

"Et voilà!": a cognitive perspective

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Voilà is a unique word in the French language, challenging many a categorization (syntactic, semantic and functional). Our paper presents collaborative research that aims at understanding why this word has been spreading so widely in spoken French. After reviewing the literature, we propose to tackle the word and its many uses from a cognitive point of view.

Such an approach is warranted by the deictic origins of the word (literally see-here), by its presentative uses and the way it contributes to discourse cohesion and intersubjective adjustment in discourse. In other words, *voilà* has to do with pointing to the world or pointing to a place in discourse or interaction (Bergen & Plauché 2001). Such a framing function makes the word highly context-sensitive.

Corpus data from varied sources (written, spoken, historical and contemporary) exhibits such a wide array of functions. It also shows that correlation exists between sentence position, syntactic complementation and function. This study yields a typology of uses (Col/Danino/Rault 2015) and provides us with semantic hypotheses to be tested.

Building from this research, psycholinguistics experiments were conducted in order to further examine its key role in information structuring and in interactional cooperation (Clark 1996). Our claim is that *voilà* signals the integration of informational elements by grouping them into a perceptible set on the verbal scene (Col/Rault/Danino/Knutsen 2015). More specifically, the results of our experiments suggest that *voilà* enables speakers to express his or her agreement with information presented previously. It also facilitates verbal interactions by making grounded information more salient in situations in which dialogue partners experience increased cognitive load.

Further experiments show that *voilà* manipulates points of view: they converge to create a shared set of information, whether from the world or from the interaction. Its role in dialogue management might explain its current expansion.

References

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