

Subordination in Conversation

Edited by

Ritva Laury and Ryoko Suzuki

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Subordination in Conversation

A cross-linguistic perspective

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Subordination in Conversation

Studies in Language and Social Interaction (SLSI)

Studies in Language and Social Interaction is a series which continues the tradition of *Studies in Discourse and Grammar*, but with a new focus. It aims to provide a forum for research on grammar, understood broadly, in its natural home environment, spoken interaction. The assumption underlying the series is that the study of language as it is actually used in social interaction provides the foundation for understanding how the patterns and regularities we think of as grammar emerge from everyday communicative needs. The editors welcome language-related research from a range of different methodological traditions, including conversation analysis, interactional linguistics, and discourse-functional linguistics.

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Volume 24

Subordination in Conversation. A cross-linguistic perspective
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Table of contents

List of contributors	VII
Introduction	1
<i>Ritva Laury and Ryoko Suzuki</i>	
<i>N be that</i> -constructions in everyday German conversation: A reanalysis of ‘die Sache ist/das Ding ist’ (‘the thing is’)-clauses as <i>projector phrases</i>	11
<i>Susanne Günthner</i>	
Interrogative “complements” and question design in Estonian	37
<i>Leelo Keevalik</i>	
Syntactic and actional characteristics of Finnish <i>että</i> -clauses	69
<i>Aino Koivisto, Ritva Laury and Eeva-Leena Seppänen</i>	
Clause-combining and the sequencing of actions: Projector constructions in French talk-in-interaction	103
<i>Simona Pekarek Doehler</i>	
A note on the emergence of quotative constructions in Japanese conversation	149
<i>Ryoko Suzuki</i>	
Clines of subordination – constructions with the German ‘complement-taking predicate’ <i>glauben</i>	165
<i>Wolfgang Imo</i>	
Are <i>kara</i> ‘because’-clauses causal subordinate clauses in present-day Japanese?	191
<i>Yuko Higashiizumi</i>	

<i>Teyuuka</i> and <i>I mean</i> as pragmatic parentheticals in Japanese and English <i>Ritva Laury and Shigeko Okamoto</i>	209
Name index	239
Subject index	243

Introduction

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Functional explanations for language phenomena

The approach taken in this volume of articles can be broadly characterized as a functional one. One of the basic goals of functional linguistics has been the search for functional explanations for linguistic regularities. This search has taken such forms as the early work of iconicity (Haiman 1985), where researchers were looking for isomorphism between language structures and their meaning and function. In another functional approach, Emergent Grammar (Hopper 1987), grammatical patterns are seen to emerge as usage patterns in discourse. In the research on grammaticalization (e.g., Traugott & Heine 1991, Bybee 2007), new grammatical categories are seen as a result of crystallization of originally relatively free combinations into fixed grammatical patterns through frequency in language use. In the most recent functional paradigm, Interactional Linguistics, grammar is seen as a resource for the organization of social life (Ochs, Schegloff & Thompson 1996; Selting & Couper-Kuhlen 2001).

The volume is based on a collection of papers presented in the panel ‘Subordination in conversation – crosslinguistic analyses of form-function matches’, organized by the editors of this volume at the International Pragmatics Conference in 2007 (Göteborg, Sweden). The papers can most clearly be seen as belonging to the last three strands of research, in the sense that in this volume, we consider grammatical patterns in a variety of languages in terms of how they arise both synchronically and diachronically out of recurrent practices in conversation, and also in terms of how they relate to the actional and sequential patterns in conversation, or, more broadly, in terms of their interactional functions.

The focus of this book – ‘Subordination’

The main theme of this volume is subordination in conversation. Subordination has been the focus of much recent interest in functional linguistics (e.g., Thompson

2002, Englebretson 2003, Couper-Kuhlen & Thompson 2008, Laury (ed.) 2008). Traditionally, subordination has been defined in syntactic terms: subordinate clauses are “grammatically dependent on another clause or some element in another clause” (Thompson, Longacre & Hwang 2007: 237–238). The subordinate clause has been seen as an argument in the other (its main, or matrix) clause (complement clauses), as a modifier of an NP in it (relative clause) or as a modifier of the verb or the whole clause (adverbial clause).

However, this traditional definition has been challenged by researchers. Some linguists (e.g. Matthiessen & Thompson 1988) have viewed subordination as a continuum – in this approach, relative clauses and complement clauses are viewed as embedded within their matrix clause, while adverbial clauses are hypotactically linked to their main clause. It has also been proposed that even within one clause type, there may be a continuum of subordination (e.g. König & van der Auwera 1988; Givón 1990; Günthner 1996, 1999; Tao & McCarthy 2001), and that certain clause types which have been considered subordinate in particular languages may not actually be best described as such (e.g. Dixon 1995; Thompson 2002; Englebretson 2003; Laury 2006). It has also been proposed that many biclausal combinations actually involve **projection** rather than subordination (e.g. Auer & Günthner 2005; Hopper 2004; Hopper & Thompson 2008, and Thompson 2002).

