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journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/pragma](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/pragma)The presentative *voici/voilà* – Towards a pragmatic definition<sup>☆</sup>Sylvie Porhiet<sup>\*</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the presentative *voilà* in modern French. It advocates taking account pragmatic criteria (situation, viewpoint, etc.) and to combine five criteria (1) *voilà* introduces a referent and poses its existence; (2) *voilà* can have a textual or a non textual function; (3) *voilà* introduces a discrete or a non discrete referent; (4) *voilà* introduces a referent linguistically expressed or not; (5) *voilà* presents or represents) to analyse *voilà*-presentative. Doing so enables us to consider that *voilà* can be a presentative without being followed by a nominalised linguistic item.

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Researchers have always found it difficult to categorize *voici* and *voilà* within the traditional parts of speech so new denominations have been created. In fact, traditional categories do not cover the whole spectrum of the occurrences of *voici* and *voilà* in modern French.<sup>1</sup> Today's *voici* and *voilà* are usually morphosyntactically classified as presentatives. This denomination has prevailed over the *struments* by Damourette and Pichon (1911–1940),<sup>2</sup> the *mots-phrases* 'lit. sentences-words' by Tesnière (1992), the *factives* by Damourette and Pichon (1911–1940) or the *particules démonstratives* by Wagner and Pinchon (1962).

Research also points out that *voici* and *voilà* are not unequivocally presentatives. The literature underlines that *voici* and *voilà* have other possible usages, in which case, according to some, they are demoted from their presentative status (Narjoux, 2003: 45; Chevalier, 1969: 85 calls it *retournement* 'reversal'). Thus, they are not presentatives when they introduce temporal complements (Morin, 1985: 782; Riegel et al., 1994: 456; Narjoux, 2003), when they interject: *Et j'ai ouvert la boîte, voilà!* 'And I opened the box, that's all' (Morin, 1985: 782; Narjoux, 2003; Dassi, 2003), when they act as a conclusive punctuation mark (Dassi, 2003: 107–108): *Voilà, c'est fini* 'There, it's over' or when they are followed by [...].<sup>3</sup>

As *voici* and *voilà* can have different usages, we will distinguish three main categories: prepositions, presentatives and discourse markers (or non-clausal units in the sense of Biber et al., 1999) or connectors (Riegel et al., 1994: 363):

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<sup>1</sup> Their English translation depends on how they are used in sentences. *Voici* can be translated by 'here is/are, this is, for, since, ago, following; etc.' and *voilà* by 'there is/are, that's, ago, since, for, that's all, that's all there is to it, etc.' As presentatives they translate respectively as here is/are and there is/are.

<sup>2</sup> Damourette and Pichon (1911–1940: 103 sqq. t. 6) classify *voici* and *voilà* as *struments*, i.e. words essentially expressing taxiematic concepts (cf. Damourette, Pichon 1911–1940: 7, t. 6). *Oui* 'yes', *non* 'no', *voici* and *voilà* all belong to the class of *struments* but are classified into two different subgroups. *Oui* 'yes' and *non* 'no' constitute *phrases instrumentales* 'instrumental sentences' (cf. Damourette and Pichon (1911–1940: 35, t. 6)) and are called *factifs instrumentaux anaphoriques* 'anaphoric instrumental factives'. As for *voici* and *voilà*, they are *factifs instrumentaux épictiques* 'epidictic instrumental factives' whose function is to designate things in a similar way to the one they are referred to by the presentative article'.

<sup>3</sup> This is according to Dassi (2003: 107), although this might be closely related to the corpus used.

- (a) In their prepositional usage, they are followed by an expression of duration (not a point in time): *Il est parti voilà cinq ans* 'He left five years ago'; *Voilà cinq ans qu'il est parti* 'It has been five years since he left'.
- (b) When they are presentatives, *voici* and *voilà* introduce a presented term, whether it be a term or a portion of text (before or after): *Voici le sceau de Charlemagne*. 'This is the seal of Charlemagne'; *Voici trois exemples (...)* 'Here are three examples'.
- (c) When they are discourse markers (Léard, 1992; Hansen Mosegaard, 1997), *voici* and *voilà* do not relate to a presented term. They are "linguistic items of variable scope, (...) whose primary function is connective" (Hansen Mosegaard, 1997: 160). Furthermore, "they do not contribute to the propositional content of their host units (in other words, they belong to that part of the utterance which is 'shown' rather than 'asserted'), and (...) they function as instructions from the speaker to the hearer on how to integrate the host unit into a coherent mental representation of the discourse" (Hansen Mosegaard, 1997: 161). They can be the expression of the writer's emotion, they can be responses to directives, etc. (The terms *writer* and *reader* should be understood to include respectively *speaker/utterer* and *addressee/hearer*). They are syntactically autonomous and have no anaphoric connections: *Voilà! ... Allons nous mettre à l'abri. ...* 'That's it! Take cover...'. (Crabe: 17)

This paper focuses on the occurrences of *voici*, *voilà* as presentatives. It circumscribes the items of the class and then identifies how *voici* and *voilà* have been analysed before reaching the conclusion that a cluster of components are needed in order to describe *voici* and *voilà*. Pragmatic parameters are needed which leads to propose a new definition of *voici-voilà*-presentatives. The last part explains and elaborates on the five criteria we believe are necessary to analyse *voici-voilà*-presentatives.

