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Juliette Delahaie

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Sociopragmatic competence in FFL language teaching : discourse markers as contextualisation cues

The common European Framework of Reference for Languages (1999) : focus on pragmatics and sociolinguistics skills, i.e. :

- knowledge of scripts, micro- and macro-functions
- ability to manage an interaction
- knowledge and use of relational and social markers

Neither pragmatic nor sociolinguistic skills are independent of the linguistic components of communicative competences : certain linguistic features convey information about context (the extralinguistic environment of the utterance).

The aim of this presentation is to demonstrate that discourse markers are contextualisation cues and to propose some ways in which discourse markers (DM) might therefore be taught.

Data : authentic oral interactions from the *Lancom corpus* (Université of Louvain-Leuven), available on line at :

<http://bach.arts.kuleuven.be/elicop/>

Transcriptions of 13 interactions in a travel agency in Marcq-en-Baroeul (Lille), 30.000 words (1993-2006).

I. Some definitions : sociopragmatic competence, discourse markers

I.1. Sociopragmatic Competence

Leech (1983), differentiates :

- sociopragmatic knowledge : the contextual and social variables that determine appropriate pragmalinguistic choices.
- pragmalinguistic knowledge : particular linguistic resources for formulating a particular type of speech act.

Rose (199 : 171) :

“The ability to use available linguistic resources (pragmalinguistics) in a contextually appropriate fashion (sociopragmatics).”

I.2. Discourse markers as contextualisation cues

Discourse markers are :

- words that have a pragmatic function and which are not grammatically integrated into a sentence
- linguistic expressions that act as various parts of speech (adverbs, conjunctions, interjections)
- words that perform principally expressive and social functions : they convey information about speakers' attitudes and actions, about shared knowledge (or lack of it), about the exchange structure, and so on.

Various theories deal with discourse markers :

- “discourse analysis”, “data-driven approach” of Schiffrin (1987, 2001) : data is used as a starting point for an account of the use and distribution of markers in everyday discourse, and to outline a pattern of use.
- “theory driven-approach” : pragmatics integrated into semantics and therefore the fundamental meaning of lexical items (especially Anscombe) (a non truth-conditional theory of language which suggests that to speak is first and foremost to have an effect upon another person).

II. How should sociopragmatic competence and discourse markers be taught (and learned)?

Sociopragmatic competence

Bardovi-Harlig (2001) demonstrates the benefits of instruction versus immersion in various aspects of pragmatics.

But how might pragmatic skills be taught?

- enhance learners “metapragmatic consciousness”, invite the teacher to explain what remains implicit in the target language (Ball : 2000 ; Bardovi-Harlig : 2001)
- make discourse markers relevant : Kasper and Roever (2005 : 318), in order to be acquisitionally available, the input must seem relevant and worthwhile. Learners' attention should be drawn “to the linguistic forms by which [an] action is implemented, its immediate interactional or textual context.”

Discourse markers

A problem : the multifunctionality of DM

DM are appropriate in various contexts whose parameters are too numerous to be demonstrated practically.

Illustration : the DM *voilà*. This very frequent DM in French has numerous functions, and might index various contextual parameters :

- as an affirmative response to a request for confirmation :

- (1). E- c'était l'hôtel X hein c'est ça hein ?
C- voilà à Lesbos et il y a une semaine à Kyos
(travel agency, « Lesbos », 2006)

Such confirmation requests should not be confused with genuine questions, to which *voilà* could not serve as an answer :

- (2). - est-ce que c'est l'hôtel X ?
- oui
- *voilà/*d'accord

- its second most common function is to conclude, at the end of a turn in dialogue :

(3) E- [...] alors on va regarder ce qu'on peut ce que je peux regarder parce que en fait si vous voulez le samedi pendant les vacances les euh tour-opérateurs ferment plus tôt (nom) ferme à seize heures trente et (nom) ferme à dix-sept heures et euh **voilà**
(travel agency, « Chypre », 2006)

This occurs especially frequently during what we might call “sequences of closure” of an interaction :

