Presentative sentences: One clause type expressing two speech acts

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Despite Searle (1976, 22) having made clear from the start that "some few verbs mark more than one illocutionary point", we tend to think of sentences fulfilling in general one main pragmatic function – for instance, an imperative sentence expressing one directive speech act. However, presentative sentences challenge this simplifying view. Here, the syntactic construction clearly cannot be mapped to one single pragmatic speech act, and the presented analysis will show that they contain two different speech acts at once. Presentative sentences, although present in a great number of languages (see 1b for English and further description by Wood/Zanuttini 2023), are well recognizable in French, the language chosen here for illustration, since French disposes of the dedicated presentative lexeme *voilà/voici*, which can be classified as impoverished verb (cf. for instance Morin 1985; Bergen/Plauché 2005).

On the one hand, presentative sentences convey a statement via a representative speech act. Example (1) illustrates that the contained proposition can be corrected. Person B can disagree with person A who is uttering the presentative sentence, but giving a negative answer is only felicitous if a corrected version is offered (as opposed to (3), see below).

(1)	a.	A: Voilà Marie (qui arrive).	fr
		VOILA M. (who arrives)	
		B: Non, ce n'est pas Marie (qui arrive), c'est Aurore.	
		No this NEG-is NEG M. (who arrives) this-is A.	
	b.	A: Here comes Mary.	en
		B: No, that's not Mary, that's Aurore.	

Moreover, as shown in (2), presentative sentences can be embedded under performative subordinate clauses, which is only possible for constructions "that (directly or indirectly) convey statements" (Lakoff 1984, 475). Interestingly, Lakoff himself cites as an example (2b), which is a construction that in our terms clearly falls under the class of presentative sentence in English.

(2)	a.	Je vais partir parce que voilà mon bus (qui arrive).	fr
		I will leave because VOILA my bus (which arrives)	
	b.	I am leaving, because here comes my bus.	en
			(Lakoff 1984, 472)

On the other hand, presentative sentences contain, in addition to the representative one, a directive speech act. Example (3) shows that the utterance as a whole cannot be negated, not without a follow-up correction as seen in (2).

(3)   A: Voilà   Marie   (qui arrive).
                VOILA   M.   (who arrives)
           B: # Non, ne voilà   pas   Marie (qui arrive).   / # Non!
                No   NEG VOILA NEG   M.   (who arrives)   No

(4)   * Est-ce que voilà   Marie ?
            Q   VOILA   M.

This restriction is thereby not due to the (in several terms) morphosyntactically deficient character of the verbal element *voilà*. Indeed, *voilà* can be embedded under negation, but only in negative, rhetoric questions, which in turn usually convey positive assertions (see (5)). Similarly, sentences like the one uttered by A in (1) and (3) do not have an interrogative counterpart: (4) is ungrammatical, unless, once again, in a rhetorical setting.

(5)   Est-ce que ne   voilà pas   une enveloppe, un cachet, du papier,   une écriture?
          Q   NEG   VOILA NEG   an   envelope,   a   seal,   PART paper,   a writing?
          'Look, isn't there an envelope, a seal paper, and a writing?'
                                (Victor Hugo, L'homme qui rit, 1869, p. 603, via Frantext)

Taken altogether, it becomes clear that presentative sentences fulfill, on the pragmatic level, a dual function. In the proposed analysis, we will assume that (a) the directive speech act serves the goal to direct the attention of the addressee to (b) the entity (deictic or abstract in nature) denoted by the representative speech act. The representative is thus encapsuled into the directive, and the overall aim is to create a moment of joint attention, essential mechanism in human communication (cf. Tomasello 2010; Diessel 2006). One intriguing question left to be answered is to know how this duality is represented in the syntactic structure of such sentence types – do they also dispose of multiple "speech act phrases"? The talk will propose different approaches and discuss their theoretical repercussions.

References

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