## 1. Forewords about presentatives

This part examines which linguistic items are considered presentatives<sup>4</sup> and if there exists an opposition between *voici* and *voilà*.

### 1.1. The items of the class

The linguistic items labeled presentatives vary from one author to the other as the following list shows:

- *tel* 'such', *voici* 'here is/are', *voilà* 'there is/are' (Brunot and Bruneau, 1969: 262)
- *c'est* 'here is', *il est* 'it is', *il y a* 'there is', *voici* 'here is/are', *voilà* 'there is/are' (Chevalier et al., 1964; Béchade, 1986: 222; Tomassone, 1996; Dassi, 2003: 57)
- *voici* 'here is/are', *ci-gît* 'here lies', *vive* 'long live', *à bas* 'down with', *ci-joint* 'included', *soit* 'let' (Bonnard, 1981: 245)
- *c'est... que/que/dont/où/etc.* 'it's... that' (Bureau, 1978: 106)
- *c'est* 'it's', *il y a* 'there is', *voilà* 'there is/are' (Chevalier, 1969; Engel and Rossi-Gensane, 2004: 179; Le Querler, 1994; Rabatel, 2001)
- *voici* 'here is/are', *il y a* 'there is', *soit* 'let', *il est* 'there exists', *c'est* 'it's' (Martinet, 1979)
- *il y a* 'there is', *c'est* 'it's', *j'ai* 'I have', *nous avons* 'we have', *vous avez* 'you have', *on a* 'we have' (Morel, 1992: 507)
- *c'est* 'it's', *voilà* 'there is/are' (Pichon, 1986: 295)
- *c'est* 'it's', *voici* 'here is/are', *voilà* 'there is/are', *il est* 'it is', *il existe* 'there exists', *il y a* 'there is' (de Salins, 1996)

They are either simple presentatives or complex presentatives when combined with the correlative *que*.

For most researchers presentatives form a special extra syntactic class<sup>5</sup>: they are made up of a residue (Bonnard, 1981: 144) which grammar books have traditionally not dealt with thoroughly (Rabatel, 2001). For others, presentatives are part of a bigger class. Thus, Grevisse (1988: 1581) claims they are part of the *introduceurs* 'introducers'. The class 'Introducers' is a broader class than that of presentatives and encompasses: *voici* 'here is/are', *voilà* 'there is/are', *est-ce que...?* 'is there...?', *ô 'O'*, prepositions acting as introducers (*à*, *de*, *en*, *quant à* 'as for', *pour* 'for', *tant qu'à* 'if we are to'); conjunctions acting as introducers (*que*, *comme* 'as a', *en tant que* 'as a', etc.), *le fait de* 'the fact of', *le fait que* 'the fact that', *c'est* 'it's', *il y a* 'there is', *soit* 'let', *vive* 'long live'. For Morin (1985: 783), they are "nothing but a subcategory of verbs, with perhaps some special functions associated with their semantic value". As for Léard (1992: 100, 102, 105), such a category is a myth.

As the presentative category is made up of so many heterogeneous items it is reasonable to question such a grouping.

<sup>4</sup> Also *présentateurs* 'presentators' (de Salins, 1996: 11 sqq.), *presentationals* (Matthews, 1997: 293).

<sup>5</sup> Whatever the perspective the research takes place in, the verbal origin of *voici* and *voilà* is acknowledged as it accounts for some of their particularities. However, in synchrony, their verbal status is sometimes questioned. For example, Grenoble and Riley (1996: 823) state that "Moignet (1969) argues that *voilà* and *voici* should be considered verbs in Modern French. However, they are uninflected and trigger neither subject-verb agreement nor verb-object agreement, as do other French verbs. Therefore we will treat them as deictic presentatives". Léard draws on Moignet's analysis and reaches the conclusion that *voici* and *voilà* are not verbal in all their uses (Léard, 1992: 100 sqq.). Thus *voici* and *voilà* can be (a) verbs with a deictic value; (b) aspectual markers that not always have a verbal status: *voilà* SN, *voilà que* P and *voilà* SN+attribute have a verbal status whereas *voilà* SN *qui* P doesn't; (c) prepositions do not have a verbal status and (d) discourse markers do not have a verbal status. [SN: noun phrase; P: sentence].

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