(4). C- bon j/e peux m/e permettre de l'emmener ?
E- bien sûr sans souci sans souci
C- à c/e moment-là j/e vais le j/e vais cogiter un peu
E- et donc euh **voilà** sachez qu/e pour l'aérien donc i/l y a pas de souci
C- oui oui
E- en aller simple en aller-retour ou en retour simple
C- tout à fait
E- et qu'à côté d/e ça euh si c'est pour l'hiver effectivement euh ce s/era plus eu:h à partir du mois d/e septembre
C- pour l'hiver oui d'accord
E- OK ?
C- donc j/e verrai demain je n/e sais pas j/e vais **voilà**
(travel agency, « Suède », 2006)

- more rarely, *voilà* is used as an overture at the beginning of the exchange : a means of opening a conversation :

(5). [beginning of a telephone call]
E- alors en fait **voilà** je voulais vérifier parce que j'aurais éventuellement une personne qui souhaiterait se rajouter [...]
(travel agency, « Lesbos », 2006)

How should these usages be taught?

- make lists of DM?

The danger is the “paradigmatic curse” identified by Beacco (1989) concerning vocabulary in foreign language teaching : giving learners lists of words to memorize, completely out of context. This is nevertheless precisely what the *Référentiels pour le français* do : provide lists of sentences or DM, linked to particular speech acts – for example to “confirm” : *oui, tout à fait, si, bien sûr que si* ; or to “conclude” : (*bon ben*) *voilà quoi, voilà, enfin, donc, bref, etc.* (*Niveau B2 pour le français, un référentiel*, 2004 : 72 and 114).

- **Give a semantic or syntactic explanation ?** The problem is that DM like *voilà* have neither a specific denotation nor a clear syntactic role. They have, instead, a subjective/expressive meaning (Schiffrin : 2001) : they convey information about the speakers' relationship, their shared knowledge (1st use of *voilà*), and take part in the co-construction of an interaction (2nd use of *voilà*).

- **Increase awareness?** Some researchers suggest increasing learners' awareness of DM : Wichmann & Chanet (2009), Dewaele & Wourm (2002) : teaching with authentic spoken data (video, transcriptions).

This all seem to support the idea that DM cannot be explained and are therefore not teachable.

III. Teaching DM in context : other propositions (the contrastive approach, and models of exchange and dialogue)

III.1. Theoretical starting point

DM have very complex meanings, but not (any longer) denotations : they convey information about the context.

Schiffrin's *data-driven theory* (2001 ; 1987) : DM are contextualisation cues, which act upon different aspects of an interaction (cognitive, expressive, social, and textual levels). Markers are therefore multifunctional. How can teachers explain the effects of multiple contextual constraints on DM?

Another theoretical starting point : DM maintain a core of semantic traits throughout (and despite) their multiple functions. They convey consistent contextual indices of speaker relationships and the construction of an interaction.

This is the theoretical point of view that will be adopted here to examine the multifunctional French DM *voilà*. In particular, the presentation will employ Anscombe's framework of Integrated Pragmatics and Stereotype Theory.

III.2. A contrastive approach to the discourse marker : the example of *voilà*

Our hypothesis is that functional variations of *voilà* are surface effects of the context, but *voilà* has a unique semantic meaning :

Voilà confirms or concludes the interlocutor's utterance, marking it as conforming (as it were) to a stereotype ; it is something that is expected and “follows” (thereby representing a kind of shared knowledge) ; it is a very strong consensual marker.

N.B : Stereotype theory : stereotypes are an “open series of utterances attached to a lexical item, which constitute its meaning” (Anscombe, 1995 : 82) ; according to this theory, speaking necessarily involves the implication of one or more stereotypical utterances, which are culturally determined, and which presuppose certain types of

sequences and conclusions. Stereotype theory exists within the framework of Integrated Pragmatic Theory whereby the semantic meaning associated with a sentence is said to include indications of a “set of instructions related to the way in which the utterance is to take its place within a discourse dynamic” (Anscombe, 1990 : 50).

Despite the fact that it is not normally used to explain interactive aspect of linguistics, the interest of this theory for the present study is to be found in its focus upon sequences of utterances, and in its hypothesis that these sequences are often based upon the presuppositions carried by words in the form of “stereotypes”.

Core meaning of *voilà*

When *voilà* confirms : consensual meaning based on speakers’ shared knowledge.

