

Insubordination and Its Conditions: How Is the *If* + *Not* [P] Construction Licensed?

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1. Introduction

As one case of “insubordination” (Evans 2007), the examples in (1) below behave interestingly.

- (1) a. [A man with the nickname “Cinderella Man” approaches Max, who is relaxing at a bar.
Max stands up and says]
Well, if it ain’t Cinderella Man. (*Cinderella Man*)
b. [Mrs. Dugan dislikes microwaves, yet receives one as a Christmas present from her
husband. She is speaking to a guest.]
“Look at my new microwave,” Mrs. Dugan said. “If that’s not just the weirdest darn
thing I ever laid eyes on.” (*The Accidental Tourist*, underline mine)
c. “Oh, Gee, well, ain’t that the limit?” “If you aren’t the grouch.”
(1925 T. Dreiser Amer. Trag. I. xvii. 145, cited in Panther and Thornburg (2003))

Max expresses surprise upon meeting Cinderella Man in (1a), Mrs. Dugan expresses distaste for her microwave in (1b), and the speaker expresses ironic dissatisfaction in (1c). That is, the speakers express their emotional attitudes through *if*-clause-utterances, even though their literal meanings essentially lack such a function. Here, I apply the term “the *If* + *not* [P] construction” to this kind of insubordination. (Note that [P] refers to a positive proposition under the *if*-clause.)¹

The *If* + *not* [P] construction has been mentioned in several prior studies. However, there have been no proper answers for one of the most fundamental questions: How is this construction licensed? Therefore, this paper aims to discuss and revise the licensing conditions of this construction and confirm their validity with reference to Hirao (2018a, 2019). Furthermore, this study aims to reveal the relationships among the conditions.

This paper consists of four sections. In the next section (Section 2), I will summarize previous studies on insubordination and the *If* + *not* [P] construction. Section 3 addresses three points: the licensing conditions of the *If* + *not* [P] construction, the validity of the conditions for describing the construction, and the way the conditions interact with each other. The final section presents the study’s concluding remarks.

2. Background

Recent years have seen interest in expressions that seem syntactically incomplete yet are pragmatically complete. Evans (2007: 367) first applied the term “insubordination” to “the conventionalized main clause use of what, on *prima facie* grounds, appear to be formally

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subordinate clauses.” In another study, insubordination is “defined diachronically as the recruitment of main clause structures from subordinate structures, or synchronically as the independent use of constructions exhibiting *prima facie* characteristics of subordinate clauses” (Evans and Watanabe (2016: 2)). As such, insubordination is seen cross-linguistically. Although insubordination is less common in English than in Japanese, we can identify some distinctive patterns; (2) below presents some English examples, with their pragmatic forces illustrated in square brackets.

- (2) a. If you could give me a couple of 39c stamps please. [request] (Evans (2007: 380))
 b. If you would like a cookie. [offer] (Panther and Thornburg (2003: 127))
 c. That you should say such a thing! [expression of indignation] (ibid.)
 d. If only I had a clue where to look for her. [wish] (Panther and Thornburg (2003: 137))
 e. "What is it you want?" "As if you don't know." [expression of provocation]
 (COCA: FIC 1991, underline mine)

“The *If + not* [P] construction” was coined by Hirao (2018b). The existence of such a construction has been referred to in earlier studies such as Quirk et al. (1985), Panther and Thornburg (2003), and Dancygier and Sweetser (2005). However, these prior discussions are partial and/or empirically inadequate. For example, Quirk et al. (1985: 842) only mentioned the function of expressing surprise upon meeting a person as in (1a), while Dancygier and Sweetser (2005: 230–232) dealt with just one sub-category of the *If + not* [P] construction, which they called “the *if that NEG* construction” as in (1b).² Within this body of literature, Hirao (2018a) described the general characteristics of the *If + not* [P] construction and proposed its licensing conditions, which had never been discussed previously. Later, Hirao (2019) refined her proposed conditions. Nevertheless, there is further room for discussion and development of these conditions. For example, Hirao neither sufficiently checked the validity of the conditions nor discussed the relationships among them. Thus, starting in the next section, we will deal with the licensing conditions of the construction, their validity, and their relationships.

