that-NOM bird-NOM bring.back-POT-CLOC

‘(Eat it in such a way that) you can bring that bird back. (i.e. don’t eat it all.)’

Pragmatically: ‘hey, don’t eat it all!’

Literally: ‘that (you/we) can bring that bird back…’

(22) *Dathin-inja kunawun-inja rabi-jarra-nth*

that-COBL child-COBL get.up-PST-COBL

rik-urrk, *rila-thirrin-inj.*

crying-LOC.COBL wake-RES-COBL

‘(Someone/you should comfort that child), because it’s got up, because it’s crying, because it’s been woken up.’

Context: addressing the child’s mother in middle of night.’

Lit.: ‘that that child has got up, that it’s crying now, that it has been woken…’

4.2 Modal functions of various types: epistemic and evidential meanings; deontic meanings (especially hortatives and obligation); exclamation and evaluation

Ex: Kayardild: wide range of possible epistemic framings (see that / know that / hear that), with present tenses focusing on direct perception/knowledge of event, past tenses focusing on perception/knowledge of result, and future tenses on supposition/inference from general knowledge:

(23) *[Dan-kurrka ri-in-kurrka]*

here-LOC.COBL east-from-LOC.COBL
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\[ dali-jurrka \quad budubudu-nth\]
come-IMM.COBL \quad boat-COBL

‘(I can hear/see) the boat coming from the east.’
Context: a group of people waiting on a beach, watching and listening for a boat.
Interpretation of visual vs. auditory evidence would depend on how close the boat was,
whether it is night-time or daytime, etc.

(24) \[ Dan-kurrka \quad marrkathu-nth\]
here-LOC.COBL \quad aunt-COBL
‘Here’s aunty. (I can see/hear her coming).’

(25) \[ Kajakaja-ntha \quad dali-n-marri-nja=d\]
daddy-COBL \quad come-NMZ-PRIV-COBL=yet
‘(I see that / it seems that) daddy hasn’t arrived yet.’
Context: speaker is returning disappointed from the airstrip,
where he had hoped to meet the hearer’s father.

(26) \[ Thabuju-ntha \quad warra-jarra-nth\]
big brother-COBL \quad go-PST-COBL
‘(There’s no-one here,) because big brother has gone.’
Context implies: there’s no-one here, so big brother must have gone.

(27) \[ Banga-ntha \quad bijarrba-ntha \quad balung-kuu-ntha\]
turtle-COBL \quad dugong-COBL \quad westward-MPROP-COBL
\[ thula-thuu-nth\]
descend-POT-COBL
‘(I know that) the turtle and dugong will go down to the west.’
Context: speaker has seen the ‘spouts’ where they have broken the surface en route.

4.3 Signalling presupposed material: negation (i.e. negative clauses have subordinate form),
contrastive focus, reiteration, disagreement with assertions by previous speaker

Givón (1979:107) ‘negative assertions are used in language in contexts where the corresponding
affirmative has been mentioned, deemed likely, or where the speaker assumes that the hearer -
erroneously - holds to a belief in the truth of that affirmative.’

In Arizona Tewa (Kroskrity 1984) the negative construction (28) involves a negative prefix (we-)
plus a suffix -di which was originally a subordinating suffix (29); insubordination has proceeded
to the point where all negatives take a -di suffix and if they need to be subordinated a second -di
suffix needs to be added (30):
(28)  *Sen kwiyó we-mán-mun-dí*
man  woman  NEG3>3.ACTIVE-see-NEG2
‘The man did not see the woman.’

(29)  *He’i se na-men-dí ’o-yohk’ó*
that  man  3.ACTIVE-go-SUB  1.ACTIVE-be_asleep
‘When that man went, I was asleep.’

(30)  *Kada we-mán-mun-dí-dí dó-mun*
Kada  NEG3>3.ACTIVE-see-NEG-SUB  1.ACTIVE-see
‘Kada did not see her/him/it, I did.’

I.e. insubordination proceeded from

‘X not being the case, Y’ to
‘X not being the case’ (as the normal way of marking negation)

5. **What functions get expressed by insubordinated clauses, and why**

An explanatory theory of insubordination will have to ask the differential question: why function(s) X, but not function(s) Y. This depends in turn on having robust data on which functions are attested, and which excluded, with insubordinated clauses. Research is still too early to permit confident statements here, but some striking initial trends are:

(a) in situations of interpersonal directivity, insubordinated clauses are used either in situations where the speaker assumes the hearer can readily identify their positive desires (insubordinated requests), or where the speaker is confident in assuming they share with the hearer a negative evaluation of the mentioned event (insubordinated apprehensive constructions)

(b) in modalizing insubordination, insubordinated clauses are used in situations where the context makes the speaker confident that the hearer can identify their epistemic stance to the proposition

(c) they are used in for the presupposed rather than the newly asserted material

More generally:

- insubordination occurs in situations where a high degree of intersubjective alignment between speaker and hearer can be presupposed

Prediction: insubordinated constructions won’t be found with meanings like:
• negative imperatives
• overrides of presumed hearer assumptions (though the Spanish si-construction is a problem for this)
• upgrades or redirections of the nature of evidence (e.g. from hearsay to direct perception)

6. Conclusion

• insubordination is as widespread as it is little-studied – typological studies so far have just examined the tip of the iceberg
• it is often marginal and therefore slips under the radar of grammatical descriptions – e.g. English if-requests weren’t identified in a published grammatical description until Huddleston & Pullum (2002) though corpus-based discourse studies began picking it up a couple of decades earlier (Ford & Thompson 1986, Stirling 1999)
• as with other phenomena where we need close studies of synchrony in order to understand diachrony (sound change in the laboratory; variationist study; polysemy to understand semantic change) we need much more delicate studies of elliptical phenomena before we can understand what is going on
• preliminary indications suggest we will need to draw on models of language use and semantic change that are more intersubjective than subjective if we are to fully grasp the phenomenon, and in particular those that focus on how speakers achieve intersubjective alignment (Du Bois 2007)

References
Harris, A. & Campbell L. (1995). Historical syntax in cross-linguistic perspective. Cambridge:

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1 I.e. where the insubordinated construction itself is the marker of negative imperative, as opposed to saying marking an imperative, in which there is a negative marker independently of the construction
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Abbreviations

CLOC complementizing locative (Kayardild; locative case functioning as complementizer for various types of subordinate clause, with first person inclusive or second person subjects – see Evans 1995)

CNJ conjunct/chained form (Japanese -te form)

COBL complementizing oblique (Kayardild; oblique case functioning as complementizer for various types of subordinate clause, with first person exclusive, second or third person subjects – see Evans 1995)

IMM immediate

POT potential (can/will/must)

RES resultative

\[=\] Campbell 1991, discussed below.

\[=\] For these examples, the English translations are my own; occasionally they are slightly non-literal in the interests of idiomaticity.

\[=\] Note Weuster’s comment (p. 56) on this construction: ‘Wo verweist [in this example] nicht auf einen Ort; es handelt sich vielmehr um das Konzessive wo’: wo [where] refers not to a place; rather it is a matter of concessive wo [i.e. English whereas].

\[=\] I thank Grev Corbett for this example.