

The Dynamics of Insubordination: An Overview

Nicholas Evans
Australian National University

By way of an introduction to the symposium I will touch upon several key issues that promise to be key discussion points running through the papers that follow.

First I review the rapid expansion of what we have come to know about insubordination in recent years, both in terms of functions and in terms of languages, by way of underlining what a widespread and versatile phenomenon this is among the world's languages.

Second, I outline some recent advances which now create a better foundation for understanding insubordination: the elaboration of construction grammar, greater attention to prosody, and the increasing use of large corpora, both synchronic and diachronic.

Third, I analyse one pragmatic motivation for a large class of insubordination constructions, namely the appropriateness of maintaining 'modal indeterminacy' in many conversational situations.

Finally, I outline how a shift from taking the solitary speaker as the unit for linguistic production, to looking at interactive dyads in conversation, gives a very natural account of how certain types of insubordination arise, as a result of units being distributed over more than one conversational participant.

With this shift, insubordination moves from being a marginal and problematic phenomenon to one that is central to understanding the interactive nature of human linguistic communication.