



# The interactional emergence of conditional clauses as directives: constructions, trajectories and sequences of actions



Jan Lindström<sup>a,\*</sup>, Camilla Lindholm<sup>b,1</sup>, Ritva Laury<sup>c,2</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Finnish, Finno-Ugric and Scandinavian Studies, PO Box 24, 00014, University of Helsinki, Finland

<sup>b</sup> Department of Finnish, Finno-Ugric and Scandinavian Studies, PO Box 4, 00014, University of Helsinki, Finland

<sup>c</sup> Department of Finnish, Finno-Ugric and Scandinavian Studies, PO Box 3, 00014, University of Helsinki, Finland

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## ABSTRACT

This article concerns the sequential emergence of Finnish and Swedish insubordinated *jos* and *om* 'if' adverbial clauses in interaction from a synchronic, online use perspective. The authors first demonstrate that such clauses function as complete directives without any main clauses, and that recipients treat them as such, responding to the directive as soon as the insubordinate clause is produced. It is then shown that many insubordinated conditionals used as directives (ICDs) are associated with a certain orderly sequential pattern organized in adjacency pairs, which bears a certain similarity to *bona fide* conditional clauses. This suggests that conditional clause patterns, including insubordinated ones, emerge in interaction in response to actions done and not done by the recipients of the requests, and are thus a product of the interaction of participants in conversation.

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## 1. Introduction

Adverbial clauses are ordinarily thought to form part of a clause combination and therefore, like other subordinate clause types, to project a superordinate clause to follow if produced in an initial utterance position (see, e.g., Auer, 2005). That is, once an initial adverbial clause is produced, participants in a conversation would, based on their experience with the language, expect a superordinate clause to be produced to complete a "full" complex sentence. However, it is also known that in many languages, clause types ordinarily considered subordinate can, in some contexts, appear without what can be analyzed as superordinate clauses, and thus are non-projecting (e.g. Matihaldi, 1979; Ford, 1993; Clancy et al., 1997; Kauppinen, 1998; Suzuki, 2009; D'Hertefelt, 2015; Sansiñena et al., 2015). Evans (2007) has introduced the concept "insubordination" to refer to (the diachronic development towards) syntactically independent uses of constructions that may have the basic appearance of subordinated constructions such as complement and conditional clauses. However, some of Evans' claims concerning the diachronic pathway towards insubordination have been disputed (cf. Mithun, 2008).

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +358 2941 23007.

E-mail addresses: [jan.k.lindstrom@helsinki.fi](mailto:jan.k.lindstrom@helsinki.fi) (J. Lindström), [camilla.lindholm@helsinki.fi](mailto:camilla.lindholm@helsinki.fi) (C. Lindholm), [ritva.laury@helsinki.fi](mailto:ritva.laury@helsinki.fi) (R. Laury).

<sup>1</sup> Tel.: +358 50 4160531.

<sup>2</sup> Tel.: +358 50 3185262, +1 559 360 9675.

According to Evans (2007), it is crosslinguistically common that conditional clauses (i.e. *if* clauses) are used without any superordinate clauses to make requests and offers and to express wishes – these are uses which he terms “if requests”, “if wishes” and “if offers” (2007, p. 372). The Finnish and Swedish *jos* and *om* clauses, the topic of this article, are one example of this kind of insubordination. In spoken interaction, they mostly communicate different kinds of directive actions, but these uses are insufficiently (if at all) treated in reference grammars. In addition, there is a wealth of traditionally recognized (but not necessarily commonly used), fully conventionalized insubordinate conditionals which express unaddressed potential or unreal wishes (*Om hon bara kommer dit i tid!* ‘If she only comes there in time’; *Om du var här* ‘If you (only) were here’) or counterfactual expressive meaning (*Hade jag bara varit där!* ‘If I only had been there’).<sup>3</sup> Finnish also has such uses, cf. *Jos se vaan tulee ajoissa* ‘If s/he only comes in time’; *Oi jospa oisin saanut olla mukana* ‘If only I had been able to be there’, from a children’s song.

