

How does insubordination relate to subordination? A constructional cline of *comme si*-clauses in French

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*Clause-combining at the discourse-grammar interface:
Answers from coordination, subordination and insubordination*

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From subordination to insubordination

> **subordinate** clauses are **dependent** on a main clause (element)



syntactically: anchored to a main clause
pragmatically: illocutionary force borrowed from main clause
discursively: surrounding discourse is needed for semantic-pragmatic interpretation

(1) *Il reprend-s la parole comme si de rien n' ét-ait.*
he take.back-PRS.3SG the word as if of nothing NEG be-PST.3SG
'He starts speaking again as if nothing had happened.'

> **insubordinate** clauses are formally subordinate (Evans 2007), but **independent**



(2) A: *Je vais arrê-t-er de fum-er.*
I go.PRS.1SG stop-INF of smoke-INF
'I'm going to quit smoking.'

syntactically: no main clause
pragmatically: illocutionary force of their own (e.g. exclamative)
discursively: meaningful in isolation (D'Hertefelt 2018)

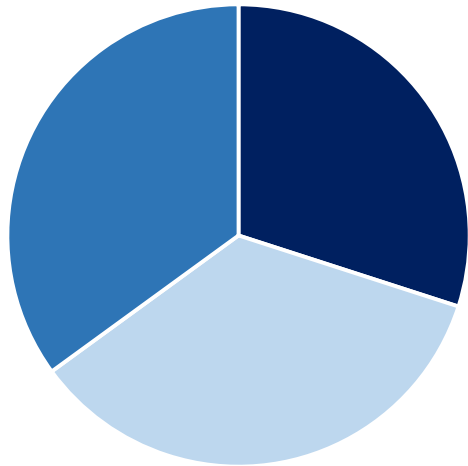
B: *Comme si t' all-ais réuss-ir!*
as if you go-PST.2SG succeed-INF
'As if you would succeed!'

mismatch between grammar and discourse



- How can we tell subordinate and in subordinate clauses apart?
i.e. which **constructional features** characterize in subordinate (*comme si*) clauses
- Does the resulting typology account for **how in subordination arises in discourse**?
i.e. how do speakers come to use formally subordinate clauses in an independent way

Corpus data: **714 instances** of *comme si*-clauses



- **spoken** in conversation: *Orféo* – exhaustive sample of **214** examples
- **written** online: *frTenTen17* – random sample of **250** examples
- **written** literature: *Corpus Romans* – random sample of **250** examples

Each instance of *comme si*-clause was analysed in terms of...

> **syntax**

degrees of **(in)dependence**, based on obligatoriness, clefting and preposability (Smessaert et al. 2015)

> **semantics-pragmatics**

the different **semantic values** they can express and the **pragmatic functions** they can serve

> **prosody**

nuclear configurations (Delais-Roussarie et al. 2015, Elvira-García et al. 2017): pitch accent + boundary tone

→ nuclear configuration of the *comme si*-clause

i. hypothetical manner

semantic expression of manner at a **representational** level (i.e. ideational discourse domain; cf. Crible & Degand 2019)

↪ manner of *doing* – ‘to do X AS IF Y *was true*’ (Olguín-Martínez 2021)
counterfactual epistemic status of the clause content

syntax (i.e. degree of (in)dependence):

> **strong**: complement clauses

(3) *Et puis elle fai-t comme si de rien n' étai-t.*
and then she do-3SG as if of nothing not be-PST.3SG
'And then she acts AS IF nothing happened.'

i. hypothetical manner

semantic expression of manner at a **representational** level (i.e. ideational discourse domain; cf. Crible & Degand 2019)

↪ manner of *doing* – ‘to do X AS IF Y *was true*’ (Olguín-Martínez 2021)
counterfactual epistemic status of the clause content

syntax (i.e. degree of (in)dependence):

> **strong**: complement clauses

> **weak**: non-obligatory adverbials (Verstraete 2007)

- bound subordinate clauses

(4) *Avec lui, je parl-e comme si je parl-ais avec toi.*
with him I speak-1SG as if I speak-PST.1SG with you
‘With him, I speak AS IF I was speaking to you.’

