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# The Extremes of Insubordination: Exclamatory *as if!*

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# Overview of paper

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- ▶ *as if*! in PDE
  - ▶ what the secondary sources say
  - ▶ presumed source
  - ▶ corpus examples
- ▶ monoclausal uses of *as if* in PDE (corpus study)
- ▶ postulated development of *as if*! from monoclausal structures
  - ▶ semantic development: from comparative to negative
  - ▶ stages of development: from subordinate clause to “insubordinated” clause
  - ▶ early examples of monoclausal uses
- ▶ conclusion: development of *as if* structures and questions for further study



# Exclamatory *as if!* in PDE

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- ▶ Draft entry in OED-3, s.v. *as*, adv. *and* conj.

*colloq. as if!*: (expressing dismissive or incredulous contradiction) ‘I very much doubt that!’, ‘some hope!’, ‘you must be joking!’

Typically used as a sardonic response to a stated or reported suggestion.

- ▶ Also listed (online) in:
  - ▶ *Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*: an informal form which shows “that you do not believe something is possible”
  - ▶ *Wiktionary*: an idiomatic form “referring to something that the speaker deems highly unlikely”
  - ▶ *WordWeb Online*: “expression of incredulity”
  - ▶ *The Online Slang Dictionary*: “derisive assertion that whatever is being talked about is impossible or very unlikely”
  - ▶ *Urban Dictionary*: = ‘yeah right’ ; “used to display disbelief”

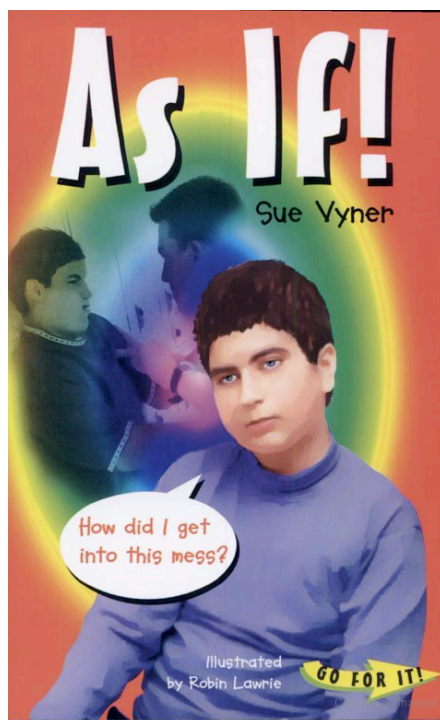
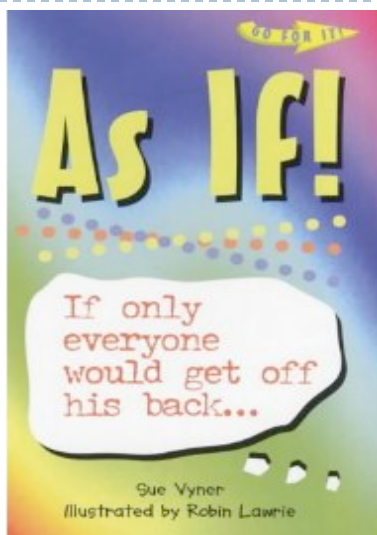
## Presumed origin of *as if*!

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- ▶ Most often attributed to the movie *Clueless* (released in 1995) and to “Valley Girl Talk”:
  - (1) there’s little trace of Austen’s elegant style in the volleys of “y’ know” and “**as if**!” that pour from the film’s Valley Girl-type characters (COCA: NEWS1995)
  - (2) Won’t audiences be disappointed if Paltrow doesn’t say, “**As if**”? McGrath [the screenwriter] has a ready reply: “She does say ‘as if.’ But it’s in the middle of a sentence. Things like, ‘It is not **as if** I am displeased with you, Mr. Knightly.’ ” (TIME 1996/10/29)

(A 1997 biography of the main actress in *Clueless* is entitled *As if! The Not-so-Clueless Alicia Silverstone*)
- ▶ Also attributed to Wayne and Garth from “Wayne’s World” on “Saturday Night Live” (beginning perhaps in 1988; the first movie came out in 1992)
- ▶ (see postings on American Dialect Society list serve: June 2005)

# Young adult novels



# Corpus searches for *as if!* in PDE

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- ▶ Searches of
  - ▶ TIME Corpus
  - ▶ COCA
  - ▶ COHA
  - ▶ ICAME corpora (FROWN, FLOB, ACE, WC)
  - ▶ OED
  - ▶ Strathy Corpus
- ▶ TIME, COCA, and COHA could be searched including punctuation in the search string:
  - ▶ As if. As if! as if) . As if as if,
  - ▶ Frown, Flob, Ace, WC, Strathy only sentence-initial “as if”



