

Clause Combining and Insubordination in Kupsapiny, a Southern Nilotic Language of Uganda

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Abstract:

This study examines two types of insubordinated conditional clauses in Kupsapiny, a southern Nilotic language of Uganda, that stand by themselves as sentences. The study shows that even a language with a preference for the main–conditional clause order has insubordinated constructions and that these constructions are at different stages of the diachronic development of insubordination, and exhibit semantic and pragmatic differences.

Evans (2007) shows that insubordination (“the conventionalized main clause use of what, on *prima facie* grounds, appear to be formally subordinate clauses”) (e.g., in English: *If you could come this way, please. / If you (dare) touch my car!*) is widespread across languages. This claim challenges the unidirectionality of grammaticalization (e.g., Heine & Reh 1984; Heine, Claudi, & Hünnemeyer 1991). According to the unidirectionality view, subordinate clauses develop from main clauses, but insubordination progresses in the opposite direction. Evans hypothesizes that insubordination follows four stages of development: (i) subordinate construction, (ii) ellipsis of main clause (no restriction on interpretation of ellipsed material), (iii) conventionalized ellipsis (restriction on interpretation of ellipsed material), and (iv) reanalysis as main clause structure. However, the semantic and pragmatic changes occur that in the process of insubordination are not clear, especially in understudied languages.

Kupsapiny commonly uses the subordinate–main clause order for any type of clause combining, but has two insubordinated conditional constructions, one starting with one of the conditional markers *nto* and *yee* (insubordinated ‘if’ construction) and the other starting with both conditional markers (in the order of *nto yee*) (insubordinated ‘if if’ construction). According to Evans’s model, the ‘if if’ construction is at a later stage of development than (and perhaps developed from) the ‘if’ construction. The insubordinated ‘if’ construction seems to be at stage (ii) or (iii). An ellipsed main clause can always be added to the insubordinated ‘if’ construction to form a grammatical sentence, but it has to include the speaker’s positive or negative evaluation of the described event. On the other hand, the insubordinated ‘if if’ construction seems to be at stage (iv) of development. It is a conventionalized construction, and no main clause can be added to it to form a grammatical sentence.

The two insubordinated conditional constructions have other differences. First, the insubordinated ‘if if’ construction, which has uses (1), (2), (4), (5), and (6) in Table 1, is used in fewer situations than the insubordinated ‘if’ construction, which has all the uses in Table 1. Second, unlike the insubordinated ‘if’ construction, the insubordinated ‘if if’ construction has the additional specific sense of ‘What if ...?’ Third, unlike the insubordinated ‘if’ construction, whose incompleteness leads the addressee to wonder whether the speaker’s evaluation of the described event is positive or negative, the insubordinated ‘if if’ construction, which is interrogative, asks the addressee how s/he evaluates the event, in a way neutral to the positive-negative distinction. Thus, the insubordinated ‘if if’ construction is semantically and pragmatically more specialized than the insubordinated ‘if’ construction.

Table 1: Uses of the insubordinated ‘if’ construction

	to the speaker	to the addressee
Positive	(1) Making a request (e.g., ‘If you bring me water.’) (2) Asking for permission (e.g., ‘If I open the window.’) (3) Expressing one’s hope/wish, regret, criticism, or curse (e.g., ‘If s/he comes.’, ‘If I had not gone to the party.’, ‘If s/he had washed clothes yesterday.’, ‘If you die.’)	(4) Making an offer (e.g., ‘If you go with the umbrella.’) (5) Giving advice (e.g., ‘If you get up earlier in the morning.’)
	(6) Making a suggestion (e.g., ‘If we eat mashed bananas.’)	
Negative	(7) Expressing one’s obligation (e.g., ‘If I don’t work hard.’)	(8) Giving a warning (e.g., ‘If you don’t stop the noise.’)
	(9) Talking about a hypothetical negative event (e.g., ‘If it had not stopped raining.’)	

In sum, although Kupsapiny prefers the main–conditional clause order, it can insubordinate a conditional subordinate clause. The insubordinated ‘if if’ construction is at a later stage of the diachronic development of insubordination, and is semantically and pragmatically more specific than the insubordinated ‘if’ construction.

References

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