- free subordinate clauses

(5) *Comme si le froid ne suffis-ait pas, la météo annonc-e un nouveau cyclone.*
as if the cold NEG be.enough-PST.3SG NEG the weather announce-3SG a new storm
‘AS IF the cold wasn’t enough, the forecast announces a new storm.’



i. hypothetical manner

semantic expression of manner at a **representational** level (i.e. ideational discourse domain; cf. Crible & Degand 2019)

➔ manner of *doing* – ‘to do X AS IF Y *was true*’ (Olguín-Martínez 2021)
counterfactual epistemic status of the clause content

syntax (i.e. degree of (in)dependence):

- > **strong**: complement clauses
- > **weak**: non-obligatory adverbials (Verstraete 2007)
- > **independent**: dependency shift (D’Hertefelt 2018)

(6) *Mais l’ erreur est trop souvent de croire que le travail consist-e à répét-er*
but the mistake is too often of believe.INF that the work consist-3SG to repeat-INF
inlassablement l’ instrument une même ‘gymnastique’, comme si la cause des difficultés
tirelessly the instrument a same gymnastics as if the cause of.the difficulties

ét-ait surtout affaire de dextérité.

be-PST.3SG mainly matter of dexterity

‘But, too often, the mistake is to believe that work consists of tirelessly repeating the same activity on the instrument, AS IF the cause of difficulties were mainly a matter of dexterity.’

Constructional typology of *comme si*-clauses

i. hypothetical manner

semantic expression of manner at a **representational** level (i.e. ideational discourse domain; cf. Crible & Degand 2019)

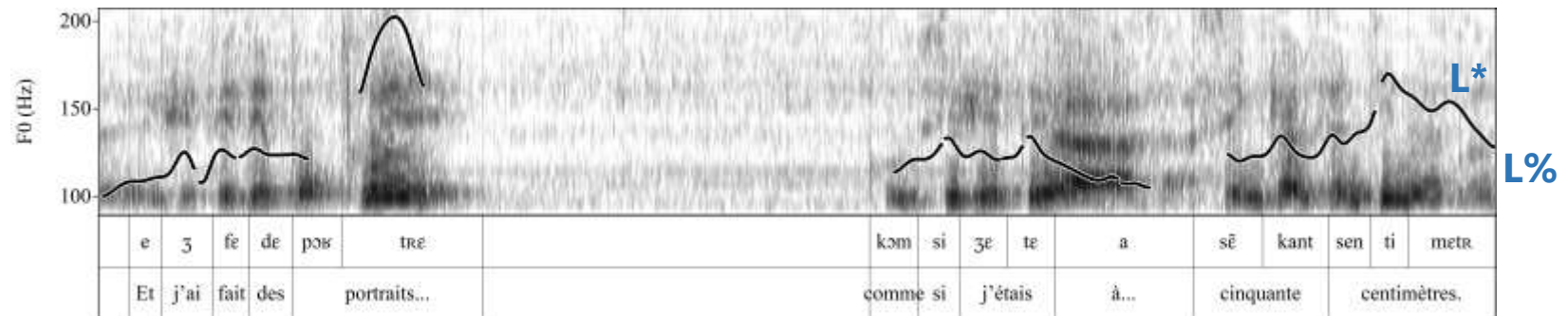
↪ manner of *doing* – ‘to do X AS IF Y was true’ (Olguín-Martínez 2021)
counterfactual epistemic status of the clause content

syntax (i.e. degree of (in)dependence):

- > **strong**: complement clauses
- > **weak**: non-obligatory adverbials (Verstraete 2007)
- > **independent**: dependency shift (D’Hertefelt 2018)

prosody

- > falling pattern (L* L%)
→ **declarative**



(7) *Et j'ai fait des portrait-s... comme si j'étais à cinquante centimètres.*
and I have.1SG do-PTCP PARTITIVE picture-PL as if I be-PST.1SG at fifty centimetres
'And I took some pictures... AS IF I was fifty centimetres close.'



ii. hypothetical qualification

semantic expression of manner at an **epistemic** level (i.e. rhetorical discourse domain; cf. Crible & Degand 2019)

↪ manner of *being* – ‘*X is (perceived) AS IF Y was true*’
counterfactual epistemic status of the clause content

syntax (i.e. degree of (in)dependence):

> **strong**: complement clauses, displaying a copular verb

(8) *C' est plus pratique, c' est **comme si** j' av-ais ma voiture ici.*
it be.3SG more practical it be.3SG as if I have-PST.1SG my car here
'It's more practical, it is AS IF I had my car here.'

> **independent**: dependency shift (D'Hertefelt 2018)

(9) *Pas loin de chez elle. **Comme si** tu te dirige-ais vers le Grand Large, en fait.*
not far from home her as if you REFL head-PST.2SG toward the Grand Large in fact
'Not far from her place. AS IF you were headed for the Grand Large, actually.'

prosody

> falling pattern (L* L%) → **declarative**

iii. hypothetical cause

semantic expression of manner at an **epistemic** level (i.e. rhetorical discourse domain; cf. Crible & Degand 2019)

↪ manner of *doing* – '*do X AS IF Y was its cause*'
manner of *being* – '*X is a fact AS IF Y was its cause*'
potential epistemic status of the clause content

syntax (i.e. degree of (in)dependence):

- > **strong**: complement clauses
- > **weak**: non-obligatory adverbials (Verstraete 2007)

(10) **Comme si** *quelqu'un l'avait tirée de l'intérieur, la porte s'ouvrit avant qu'il ne l'ait touchée.*
'AS IF someone had pulled it from the inside, the door opened before he touched it.'