In what follows, we will first give an overview of Finnish and Swedish insubordinate conditionals used as directives (ICDs), building on our prior work on these constructions and leaving aside unaddressed desiderative uses (Laury, 2012; Laury et al., 2013). We will then discuss the interactional emergence of ICDs in conversational sequences. We will demonstrate that they are associated with an orderly sequential pattern organized in adjacency pairs, and that this pattern bears a certain similarity to the emergence of ordinary initial conditional clauses which are followed by a consequent (apodosis) in an orderly fashion. Hence, the ultimate realization of an insubordinate conditional clause or a more canonical conditional clause combination has an interactional trajectory which is dependent on local sequential contingencies involving collaborative input from the participants (cf. Ford, 2004). Interactional approaches to insubordination are not commonplace, but we note the “dyadically dependent” analysis of insubordinate complement clauses that has been put forward by Sansiñena et al. (2015); their investigation looks for a motivation for insubordination in the preceding sequential context, arguing for that an insubordinate clausal unit could be seen as a projection (and completion) of a matrix clausal unit produced in a prior turn (thus “depending” on it). Our analysis, in contrast, is concerned with projections and actions *following* a (potentially) insubordinate clausal unit which seems to lack a projected superordinate unit (and thus, completion). We also want to stress that our analysis is strictly synchronic, based on an online syntactical view of utterances and constructions emerging in talk-in-interaction here and now (cf. Auer, 2005); we therefore refrain from making any assumptions about the diachronic emergence of insubordinate conditional clauses.

## 2. Data and method

The data used for the study come from the conversation archives of the Department of Finnish, Finno-Ugrian and Scandinavian Studies at the University of Helsinki. The data include approximately seven hours of Finnish everyday face-to-face conversations and telephone calls among friends, family members and acquaintances and 61 h of Swedish face-to-face conversations of which most were recorded in institutional settings, i.e. doctor–patient consultations or moderated conversations with high school students. Recordings of both Sweden Swedish (48 h) and Finland Swedish (13 h) are included. Taken together, our data contain 42 insubordinated Finnish conditional *jos* clauses and 92 insubordinated Swedish conditional *om* clauses, i.e. conditional clauses which do not form a clear-cut biclausal construction with a main clause (apodosis).<sup>4</sup> We have augmented this collection with a few relevant extracts from previous published work on language and interaction such as Lindström (1999).

The analytic methods are rooted in the traditions of Conversation Analysis and Interactional Linguistics (see Couper-Kuhlen and Selting, 2001). We thus pay special attention to the sequential, turn-by-turn emergence of speaker contributions and their grammatical shaping in conversational interaction as it is unfolding in real time.

## 3. Insubordinated conditionals as stand-alone directives

In general, conditionals function to name hypothetical or unreal events or states of affairs (Couper-Kuhlen and Thompson, 2009), which may be presented as either undesirable or desirable by the speaker. The content of the conditional clause is thus unassertable (cf. Dancygier, 1998, p. 23). The sense of “optionality” expressed by conditionals is also mentioned by Ford (1993) as a feature of English *if* clauses, which makes conditionals useful for offers without any explicating main clauses. Further, Kangasharju (1991, p. 152) found that many of the requests and suggestions in her Finnish data from business negotiations involved conditionality, and she suggests that such uses may give the addressees room for negotiation. Sorjonen et al. (2009, p. 109), on the other hand, found that the conditional was used in requests made at convenience stores to propose actions which were contingent on the acceptance of the recipient of the request; clients used conditional requests for items from clerks when the clerk had access to the item, and the client did not.

<sup>3</sup> For a fuller account on different functional categories of insubordinate conditional and complement clauses in Germanic languages (including Swedish), see D’Hertefelt, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> These figures seem to suggest that insubordinate conditional clauses are much more frequent in Finnish than in Swedish. We believe, though, that the difference depends on the types of data we had available: insubordinate conditionals are especially frequent in the Finnish telephone calls, most of which involved planning of future actions. The construction is used to a lesser degree in casual group conversations, a genre dominating the Swedish dataset, in which most of the talk is about specific topics and not so much about actions which should be carried out. Hence, the activity type is probably crucial for the directive use of insubordinate conditionals.

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