When *voilà* concludes : it presents the situation as part of a stereotypical and expected sequence, sometimes in order to replace an explicit explanation. When *voilà* is employed within a monological conclusion, a sentence can be finished without proceeding to a normal grammatical closure :

(6) E- [...] alors on va regarder c : e qu’on peut c/e que j/e peux regarder parce qu/en fait si vous voulez le samedi pendant les vacances les eu :h tour-opérateurs ferment plus tôt X ferme à seize heures trente et Y ferme à dix-sept heures et euh **voilà**
C- d’accord mais déjà euh qu’est-c/e qu’on pourrait en fait on est jamais parti avec des tour op [...]
(travel agency, “Chypre”, 2006)

In the travel agency interactions, when *voilà* appears at the end of the interaction, it is used at the end of a script (with a set of expected sequences, exchanges and speech acts) as a conclusion : a usage that is less frequent in conversational interactions.

Application 1 : contrastive exchanges

In order to highlight the relevance of the semantic and pragmatic meaning of *voilà*, contrastive, binary models of exchanges might be proposed that focus on two different discourse markers.

For example : *voilà* and *d’accord* as a binary pair of responsive speech acts :

(7) . C- là vous attendez une confirmation d’AQUATOUR ?
E- voilà
c- d’accord
(travel agency, « un père organisé », 1993)

D’accord is frequently the third “evaluative” move of an exchange (36,9% of the evaluative responses in our data), it serves as a ratification of new information.

Dans une agence de voyage, C est le client, et E l’employée	
Je confirme	E - vous voulez partir le 30 août c’est ça ? C - voilà
J’enregistre l’information (1)	C- je voudrais partir aux environs du 30 août si possible E- d’accord
Je confirme (2) J’enregistre l’information (2)	E- et donc vous rentrez 15 jours après c’est ça ? C- voilà E- d’accord
Je réponds à une question	E- est-ce que vous avez une idée de voyage ? C- oui

Figure 1. Des modèles d’échange contrastifs

Application 2 : models of contrastive interactions

How might *voilà* be presented as a concluding or opening marker?

A contrastive approach through dialogue : *voilà*, as a consensual marker, is used at the end of a script , as a confirmation of an expected conclusive sequence. It rarely occurs in conversational interactions (without a script), replaced by *tiens* (opening) or *bon* (conclusion), as Traverso has demonstrated (1996).

Thus a teacher might want to compare two different types of interaction :

conversation familière : rencontre en rue de copains (interaction de <i>Lancom remaniée</i>)	interaction à script : à l’agence de voyage (interaction de <i>Lancom remaniée</i>)
(C1 et C2 sont dans la rue et se rencontrent) C1- tiens salut Bertrand, comment ça va ? C2- très bien et toi ? C1- bah ça va je suis en train de faire de courses là C2- tiens au fait tu as des nouvelles de Jérémy il devait partir en Angleterre C1- oui il a réussi à partir pour quinze jours, il rentre dans une semaine C2- ah oui c’est bien C1- bon ben il faut que j’y aille de toute façon on s’appelle hein ? C2- d’accord allez salut !	(dans une agence de voyage) E- monsieur bonjour C- bonjour madame voilà je voudrais connaître le prix des billets d’avion Paris-Londres s’il vous plaît E- oui départ quelle date ? C- le 5 novembre pas avant, parce que je ne peux partir avant et euh voilà E- d’accord en seconde classe ? C- en seconde oui E- et il vous faut un retour ? C- et pas de retour non E- alors vous avez un vol le 5 novembre au matin à 150 euros l’aller

	<p>C- ah c'est pas mal E- par Air France C- d'accord E- voilà C- bon ben je vais réfléchir et euh voilà, je repasserai E- d'accord pas de problème C- voilà merci au revoir</p>
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Figure 2. Des modèles d'interaction contrastifs

Conclusion

Teaching DM in FFL is impossible without a systematic linguistic description of the DM. This description should demonstrate that DM prescribe linguistic systems and do not vary according to external contexts : they explain contexts.

The project of the *Dictionnaire raisonné des marqueurs discursifs du français*, undertaken by D. Paillard (see Paillard : 2009), in collaboration with the University of Hanoï and the Agence universitaire de la Francophonie : to describe and explain DM in French as a linguistic and pragmatic system (according to Culioli's Enunciation Theory), is to be followed by a thorough didactic model for teaching and learning of this system.

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