- > **independent**: dependency shift (D'Hertefelt 2018)

prosody

- > falling pattern (L* L%) → declarative

iv. denial of an assumption

semantic expression of the **speaker's attitude** (i.e. interpersonal discourse domain; cf. Crible & Degand 2019)

➔ manner of *saying* (i.e. speech act level) – [*you say that*] AS IF X *were true* [but it's not]'
counterfactual epistemic status of the clause content

➔ polarity reversal (Brinton 2014):
 allows the speaker to simultaneously **deny an assumption** and **assert its opposite**

syntax (i.e. degree of (in)dependence):

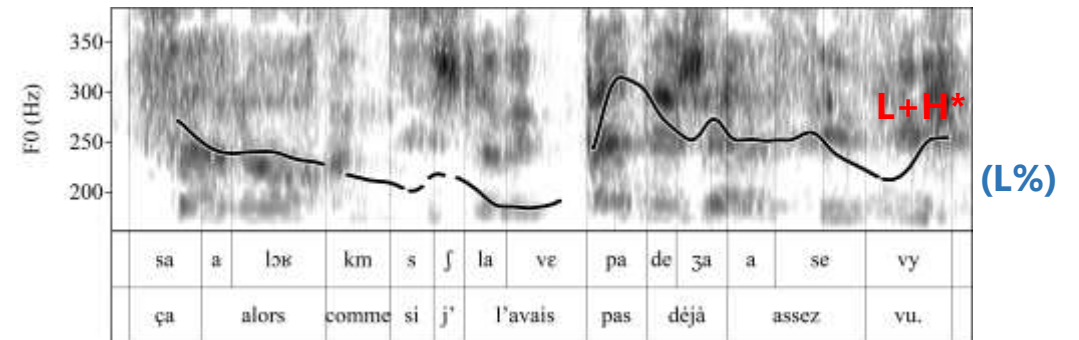
> **independent**: insubordinate clauses

(11) A: *Et tu vas voir Pompoko aussi.*
 and you go.PRS.2SG see-INF Pompoko too
 'And you're going to see *Pompoko* too.'

B: *Ça alors, **comme si** je l' av-ais pas déjà assez vu!*
 this then as if I it have-PST.1SG NEG already enough see.PTPC
 'Now that... AS IF I hadn't already seen it enough!'