3. How is the *If + not* [P] construction licensed?

3.1 Licensing conditions of the *If + not* [P] construction

Firstly, this section deals with the licensing conditions of the *If + not* [P] construction. By analyzing instances, as Hirao (2018a, 2019) pointed out, we can identify the formal, semantic, and pragmatic conditions, which we will discuss and revise individually.

3.1.1 Condition 1: The formal condition

The first condition is based on the construction's appearance and its formal characteristics. The formal condition consists of three sub-conditions as follows:

- (3) Condition 1: The formal condition of the *If + not* [P] construction
- a. The construction takes the *If + not* [P] form with a positive proposition [P]. (Hirao (2018a))
 - b. It occurs in the indicative mood. (Hirao (2019))
 - c. It does not take a modal auxiliary verb. (new claim)

This type of insubordination always takes this form. For example, *Well, if it ain't Cinderella Man* (= (1a)) can be rewritten as *If + not* [P: *it is Cinderella Man*] and it satisfies (3a–c). Additionally, expressions that do not satisfy this condition are regarded as ill-formed. (4) shows rewritten examples of (1a) in ways that violate Condition 1.³

- (4) a. *If it is Cinderella Man. (not taking *not*)
 b. *If it's never Cinderella Man. (taking *never*, Hirao (2018a))
 c. *If it wasn't/weren't Cinderella Man. (occurring in the subjunctive mood, Hirao (2019))
 d. *If it shouldn't/couldn't be Cinderella Man. (taking a modal auxiliary verb)

Above all, (4a) and (4b) violate the sub-condition in (3a) and show that we can neither omit *not* nor replace *not* with *never*. From these results, we can assume that the construction should be not only made up of an *if*-clause but also negated with *not*. This is one of the distinctive characteristics of this construction (cf. other types of *if*-insubordination in (2)); thus, I term it the “*If + not* [P]” construction.

3.1.2 Condition 2: The semantic condition

The second condition relates to the proposition's semantic features expressed by the construction. This condition is a speaker-oriented description.

- (5) Condition 2: The (propositional) semantic condition of the *If + not* [P] construction
 [P] describes a state of affairs that is recognized as determined by the speaker.
 (Hirao (2018a))

For example, in *Well, if it isn't Cinderella Man* (= (1a)), the positive proposition [P] is [P: it is Cinderella Man]. This describes a state of affairs that is recognized as determined by the speaker in this context because the speaker is truly encountering Cinderella Man.

Panther and Thornburg (2003) argued that the construction's propositions are characterized as follows:

- (6) ... we note that all the propositions [...] assert at the moment of speaking a non-factual state of affairs, for example *it ain't Tom*, when in fact it is precisely Tom.
 (Panther and Thornburg 2003: 140)

The authors discussed propositions that I refer to as “*not* [P].” Therefore, (6) can be paraphrased as “all the [P] assert at the moment of speaking a factual state of affairs.”

However, [P] cannot be wholly explained as “factual.” As the following examples show, in some cases the proposition expressed is a metaphorical one, while in other cases the proposition expressed describes the speaker's strong volition regarding the future.

- (7) [Extract from a movie, whose characters originate in other stories and movies. One day, Captain Hook and his fellows attack a city. Captain Hook corners a nameless parent and her child.]
 Captain Hook: Well, well, well. If it isn't Peter Pan.
 Mother: His name's not Peter!
 Captain Hook: Shut it, Wendy!
 Mother: Ahhhh
 (*Shrek the Third*, Hirao (2018a))

In (7), Captain Hook called the child Peter Pan even though the child is obviously not Peter Pan. Captain Hook metaphorically referred to the mother and her son as Wendy and Peter Pan so that audiences can recall the original story in which Hook appears. Therefore, [P: it is Peter Pan] is a metaphorical proposition. This type of proposition cannot be fully described with the term “factual” (see Hirao (2018a: 28)).