Subordination has also been recently discussed within Cognitive Linguistics, yet another functional approach. Cognitive linguists have suggested that subordination can be viewed conceptually as the distinction between figure (main clause) and ground (subordinate clause) (Talmy 2000: 324). Similar to this is Langacker’s (1991: 436; 2008) description of the subordinate clause as the one whose profile is overridden by the main clause; in this approach, the subordinate clause lacks an independent profile while that of the main clause imposes its own profile over the whole sentence. (For a useful summary of various approaches to subordination, see Cristofaro 2003: 22–29).

Some of the papers in this volume propose yet another direction of research. They approach ‘subordination’ in terms of social action, taking what participants are **doing** with their talk in conversation into account. We could think of one action forming a part of another (main activity vs. subordinate action), so that subordinated verbal actions would be ones which are included within larger activities, or dependent on, or supportive of, other actions, so that subordination would be a matter of *inclusion* (for a discussion of actions embedded within other actions, see Lerner and Kitzinger 2007; Etelämäki 2009). We could also look at the relation in terms of *focality*. For example, Auer (2005: 9) suggests that ‘pres’ (i.e., prefatory activities in conversation, such as story prefaces, preinvitations, preannouncements, etc., which foreshadow another action)¹ “project by noticeably being

1. On pres, see Schegloff 1980, 2007.

subsidiary (subordinated) to some focal activity”. Here Auer seems to be talking more about what is central to the activity vs. what is less central, and also suggesting that activities which serve to foreshadow or project actions (or activities) may be considered to be subordinated to those activities. Thompson (2002) considers the action that a turn is performing to be the part of the turn that is sequentially implicative; she specifically claims that “conversationalists are normally oriented to the material in the complements and independent clauses (154)”, rather than to the content in the matrix clause, and therefore argues against the treatment of complements as ‘subordinate/not main.’ However, the ways in which syntactic subordination correlates with the actional and sequential structure of conversation is still not well understood. Several of the papers in this volume deal with that topic.

Other papers in this volume involve more classic themes such as the grammaticalization of particles and the grammaticalization of discourse markers from conjunctions and main clauses. All of the papers consider linguistic form as emergent from recurrent practices engaged in by participants in conversation. Therefore, this volume contains two related functional approaches to subordination: interactional and emergent approaches. All the contributions critically examine central syntactic notions in interclausal relations and their relevance to the description of clause combining in conversational language, to the structure of conversation, and to the interactional functions of language.

Contents of the volume

The articles contributed by Günthner, Keevallik, Koivisto, Laury & Seppänen, Pekarek Doehler, and Suzuki address, in different ways, the relationship between action and grammatical subordination.

Günthner’s contribution concerns the German *die Sache ist/das Ding ist*- ‘the thing is’ construction and its use as a projective fragment in conversation. She shows that the traditional treatment of this construction in reference grammars does not adequately account for its use in spoken German. In conversation, speakers use the construction to project an upcoming syntagma as a focal point. What follows *die Sache ist/das Ding ist* is often not clausal in nature; that is, the construction is not by nature a matrix clause followed by a subordinate clause, as it is described in grammars. What follows the construction in conversation can in fact be a nonintegrated main clause, or it can even be a longer stretch of discourse. Günthner points out that the nature of this construction follows the usual tendencies noted in grammaticalization, namely the degrading of a construction in pragmatic weight, interactional function, and also in terms of syntactic features, as the construction becomes routinized and formulaic and skewed toward certain types of communicative functions.

The article by Keevallik deals with Estonian indirect questions and their status as complements. She shows that indirect questions are not treated as subordinate by participants in Estonian conversation, but rather are interactionally prominent and responded to in the next turn. This is reflected in their grammar in that they also have features of main clause direct questions. Similarly to Günthner, Keevallik also suggests that the 'main' clauses associated with indirect questions have been grammaticized into epistemic particles which function to project and design questions in a sequentially and interpersonally sensitive way.

Thus, the papers by both Günthner and Keevallik suggest that in the clause combinations they examine, the initial element does not serve as a main clause, but rather serves to project an upcoming segment, which may be clausal or non-clausal in form. Both papers show that what participants orient to in the upcoming conversation, and what therefore seems central in the interaction is what follows the projector phrase, not the projector phrase itself (cf. Thompson 2002). Therefore, as suggested by Auer (2005: 9) for prefatory activities, the projector phrases could perhaps be considered "subsidiary (subordinated) to some focal activity", namely the action carried out by the main clause which follows.