prosody

> rising-falling pattern (L+H* L%) ➔ **exclamative**

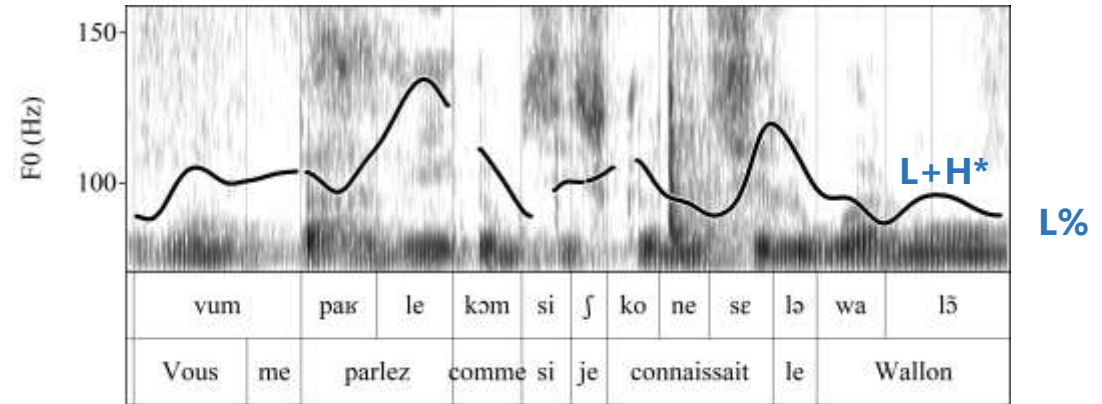


! longer syllables reveal the **underlying rising-falling pattern**



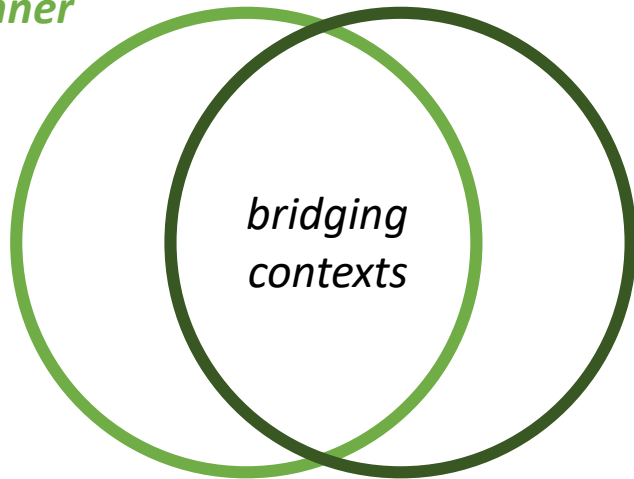
The case of bridging contexts

> **bridging contexts** (Brinton 2014:104; cf. Heine 2002)
 non-obligatory adverbials with both *manner* and *denial*

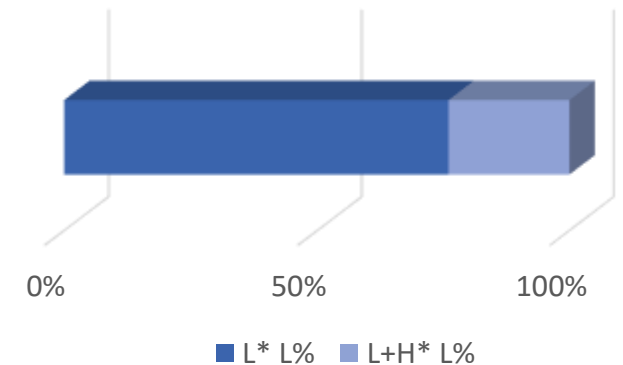


(10) *Vous me parlez **comme si** je connaissais le Wallon.*
 'You talk to me AS IF I knew the Wallonian language.'

manner

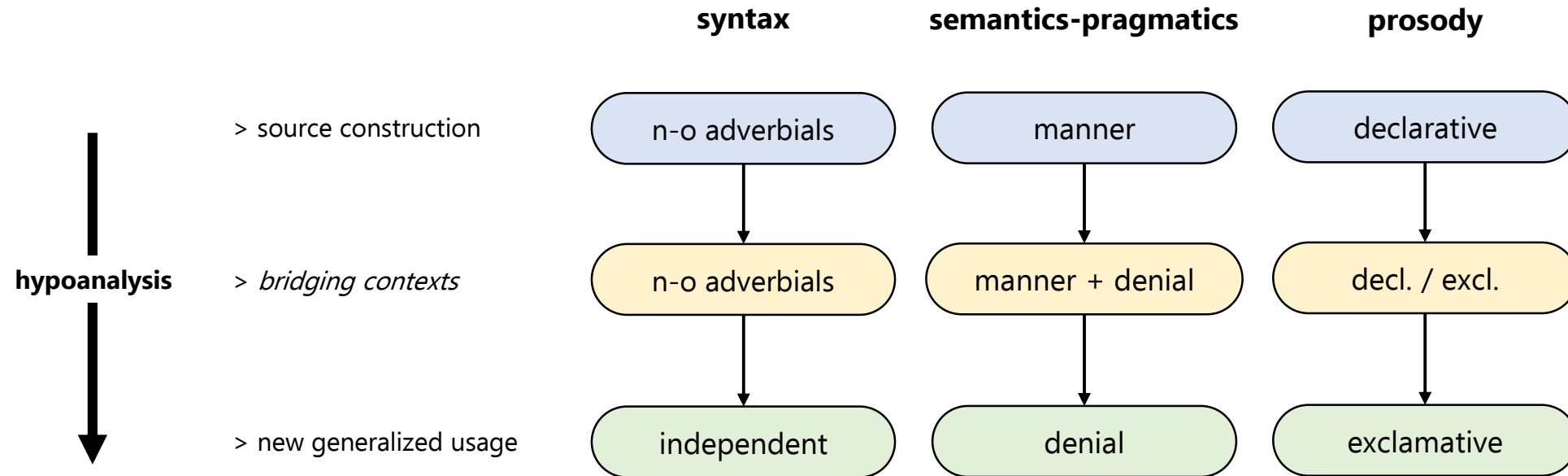


→ such examples contextually support both *manner* and *denial* readings
 prosodic realization of bridging contexts:



Discursive development of insubordinate *comme si*-clauses

Van linden & Van de Velde's (2014) hypothesis: **hypoanalysis** (Croft 2000)



→ Speakers do reanalyze this contextual meaning as an **inherent constructional property** of the subordinating conjunction, allowing insubordinate clauses to appear in discourse

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Thank you for your attention.

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