[P] in (8) is much harder to regard as describing a factual state of affairs.

- (8) [Scarlett is caring for Melanie (= Melly). Scarlett ordered Prissy to go for the doctor, but she has not come back yet.]

Scarlett: Oh, don't worry, Melly. Mother says it always seems like the doctor will never come. (to herself) Oh, if I don't take a strap to that Prissy!

(*Gone with the Wind*, Hirao (2018a, 2019))

[P: I take a strap to that Prissy] refers to Scarlett's strong volition regarding the future. Since, by definition, “factual” is used for existing situations or empirically true things, we cannot label future things as “factual.” Thus, Hirao (2018a, 2019) and this paper adopt the term “determined” rather than “factual.” The concept of being “determined” encompasses that of being “factual,” and we can describe every [P] in the *If + not* [P] construction as “determined.”

Expressions that do not satisfy this condition do not make sense. In what follows, (9a) and (10a) are attested examples of insubordination, while (9b) and (10b) show corresponding examples rewritten so as to violate Condition 2.

- (9) a. [The same context as (1a). Note that the speaker Max knows that Cinderella Man's real name is Jim.]
 Well, if it ain't Cinderella Man. (= (1a))
 b. #If it ain't/isn't Steve.
 (10) a. [Seeing a friend's beautiful new car]
 Well, if that ain't a beauty.
 b. #If that ain't/isn't an ugly car.

As shown above, (9b) and (10b) do not make sense.⁴

Condition 2 was previously discussed in Hirao (2018a), but this paper is the first to show its validity by providing unacceptable examples, as seen in (9) and (10).

3.1.3 Condition 3: The pragmatic condition

The third and final condition specifies the construction's pragmatic function. As mentioned in Section 1, this construction has the following expressive function:

- (11) Condition 3: The pragmatic condition of the *If + not* [P] construction

The construction expresses the speaker's various context-dependent emotional attitudes.
 (Hirao (2018a))

This becomes clear when embedding the insubordinate construction in a direct speech complement. (12) presents instances that contain insubordination as a direct speech complement. Showing examples where the insubordination expressions in (1a), (8), and (10a) occur as direct speech complements to *say*, I asked some native speakers to take the original

context into account and modify the verb with an appropriate emotional adverbial. The results are underlined.

- (12) a. “Well, if it ain’t Cinderella Man,” Max says in surprise. (cf. (1a), Hirao (2018a))
 b. “Oh, if I don’t take a strap to that Prissy,” Scarlett says angrily. (cf. (8), Hirao (2018a))
 c. “Well, if that ain’t a beauty,” Ted says excitedly. (cf. (10a))

The underlined expressions correspond to the emotional attitudes expressed by the original insubordination.

Furthermore, as seen in (13), the construction’s pragmatic function cannot be canceled. In other words, expressions that do not satisfy this condition make no sense. In (13), an expression that negates the emotional attitude expressed by the insubordination in (1a) is added, which results in a contradiction:

- (13) #If it ain’t Cinderella Man... but I’m not surprised to see you here.
 (cancellation of the expressed emotional attitude)

Although Condition 3 was previously discussed in Hirao (2018a), this paper is the first to give the cancellation test in (13) to exhibit the functional property of the construction. Note that this test was originally used by Hirao (2018b, 2019) to determine how much the construction is conventionalized. She concluded that the construction reaches a relatively high degree of conventionalization as insubordination because the pragmatic function cannot be canceled. Thus, the non-cancelability of the pragmatic function is also an important factor in explaining the construction.

In sum, this section has discussed the licensing conditions of the *If + not* [P] construction.

3.2 Validity of the conditions

In this section, we move on to addressing the validity of the licensing conditions of the *If + not* [P] construction. While Hirao (2018a, 2019) successfully showed that satisfying all conditions is essential for the construction, she only gave a few examples. We will reinforce her argument by going into greater detail with more examples.