The paper by Koivisto, Laury & Seppänen takes up a similar issue, but from a different angle. The topic of their article is the role of complement-taking constructions and particles in the organization of conversation. They discuss the use of the Finnish *että*, which functions both as a complementizer and as an initial and final particle. They show that utterances which follow the most frequently occurring types of CTPs involving *että*, as well as utterances starting and ending with the particle *että*, are not syntactically subordinate, and since their content is clearly oriented to by the participants in the interaction, they are not subordinate on the level of action either. However, the authors suggest, differing from e.g., Thompson (2002), that the CTP phrases (as well as the particle *että*) are not actionally subordinate to the complement clauses or other utterances they are associated with, since they can also be shown to be oriented to by the participants. Instead, the authors suggest that the particles and the CTP phrases can be understood to perform a separate action in the service of the action done by the utterance they accompany, similarly to referential actions described by Lerner & Kitzinger (2007).

Pekarek Doehler takes up the question of certain French constructions which have traditionally been analyzed as biclausal, namely the *je veux dire* 'I want to say' + complement construction, the *il y a* 'there is' presentational cleft, and the pseudo-cleft-construction. Pekarek Doehler shows that the initial projector fragment in these constructions serves to fit together stretches of talk and in that way functions to organize complex turns. The constructions differ in that *je veux dire* has a retrospective orientation, as it functions to extend a turn, prolonging some previous action and presenting a stretch of talk as a modification of preceding talk, while

the *il y a*-cleft is more exclusively prospectively oriented and opens a new segment of talk. The pseudocleft, in turn, also projects forward to a complex segment, and frames it in certain ways so that the second part is oriented to by co-participants – and hence interpretable – as accomplishing an action that is projected by the first part. The talk that follows these initial projector fragments varies in length and scope, but the talk and its eventual boundary is related to both the nature of the projector and its contextual embedding. Pekarek Doehler suggests that the projector fragment in this way projects both turn-shape and turn-type. She further proposes that the initial projector fragment can thus be interpreted as part of a turn-constructional device that is instrumental for floor-holding, turn-extension, and the construction of complex turns. In this sense, Pekarek Doehler's point is similar to that made by Günthner and Keevallik.

Suzuki's paper discusses the diachronic development of constructions involving the quotative complementizer *tte* in Japanese. The sequence of [reported speech + *tte* + verb of saying] is usually considered to be typical, but in natural conversation, *tte* also occurs at the end of clausal utterances without any main verb. Suzuki examines the earliest *tte* tokens in her data, and finds that tokens of utterance-final *tte* without any main verb following it can be found in three interactional contexts: (1) introducing reported speech as the 2nd pair part of a question – answer sequence; (2) introducing reported speech with an explicit reference to the original speaker; (3) introducing immediate repetition of the prior speaker's utterance. At this point, we would not be able to directly link utterance-final uses of *tte* in the early data and *tte* used as the utterance-final pragmatic particles in today's natural conversation. However, utterance-final *tte* in the early data, which implements several interactional practices with specific communicative intent, i.e., offering information, clarification, asking for elaboration etc., may feed into the emergence of utterance-final *tte* as an independent syntactic construction.

The papers by Imo, Higashiizumi, and Laury & Okamoto, which form the second part of the volume, are also concerned with the use of grammatical forms in conversation, but focus more on issues of the development and continuum nature of grammatical categories.

Imo's paper concerns constructions with the German complement-taking predicate *glauben*. Imo shows that in his spoken German corpus, the CTPs involving *glauben* form a cline with clear matrix clauses at one end, and with uses as adverbs or modal particles at the other end. He shows that when the clause with *ich glaube* 'I think' is initial, and the clause following it has subordinate grammar, the *glauben*-clause is relatively asserted and its profile overrides that of the clause that follows. On the other hand, when a clause-initial *ich glaube* is followed by a main clause, it functions as a pragmatic particle or discourse marker. In clause-final and clause-medial use, the matrix-clause character of *glaub(e) ich* is further

lessened. In these positions, the expression has become nearly fully recategorized. As also noted by Auer & Günthner (2005), in these positions, it has lost syntactic powers of projection, and has become morphologically and phonologically reduced and prosodically downscaled and integrated.