# Corpus examples

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- (3) I'll let him go. Just as soon as we're married. (Behind IRENKA's back and to IVAN) **As if**. (COHA: FIC [play] 1990)
- (4) the refurbished Bill Graham Civic Auditorium—which out-of-town journalists seem to believe is being referred to locally as “the Bill” (**as if!**) (COCA: NEWS 1996)
- (5) Laurie peppered us with so many precautions about ... the dangers of hot-dogging (**as if**) that by the time we reached the summit, I was ready to stay in the van (COCA: NEWS 2000)
- (6) then you can ditch me in the crowd of tourists.” She laughed. **As if**. He would probably need a fire hose to get her off of him. (COCA: FIC [book] 2006)
- (7) The woman who was meant to make him complete. // **As if**, he silently snarled. (COCA: FIC [book] 2008)
- (8) Of course it wasn't true. A joke, a hoax , a prank. **As if**. (COCA: FIC [book] 2010)



## Distribution by genre (PDE)

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	COCA, COHA, TIME	OED	TOTAL N	TOTAL %
FICTION	28	2	30	59%
NEWS	15	3	18	35%
MAGAZINE	2		2	4%
SPOKEN	1		1	2%
TOTAL	46	5	51	100%





# Earliest attested example

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OED cites this 1904 example from Frank Norris, *The Pit: A Story of Chicago* (expanded context)

(9) “Better wait, hadn’ t you, Laura,” said Aunt Wess’, “and see. Maybe he’ ll come up and speak to us.”

“Oh, **as if!**” contradicted Laura. “He don’ t know us, —just as Page says. And if he did, he wouldn’ t. He wouldn’ t think it polite.”

With a (fairly) exhaustive search I could not pre-date this example nor find any other early 20<sup>th</sup> century example. Cf.

(10) Because I’ ve disgusted you so deeply? Just my luck—when I came over to ask you to marry me!”

She laughed, but he had become suddenly grave. “Upon my soul, I did.”

“Dear Streff! **As if**—now—”

“Oh, not now—I know. I’m aware that even with your accelerated divorce method—”

“It’s not that. I told you it was no use, Streff—I told you long ago, in Venice.”

(1922 Wharton, *The Glimpses of the Moon*)



# Origin: monoclausal exclamatory *as if*

- ▶ *As if*, *as though*, and *like* clauses can stand alone as independent clauses:

(11) Merriam Webster Dictionary says its official, google, the popular search engine is now part of the English language as a verb. **As if I'm going to google you.** (COCA:SPOK 2006)

- ▶ Evans (2007:367) discusses “insubordination”: “*conventionalized main clause use of what, on prima facie grounds, appear to be formally subordinate clauses*”
- ▶ Dancygier and Sweetser (2005:229) call this the “monoclausal use of *as if*” and note that it prefers negative stance verbs
- ▶ Huddleston and Pullum (2002:1152) call an *as if* phrase standing on its own as an “exclamatory clause”
- ▶ Fowler (1965:37) notes the “still more elliptical” use of *as if* and *as though* in exclamations
- ▶ cf. also López-Cuoso & Méndez-Naya (2010: §3.2.1)

## Monoclausal exclamatory *as if* in PDE

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- ▶ The clauses can be quite formulaic:

(12) He'll go with us to the hospital. Okay?" **As if** I had a choice. (Strathy: FIC)

(13) Mother said, "**As if** I were the one at fault". (COCA:FIC 2000)

- ▶ Constructions with (negative) *enough* are common:

(14) **As if** pregnancy wasn't uncomfortable **enough**. (Strathy: SPOK)

- ▶ They can be long, complex, and novel:

(15) **As if** Notting Hill's ladies who lunch were not already spoilt for choice when it comes to exclusive shopping experiences. (1999 *Sunday Times* 18 Nov. ii. 4/2; OED)

(16) **As if** a state spending hundreds of millions of dollars to make millionaires even more millionaire-ish is 'noble'. (1995 *Sun* [Baltimore] 8 Nov. 1b; OED)

# Monoclausal *as if* in the Strathy Corpus

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## ► Sentence-initial monoclausal *as if* clauses by genre

	Total	Exclamatory <i>as if</i> (N)	Exclamatory <i>as if</i> (%)	<i>enough</i>	Negative
Academic	33	8	24%	3	2
Fiction	100	29	29%	1	4
Magazines	33	13	39%	13	
News	12	7	58%	7	
Nonfiction	8	3	38%	3	
Spoken	2	2	100%	2	



## Subordinate *as if* clauses

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As *if/though* combine an element of similarity (*as*) with an element of hypotheticality (*if, though*) to form a complex coordinator signaling comparison (Kortmann 1997:318)

Quirk et al. (1985:1110): *as if/as though* serve as adjunct clauses of comparison; when the verb is dynamic, they may express manner; they may be factual or hypothetical