The *If + not* [P] construction must satisfy all conditions listed in (3), (5), and (11). In other words, we call examples that satisfy all conditions the *If + not* [P] construction. For instance, consider (14). As a summation of the previous section, (14b) shows that (14a) satisfies all conditions.

- (14) a. Well, if it ain’t Cinderella Man. (= (1a))
 b. ✓Condition 1: Takes the *If + not* [P] form (cf. (4a, b))
 Occurs in the indicative mood (cf. (4c))
 Does not take a modal auxiliary verb (cf. (4d))
 ✓Condition 2: [P: it is Cinderella Man] describes a state of affairs that is recognized as determined by the speaker (see Section 3.1.2)
 ✓Condition 3: Expresses surprise upon meeting Cinderella Man (cf. (12a) and (13))

As an additional example, consider the single-underlined part in (15).

- (15) [Sarah and Macon are an estranged married couple. They meet for the first time in a while and Macon becomes angry with what Sarah is saying.]
 “The trouble with you is, Macon—” It was astonishing, the instantaneous flare of anger he felt. “Sarah,” he said, “don’t even start. By God, if that doesn’t sum up every single thing that’s wrong with being married. ‘The trouble with you is, Macon—’ and, ‘I know you better than you know yourself, Macon—” (*The Accidental Tourist*, underline mine)

This example also satisfies every condition. First, the utterance takes the *If + not* [P] form in the indicative mood without a modal auxiliary. Second, [P: that sums up every single thing that’s wrong with being married] describes a state of affairs that is recognized as determined by the speaker. Third, as the double-underlined part also shows, the utterance expresses the speaker’s anger. Consider another example in (16).

- (16) [An American talks about the names of French soft drinks.]
 “Just look at the brand name: Pschitt. If that’s not the most suspicious-sounding... and there’s another kind called Yukkier, Yukkery, something like that—”
 (*The Accidental Tourist*, underline mine)

This example also satisfies every condition. First, the underlined utterance takes the *If + not* [P] form in the indicative mood without a modal auxiliary. Second, [P: that is the most suspicious-sounding] describes a state of affairs that is recognized as determined by the speaker. Third, the underlined utterance expresses the speaker’s surprise at the sound of the brand name.

Conversely, if any of the three conditions is unsatisfied, then an utterance cannot be considered an example of the construction, even if it is grammatical and/or makes sense. The following three movie extracts may resemble the construction at first glance, but they cannot be regarded as examples of this construction as they do not satisfy all of the licensing conditions. First, let us consider (17).

- (17) [Anne did not attend a festival to which Gilbert had invited her. She lies to explain her absence.]
 Gilbert: Why didn’t you show up at the Carmody Spring Festival? I saved a spot for you at our table.
 Anne: I was busy. I was... trying to get my finals marked.
 Gilbert: Anne, you had your finals marked and posted with the Board before I did. What are you up to?
 Anne: Nothing! This is a completely personal matter.
 Gilbert: I suppose it must be. If you can’t keep your word anymore.
 Anne: Good grief! You know how to try one’s patience, don’t you!
 (*Anne of Green Gables: The Sequel*, underline mine)

This utterance is not a case of the *If + not* [P] construction but merely describes a condition that Gilbert stated as an afterthought. (The full sentential version of his utterance would be *I suppose it must be a completely personal matter if you can’t keep your word anymore.*) It is possible to perceive negative emotions in the underlined part of (17). However, this utterance involves a modal auxiliary verb and violates Condition 1. Additionally, the proposition “you keep your word anymore” does not describe a state of affairs that is recognized as determined by the speaker, so Condition 2 is also not satisfied. Even though there may be an emotive

reading to the utterance, it is not inherent to the expression itself. Since this example is from a movie, the tone of voice is key to supporting that emotive reading.

Next, observe the example in (18), which is discussed in Hirao (2018a).