Higashiizumi's paper focuses on Japanese *kara* 'because'-clauses from synchronic and diachronic perspectives. This study, like some other recent studies of complex clause constructions, rejects the traditional dichotomous approach of subordination vs. coordination, and suggests that a three-way continuum of parataxis-hypotaxis-subordination (Hopper and Traugott 2003) would be more useful in describing the evolution of *kara*-clauses. However, she finds the direction of change of the *kara*-clause goes the opposite direction from what has earlier been suggested; starting from subordination to parataxis, and furthermore, to independent *kara*-clause without any main clause. Before 1900, the *kara*-clause was used as a subordinate clause, expressing real-world causality, and was followed by a main clause. Then, from the 1900s onward, one finds an increase of paratactic *kara*-clause constructions, expressing epistemic or speech-act causality. Accordingly, the clausal order becomes more flexible, so we find an increasing use of *kara*-clauses following a main clause ('the inverted order'). Independent *kara*-clauses, whose interpretation relies on surrounding discourse, also show an increase in the 20th century. In her paper, Higashiizumi demonstrates the complex relationship between syntax and semantic/pragmatic functions of *kara*-clauses.

Laury & Okamoto's paper compares the use of the English *I mean* and the Japanese *teyuuka*. Each of these constructions has been extensively studied separately, but have not been compared with respect to their interactional functions. Laury & Okamoto show that although the expressions have quite different syntactic and semantic origins, they have come to be used in similar ways in conversation. The function of both expressions can be characterized in terms of self-monitoring: they indicate that a preceding utterance is somehow inadequate or in need of modification, and they may project another utterance which is intended as a modification of that preceding utterance. The article also shows that *teyuuka* may be further along in its path of grammaticalization than *I mean*, while *I mean* may have more of an interpersonal function than *teyuuka*. On the other hand, *teyuuka* functions on a more metalinguistic level. This may pose a problem for the theory of grammaticalization, since it has often been assumed that items move from subjective to intersubjective functions as they become further grammaticalized. The paper also discusses the contribution of the original syntax and semantics of the expressions, and the syntax of Japanese and English in general, to the developmental paths and current use of these expressions.

Contribution to subordination research and future directions

This volume adds to the existing literature which has questioned the standard assumptions regarding subordination in the languages of the world. Several papers (in particular Günthner, Keevallik, Imo, Laury & Okamoto) suggest that the tendency for complement-taking constructions to become grammaticalized into formulaic fragments (e.g. Thompson & Mulac 1991, Auer 1996, Hopper 2001, Thompson 2002, and others) is widespread in a range of genetically and geographically unrelated languages. The papers by Higashiizumi, Günthner, Imo, Keevallik, and Suzuki also discuss the changes that subordinate clauses undergo so that they increasingly develop main clause-like syntax: while Higashiizumi and Suzuki view this change from a diachronic perspective, Günthner, Imo, and Keevallik base their observations on synchronic data. Suzuki and Koivisto, Laury & Seppänen discuss a related process, the development of complementizers into pragmatic particles. Another related question has to do with biclausal constructions in general; as Günthner as well as Pekarek Doehler point out in their paper, and as also suggested by Hopper and Thompson (2008), many constructions normally thought to be biclausal, such as pseudo-clefts, actually consist of a formulaic fragment which serves to project, and, as Pekarek Doehler shows, tie the utterances they occur with to ongoing talk, framing them in certain ways and affording the construction of complex turns.

A novel topic taken up in several papers is the connection between grammatical subordination and the structure of conversation. These papers, notably the contributions by Günthner, Keevallik, Koivisto, Laury & Seppänen, and Pekarek Doehler add to the claims made in earlier research (e.g. Thompson 2002) regarding the orientation of participants to the matter expressed in the part of the utterance normally considered grammatically subordinate; such utterances, responded to and otherwise oriented to by participants, may also show grammatical features of main clauses in languages with distinctive main clause and subordinate clause syntax. Several of the papers also touch upon the functions of formulaic projecting phrases and particles. Keevallik suggests that the Estonian particles in her data serve to deal with interpersonal and sequential matters in conversation, while Pekarek Doehler shows that the French projecting formulae she discusses in her paper are devices specializing in contextualizing the utterance which follows in terms of turn type and turn shape. Koivisto, Laury & Seppänen also show that the Finnish projecting formula and particle which they discuss in their paper does important work in organizing the participant framework in conversation (Goffman 1981), and question whether the work done by these elements should be considered actionally subordinate, since they can also be shown to be oriented to by the participants.

A challenge to our quest to relate grammatical subordination to the actional and sequential structure of conversation is that it is not yet quite clear just how the link between the syntactic level and the actional level in general should be characterized. The work on this topic, while highly exciting and important, is only in its beginning stages. Traditional views of syntactic subordination have been challenged, and this volume continues that work, but the vocabulary to talk about the types of relations we actually see in conversation is still developing. There are still only scattered references in the literature to subordination on the level of action. In fact, our volume is one of the very first attempts to link together the two concepts, subordination and action. We expect to see significant work on this topic in the future, along the lines pointed to in the articles in the volume.

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