

***Qu'il en soit ainsi!* Insubordination in French**

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Insubordination is the process by which the head of a formerly dependent clause comes to head an independent clause (cf. Evans 2007). For example, in the common exclamation 'if only I knew', the head of the clause 'if' is according to English standard grammar a subordinator. However, 'if only I knew' is treated as an independent clause and is, if at all, accompanied by a subordinate rather than a superordinate clause as in 'if only I knew *what he was doing*'. Insubordination is cross-linguistically attested but often omitted or downplayed in standard grammars, particularly in grammars of highly codified languages like French. Yet with the increasing interest in non-standard features and non-standard varieties in linguistics, insubordination has lately received more attention (cf. Larrivee and Lefevre 2007).

The process of insubordination raises three essential problems: (1) The process seems to run counter to the usually assumed one-way path of grammaticalisation, from paratactic to hypotactic structures (cf. Patard 2014 for French). (2) In order to resolve this issue, it may be necessary to reconsider the unit of interest. In short, are clauses a unit of natural language or a unit of artificial grammars (cf. Blanche-Benveniste for French, Halford and Pilch 1990 more generally)? (3) If the latter is the case, not only need we define a unit of analysis for natural language but we also need to consider the functional requirements of spoken language. In this context, the apparent pragmatic conditioning of insubordination becomes relevant (cf. Debaisieux 2004, Sansinena et al. 2015).

This paper seeks to trace the phenomenon of insubordination and the range of 'insubordinators' in French in order to show (1) that it is not an innovation of modern colloquial discourse, (2) that it is a pragmatically valuable resource and (3) that with the right unit of analysis it does not challenge traditional categories of, but only traditional views on grammar.

References

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