- (18) [Lionel is trying to treat Bertie's stutter, but Bertie does not believe the treatment can be effective. Lionel proposes betting on the outcome of the initial treatment.]
Lionel: I bet you, that you can read flawlessly, right here, right now. And if I win the bet, I get to ask you more questions.
Bertie: And if you don't win?
Lionel: Well, you don't have to answer them.
(*The King's Speech*, partially modified for clarity, underline mine)

The underlined part of (18) is to be interpreted as a simple conditional *if*-clause. Interestingly, this *if*-clause-utterance by Bertie functions as a question to which Lionel responds. Their exchange is an example of what Lerner (1991) called the joint production of a single syntactic unit. They jointly produced the sentence *And if you_i (= Lionel) don't win, you_{ii} (= Bertie) don't have to answer them*. While the underlined part satisfies Condition 1, the proposition “you win” does not describe a state of affairs that is recognized as determined by the speaker, nor is there any inherent expression of emotional attitude. This means that it satisfies neither Condition 2 nor Condition 3.

Finally, let us consider (19). This example is also referenced in Hirao (2018a).

- (19) [Boolie starts talking about how he may no longer be invited to Commerce Club lunch meetings.]
Boolie: Anyway... if we don't use those seats, somebody else will.
Daisy: If we don't use those seats! I'm not supposed to go either?
Boolie: Well, Mama, you can do whatever you want.
Daisy: Oh, Thanks for your permission!
(*Driving Miss Daisy*, underline mine)

The underlined *if*-clause is interpreted as just an echoic utterance.⁵ It echoes part of Boolie's preceding utterance, which is indicated with a dotted line. The underlined part of (19) occurs in the indicative mood in the *If + not* [P] form without a modal auxiliary verb and expresses emotion (through echoing), but the proposition “we use those seats” does not describe a state of affairs that is recognized as determined by the speaker. Thus, it violates Condition 2.

In this way, an utterance can be considered an example of the *If + not* [P] construction if and only if it satisfies all of the three licensing conditions shown in Section 3.1.

This section has presented the validity of the licensing conditions by examining more instances than Hirao (2018a, 2019). It has become clear that the licensing conditions are indispensable to describe the *If + not* [P] construction.

3.3 Relationships among the conditions

The preceding sections have examined the licensing conditions of the *If + not* [P] construction almost in line with Hirao (2018a, 2019) and provided valid answers to the fundamental question of how the construction is licensed. However, an additional question now emerges: Do the conditions interact with each other? The answer is YES.

First, there is a close relationship between Condition 1 and Condition 2. Condition 2

imposes further restrictions on what has already been narrowed down by Condition 1. More precisely, Condition 1's statement that the construction must take the indicative mood parallels Condition 2's statement that [P] describes a state of affairs that is recognized as determined (including factual) by the speaker. From this fact, the "form" of the construction can be determined in a broad sense by Conditions 1 and 2.

Second, consider Condition 3. The *if*-clause itself does not inherently possess any expressive function. Furthermore, the construction neither occurs in the subjunctive mood nor takes modal auxiliaries. Thus, the construction's expressive function does not follow from the construction's formal (and semantic) characteristics. Condition 3 determines the "meaning" of the construction independent of the other two conditions.

In sum, Conditions 1 and 2 are interrelated, while Condition 3 stands independent of the other two. These relationships correspond with what Goldberg (1995, 2006) identifies as a construction:

- (20) a. C is a CONSTRUCTION if and only if C is a form-meaning pair $\langle F_i, S_i \rangle$ such that some aspect of F_i or some aspect of S_i is not strictly predicable from C's component parts [...] (Goldberg (1995: 4), underline mine)
 b. Any linguistic pattern is recognized as a construction as long as some aspect of its form or function is not strictly predicable from its component parts [...] (Goldberg (2006: 5), underline mine)

In this sense, the linguistic phenomenon in question counts as a CONSTRUCTION.