Huddleston and Pullum (2002:1151): *as if/as though* express either manner or comparison; *as if/as though* are “compound” forms



# Monoclausal *as if*

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- ▶ Monoclausal *as if* presents the content clause as false; used to express “indignant rejection” (e.g., *As if I would try to cheat you!*) (Huddleston and Pullum 2002:1151)
- ▶ “Irregular sentences” generally have the illocutionary force of exclamations, “the omission of the matrix clause being mimetic of speechless amazement” (Quirk et al. 1985:841).
- ▶ Two of the functions of insubordinated clauses (Evans 2007):
  - ▶ modality, e.g. exclamation and evaluation (403–5)
    - ▶ {*That I should/to think that I should*} *live to see such a day!*
  - ▶ discourse context/highly presupposed material, e.g. negation (410)
    - ▶ corresponding affirmative has been mentioned and deemed unlikely, or
    - ▶ speaker assumes hearer erroneously holds belief in the affirmative

# From comparison to truth-value

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Huddleston and Pullum (2002:1151–52): the comparison meaning can become “much attenuated”

1) *She acts as if she hates me*: “shift from comparison to the issue of whether the content clause is true”

(leads to *It looks/seems as if .../that*)

2) *As if this news wasn't bad enough, I found that the printer wasn't working either.*

- ▶ *as if* always has a negative complement
- ▶ “again it is less a matter of comparison than of the status of the content clause” (*as if* clause indicates that the content clause is true)



# Stages in the development of insubordinated clauses

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(Evans 2007:430–31, 371–75):

(1) subordinate construction with overt main clause

(2) ellipsis of main clause

the clause can be treated as underlyingly subordinate, with the possibility of restoring a grammatically compatible main clause

(3) conventionalized ellipsis

the clause has achieved greater semantic specificity and only a subset of ellipsed main clauses can be “restored”

(4) reanalysis as main clause

the clause is fully nativized as a main clause, and restoration of ellipsed material is not possible





# From pragmaticization to constructionalization

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When the subordinate clause becomes independent, it is “available for pragmatic interpretation” and is less grammatical (pragmaticization)

When the (formerly) subordinate clause is conventionalized as a whole (and independent) construction, it acquires “a more specific constructional meaning” (constructionalization) (Evans 2007:374-5)

There is an opening up and then closing of the role of pragmatics (374)

grammaticalization/analogy: “it is clear that insubordination goes against the usual direction of change” (376)



# “Bridging contexts”

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- ▶ unambiguous comparison: ≠ **As if!**

- (17) They both look at Lesje as she walks by, not smiling but not hostile either. **As if** they are sightseers and she is a sight. (Strathy:FIC)  
= ‘They are looking at her as if ...’

- ▶ indeterminate comparison/negative exclamatory

- (18) “John and I have really stabilized.” **As if** stability can be bought like a pair of slippers. (Strathy:FIC)  
= ‘She is speaking as if stability can be bought like a pair of slippers’  
= ‘Stability cannot be bought like a pair of slippers’ . = **As if!**

- (19) Elizabeth fills him in on the children—their marks, their latest interests—**as if** he hasn’t talked to them for a year. **As if** he’s an uncle, a new school principal. I’m their father! (Strathy: FIC)

- ▶ unambiguous exclamatory = **As if!**

- (20) “Over ten pounds,” he sounded as proud as a natural father. **As if** he could have done the job himself. (Strathy:FIC)



# Earliest examples of monoclausal exclamatory *as if*

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- (21) **As if**, for example, the right of the kings of England did depend on the goodness of the cause of William the Conqueror, and upon their lineal and directest descent from him; (1551 Hobbes, *Leviathan, or, The matter, forme; U of V*)
- (22) **As if** a Commonwealth could consist where the force were in any hand which justice had not the authority to command and govern. (1551 Hobbes, *Leviathan, or, The matter, forme; U of V*)
- (23) **As if** one should phantasy to praise a Gose before any other beast (1553 T. Wilson, *Arte of Rhetorique; OED*)
- (24) **as if** I went aboute to saue my Lyfe: no, I despise it # and am at peace w=th= god and have forgott the world (1691 *Trial of the Earl of Essex; HC*)
- (25) **As if** a theefe should be proud of his halter: a beggar of his cloutes: a childe of his gay. (1601 Dent, *Path-way to Heaven; OED*)



