

PA11.1 – Presentational Particles in Romance languages. A diachronic syntactic study of French and Italian

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I. The form-meaning mismatch

In the Romance languages, specific lexical items exist to construct presentative sentences. French *voici/voilà* and Italian *ecco* belong to this group of items:

| | | |
|---------------------|----------------|-----|
| (1) a. Voilà Marie. | b. La voilà. | Fr. |
| VOILA M. | 3fsg.ACC=VOILA | |
| (2) a. Ecco Maria. | b. Eccola. | It. |
| ECCO M. | ECCO=3fsg.ACC | |

They

- state the existence of an (abstract) entity,
- localize the entity in space (or discourse), similar to a pointing gesture (cf. Lakoff's 1987 „pointing-out ICM“),
- invite the hearer to shift the attention to this entity and „make that entity the most salient in the discourse“ (Wood/Zanuttini 2023, 37),
- announce that also the speaker will direct his attention to the entity so that Joint Attention (cf. Tomasello 2010; Diessel 2006) is established,
- combine functions of declarative, imperative and commissive speech acts.

At the same time, they

- behave syntactically like verbs,
- do not inflect and display obligatory null subjects.

Research questions:

- How did the presentative items *voici/voilà* and *ecco* develop diachronically, on a morphologic as well as on a semantic/pragmatic level?
- How to account for their syntactic and morphologic divergence from regular verbs in those languages, given that they are not etymologically linked to each other?

II. Methodology and hypotheses

Hypotheses:

- Voici/voilà* are the result of a grammaticalization process.
- Presentative sentences show universal tendencies as they represent a distinct presentative clause type.

Methods:

- diachronic corpus research using as main resources *Base du Français Médiéval* (BFM), *Frantext*, *Opera del Vocabolario Italiano* (OVI) and *Morfologia dell'Italiano in Diachronia* (MIDIA)
- syntactic analysis within the generative framework

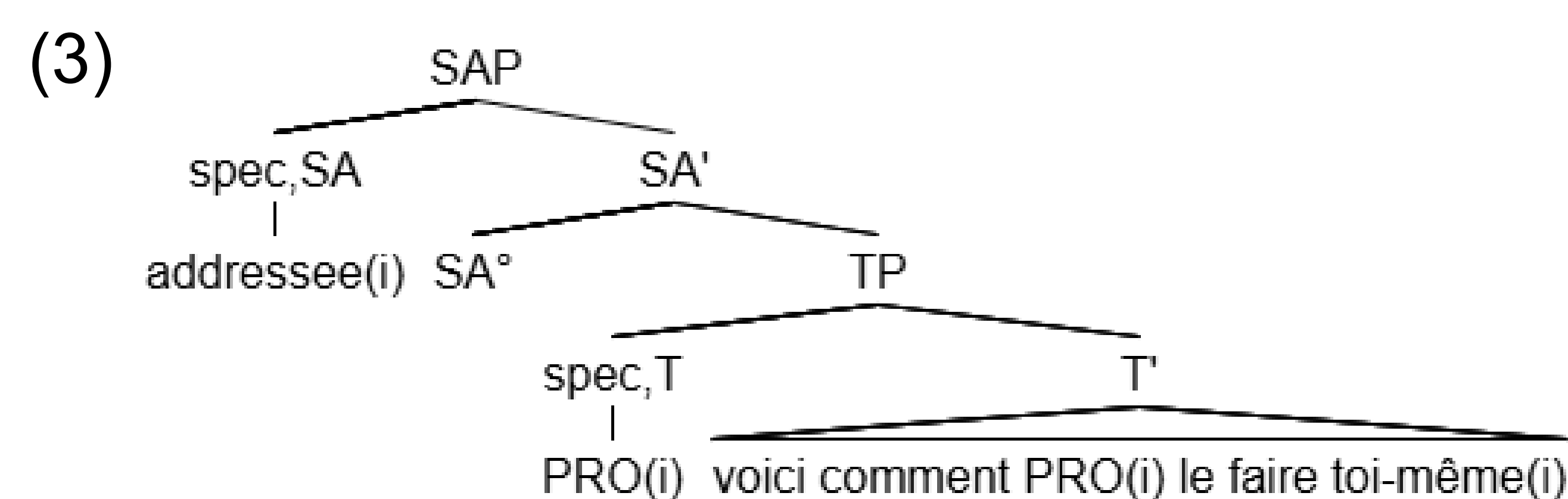
III. Results and discussion

- It. *ecco* inherits its semantic and pragmatic features from Lat. ECCE.
- Fr. *voici/voilà* follows a complex grammaticalization path:

| free collocation | > fixed formula | > contraction | > univerbation | > reanalysis |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|
| (voz) veez ici/ la sus etc. | > veez ci/la veiz ci/la | > vez ci/la | > veci/vela | > voici/voilà |

- Overt subjects with *voici/voilà* become ungrammatical at the moment in time when French loses its pro-drop property.

- Italian presentative sentences can be analyzed as imperatives.
- French presentative items share properties with non-finite verbs, taking PRO as subject.
- PRO in French presentative sentences can be arbitrary (due to the absence of a speech-act-layer, cf. Ritter/Wiltschko 2018; Speas/Tenny 2003 for SAP) or controlled by the addressee, as sentences involving an impersonal intensifier show that a [+addressee] feature is obligatory (see (3)).



- A unified account for Italian and French presentative sentences is possible under the assumption that imperative and presentative clauses share the same type of subject, i.e. an addressee-oriented logophoric PRO.

IV. Consequences and follow-up questions

- The study of presentative constructions provides further arguments for the assumption that the pragmatic domain of the addressee directly effects the syntax.
- The convergence of the syntactic and pragmatic properties of French and Italian suggest that it exists, indeed, a universal presentative clause type.
- A wider typological study on presentative constructions families would be necessary to confirm this approach.
- Studies on the same 1:many mismatch type across modalities could clarify the intertwined relationship of presentatives with co-speech gestures (see PA11.2).