Furthermore, no examples satisfy both Conditions 1 and 2 without also satisfying Condition 3. In other words, as a construction in Goldberg's sense, if an expression satisfies both Conditions 1 and 2, then it necessarily satisfies Condition 3 and becomes a clear example of the *If + not* [P] construction. This fact implies that in order to derive the non-literal "meaning" indicated by Condition 3, Conditions 1 and 2 jointly create the "form" of this particular construction. Verifying this claim and determining whether there are similar systematic relationships between the licensing conditions of other types of insubordination are areas for future examination.

This section has analyzed the relationships among the licensing conditions of the *If + not* [P] construction. The relationships reveal that the construction is characterized as a construction in Goldberg's (1995, 2006) sense.

4. Concluding remarks

This paper has focused on the *If + not* [P] construction to show that it possesses the formal, semantic, and pragmatic conditions that license and explain the construction. Furthermore, the conditions are interrelated.

Thus far, few studies have focused on expressive insubordination, particularly its individual types in the English language. Moreover, in order to properly investigate a linguistic phenomenon, it is necessary to identify its exact characteristics and licensing conditions. Our detailed research and its findings will contribute to future research on (expressive) insubordination in general.

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Notes

1 When I refer to the construction, I always capitalize the first letter of *if* to indicate that the *if*-clause is used independently. Of course, as (1a) shows, an interjection often precedes the *if*-clause; therefore, *if* is not always shown as *If*.

2 The *If* + *not* [P] construction may sound somewhat old-fashioned. The usage in which the speaker expresses surprise upon meeting a person (e.g. (1a)) is the most common modern usage.

3 Based on comments from native speakers, we added asterisks to the examples in (4) to indicate that these examples are ill-formed as examples of the *If* + *not* [P] construction. We do not intend to suggest that these examples themselves are fundamentally ungrammatical. Perhaps these examples could be regarded as simple sentence fragments, whose main clauses happen to be dropped and/or left to the hearer or the context. Note that, in that case, they can no longer be considered examples of the construction.

4 Expressions such as (9b) and (10b) could be possible in a humorous context; however, in such a context it is necessary for the hearer to also be aware that they are intended as humor (comments from British native speakers).

5 As Sperber and Wilson (2012: 93) describe, "An echoic utterance indicates to the hearer that the speaker is paying attention to a representation (rather than to a state of affairs); it indicates that one of the speaker's reasons for paying attention to this representation is that it has been entertained (and perhaps expressed) by someone; it also indicates the speaker's attitude to the representation echoed."

[Sources of Examples]

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Abstract

This paper examines “the *If + not* [P] construction” (e.g. [when Peter encounters Tom, he says,] “Well, if it isn’t Tom!”). This is one type of expressive “insubordination,” which Evans (2007) defines as “the conventionalized main clause use of what, on *prima facie* grounds, appear to be formally subordinate clauses.” Although this construction has been touched on in previous studies, the question of how the construction is licensed has not been adequately answered. To solve this issue, which is perhaps the most important issue of the construction, this paper focuses on the construction’s licensing conditions. In this paper, we will address the following three main points.

First, this paper defines the licensing conditions of the construction with reference to Hirao (2018a, 2019). By analyzing examples drawn from movies, novels, and daily conversation, this paper proposes three formal, semantic, and pragmatic conditions, whose validity is demonstrated by the fact that examples constructed to violate them are not accepted.

Second, this paper confirms the validity of the conditions, which Hirao (2018a, 2019) did not sufficiently discuss. Only expressions that satisfy all three conditions are regarded as examples of the construction. Furthermore, using extracts from movies, we argue that, if not all three conditions are satisfied, then an utterance cannot be considered an example of the construction, even if it is grammatical and/or it makes sense. That is to say, the conditions are essential for characterizing the construction.

Third, this paper newly reveals the complex relationships among the conditions. The semantic condition imposes further restrictions on what is already narrowed down by the formal condition, while the pragmatic condition functions independently of the other two conditions. Additionally, there are no instances that satisfy the formal and semantic conditions without also satisfying the pragmatic condition. Interestingly, these relationships correspond with what Goldberg (1995, 2006) identifies as a construction.