## Further examples of monoclausal exclamatory *as if*—17<sup>th</sup> century

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- (26) (Ma.) **As if** I haue not a good dish of Oysters, and a cold pye at home to hold you tacke. (1615 Hoby, *A Cvrry-combe for a coxe-combe*; CED)
- (27) *Frank*. **As if** you knew not that, fie, fie, leaue your dissembling now (1622 May, *The Heir*; ED)
- (28) **As if** I did not know them to bee as arrant Cowards, as a Justices Clerke or Gentleman Vsher can be; (1638 Nabbes, *Covent Garden*; ED)
- (29) **As if** there were no joy/But these Chimera' s in a Lovers head, /Of strange Eliziums, by his feaver bred! (1647 Fanshawe, *Il Pastor Fido*; ED)
- (30) **As if** the newest Stamp were to be deemed alwaies the tru\_est metal (1682 Pitts, *An Old Way*; Lamp)
- (31) **As if** he were not also a part of the commonwealth, and the head of the whole people! (1689 Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*; U of V)



## 18<sup>th</sup> century examples

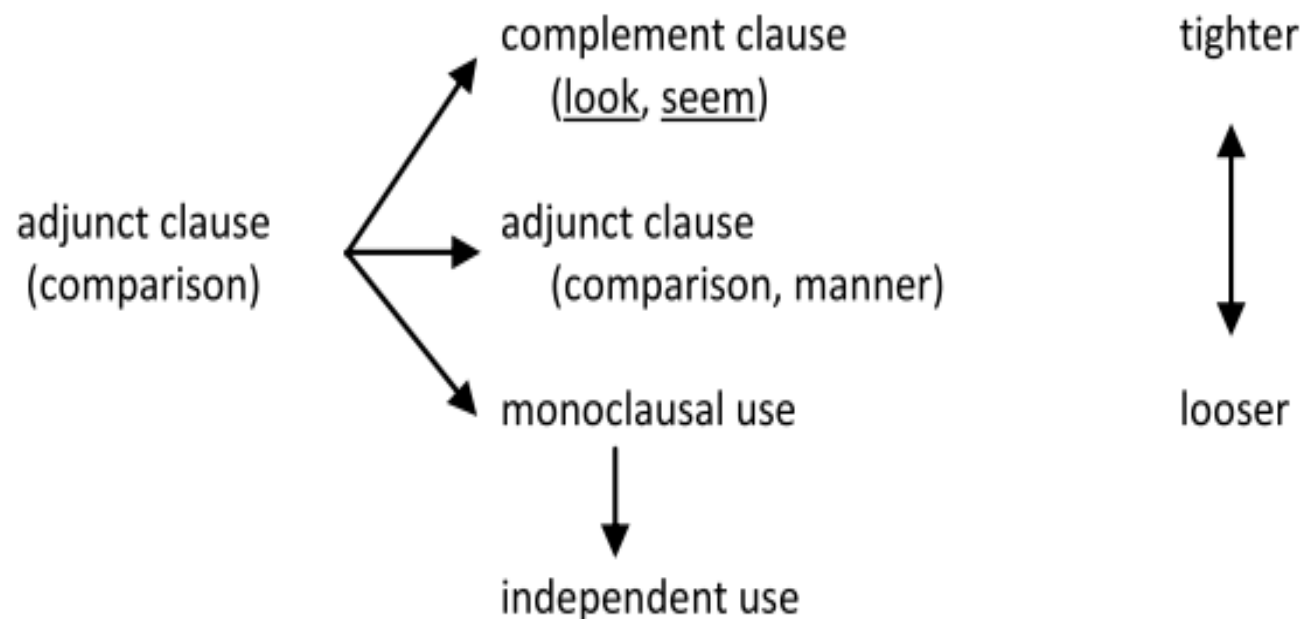
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- (32) To see his Face, they' d never after Care, **As if** his very Looks Infectious were: (1700 Ward, *Labour in Vain*; Lamp)
- (33) **As if** Treaties could be made like Acts of Parliament, (1730 Hervey, *Observations*; Lamp)
- (34) **As if** Ostend was of no more consequence to us, than Mons or Namur! (1735–48 Walpole, *Letters*; CLMETEV)
- (35) **As if** *Heaven* was a Region of Enthusiasm, Error, Bigotry, and Uncharitableness; and the Elect a parcel of proud, self-conceited Separatists (1736 CED)
- (36) **As if** these were of less importance to the happiness of Mankind than the making of Lords, or the importation of Slaves! (1786–88 *Letters of Delegates to Congress*; U of V)



# Development of *as if* clauses

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## Questions for further study

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- ▶ Can Evans' historical stages be more clearly teased out?

in earliest instances monoclausal *as if* already seems highly conventionalized (main clause cannot be restored)

monoclausal *as if* need not develop pragmatic meanings (may continue to have comparison meaning)

even in later uses, exclamatory *as if* clauses can be treated as subordinate (or at least adjoined to the main clause)

- ▶ Why does *as if* undergo this development but not *as though*, which can be shown to have early monoclausal uses:

(37) **As though** all the crookedness of our disposition were not accidental. (1578 T. Timme tr. J. Calvin, *Comm. Gen.* 84; OED)

No instances of *As though!* found in corpora

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