



GEORG-AUGUST-UNIVERSITÄT
GÖTTINGEN IN PUBLICA COMMODA
SEIT 1737



French *voilà*: an uninflectable form arising from an inflecting verb

Katja Friedewald

Georg-August-Universität Göttingen,
RTG Form-Meaning Mismatches

45. DGfS-Tagung 2023, Universität zu Köln

AG 8: Uninflectedness

09.03.2023

French *voilà*: an uninflectable form arising from an inflecting verb

1. *Voilà* – an uninflectable verb?
2. Diachrony: Corpus Study
3. Grammaticalization Path of *voici/voilà*
 - 3.1 Free Collocation
 - 3.2 Fixed Formula
 - 3.3 Contracted Form
 - 3.4 Univerbated Form
 - 3.5 Alignment to changing verb paradigm
4. Conclusions and Outlook
5. Discussion

VOILÀ

Uninflectable

VOI

=

LÀ



?



Locative adverb 'there'
Analogous to *-ci* 'here' (in *voici*)

1. *Voilà* – an uninflectable verb?

Taking complements:

- (1) Voilà Marie.
PART Marie

Assigning accusative case:

- (2) a *Tu= voilà.
you.NOM.2SG= PART
- b Te= voilà.
you.ACC.2SG= PART

Forming the only constituent of a relative clause:

- (3) La femme que voilà est mon épouse.
the woman that PART is my wife

1. *Voilà* – an uninflectable verb?

Introducing a subordinate clause:

- (4) a *Voilà* pourquoi je voulais te parler.
PART why I wanted you.ACC talk
- b *Voilà* que Marie part.
PART that M. leaves

Building up cleft-like structures:

- (5) *Voilà* mon frère qui pleure.
PART my brother who cries

Introducing a Small Clause:

- (6) *Voilà* mon oncle content.
PART my uncle happy

1. *Voilà* – an uninflectable verb?

Allowing word formation via the common verbal prefix *re-*:

(7) Me re- voilà.
me.ACC.1SG again- PART

1. *Voilà* – an uninflectable verb?

No restriction to addressees with a specific **number feature**:

2SG

- (8) a *Voilà un monde que tu n'as pas connu.*
PART a world that you.2SG NEG-have NEG known

(A. Jenny, *L'Art Français de la Guerre*, 2011, p. 241, via Frantext)

2PL

- b *Voilà pourquoi vous crèverez tous ;*
PART why you.2PL die.2PL.FUT all

(J. Roubaud, *Poésie: Récit*, 2000, p. 349, via Frantext)

1. *Voilà* – an uninflectable verb?

Observation:

- *Voilà/voici* is an uninflectable item that behaves syntactically as a verb (with a null subject)

Question:

- How did the verbal element of this former multiword construction develop into an uninflectable morpheme?
- -> Where does the etymological origin of *voi-* lie?
- -> Which mechanisms come into play during the process of the morpheme *voi-* turning into an uninflectable item?
- “How can an uninflected stem participate in syntactic relations that are normally the province of inflected word forms and the phrases they project?” (Spencer 2020, 154)

2. Diachrony: Corpus Study

2. Diachrony: Corpus Study

Various Hypotheses

concerning the origin of the *voi-* morpheme

„Even if it is easy to recognize [in *voilà/voici*] a combination of a **form of VIDERE** with presentational adverbs, it is however complicated to definitely analyze those verbal forms. Tobler recognizes in the first element the **2nd pers. sg. ind. pres.** of *veoir*, while others are convinced to deal with the **imperative**.“

(FEW 14, 492)

« the etymological presence still sensible of the **imperative** [2pers.sg.]
« **vois ici** », **vois là** » »

(Rabatel 2001, 141)

« [...] *voici, voilà* will establish themselves on the basis of the **frozen imperative singular** »

(Buridant 2000, 243)

2. Diachrony: Corpus Study

corpus	century	no. texts	no. tokens
BFM 2019	12th	50	1.253.830
BFM 2022	13th	64	1.854.076
Frantext	14th	119	4.354.407
	15th	162	4.902.277
	16th	188	7.189.168

Table 1: Description of the used subcorpora.

2. Diachrony: Corpus Study

corpus	century	no. texts	no. tokens
BFM 2019	12th	50	1.253.830
BFM 2022	13th	64	1.854.076
Frantext	14th	119	4.354.407
	15th	162	4.902.277
	16th	188	7.189.168

Table 1: Description of the used subcorpora.

category	variants
veoir.2PL + ci/la	veez, vees, voiez, voyez, voiés, voyés
veoir.2SG + ci/la	veis, veiz, vois, voiz
vez ci/la	vez, ves
veci / vela	vezci, vezla, vesci, vesla, vezcy, vescy, veci, vela
voici/ voilà	voici, voicy, voila, voyci, voycy, voyla
All categories	All possible combinations with diacritics and alternations between <v> and <u> have been considered.

Table 2: categorization of presentative forms applied during the corpus study.

2. Diachrony: Corpus Study

	veoir.2PL + ci/la	veoir.2SG + ci/la	vez ci/la	ve(z/s)ci / ve(z/s)la	voici / voila
12th century	36,69 (46)	5,48 (7)	10,37 (13)	0 (0)	0 (0)
13th century	35,06 (65)	8,63 (16)	42,07 (78)	1,08 (2)	0 (0)
14th century	33,07 (144)	9,88 (43)	71,19 (310)	98,52 (429)	0,46 (2)
15th century	37,56 (161)	0,7 (3)	6,3 (27)	94,56 (405)	9,11 (39)
16th century	10,29 (74)	4,59 (33)	0,14 (1)	23,79 (171)	438,16 (3150)

Table 3: Relative frequencies per million tokens, (absolute frequencies in brackets).

2. Diachrony: Corpus Study

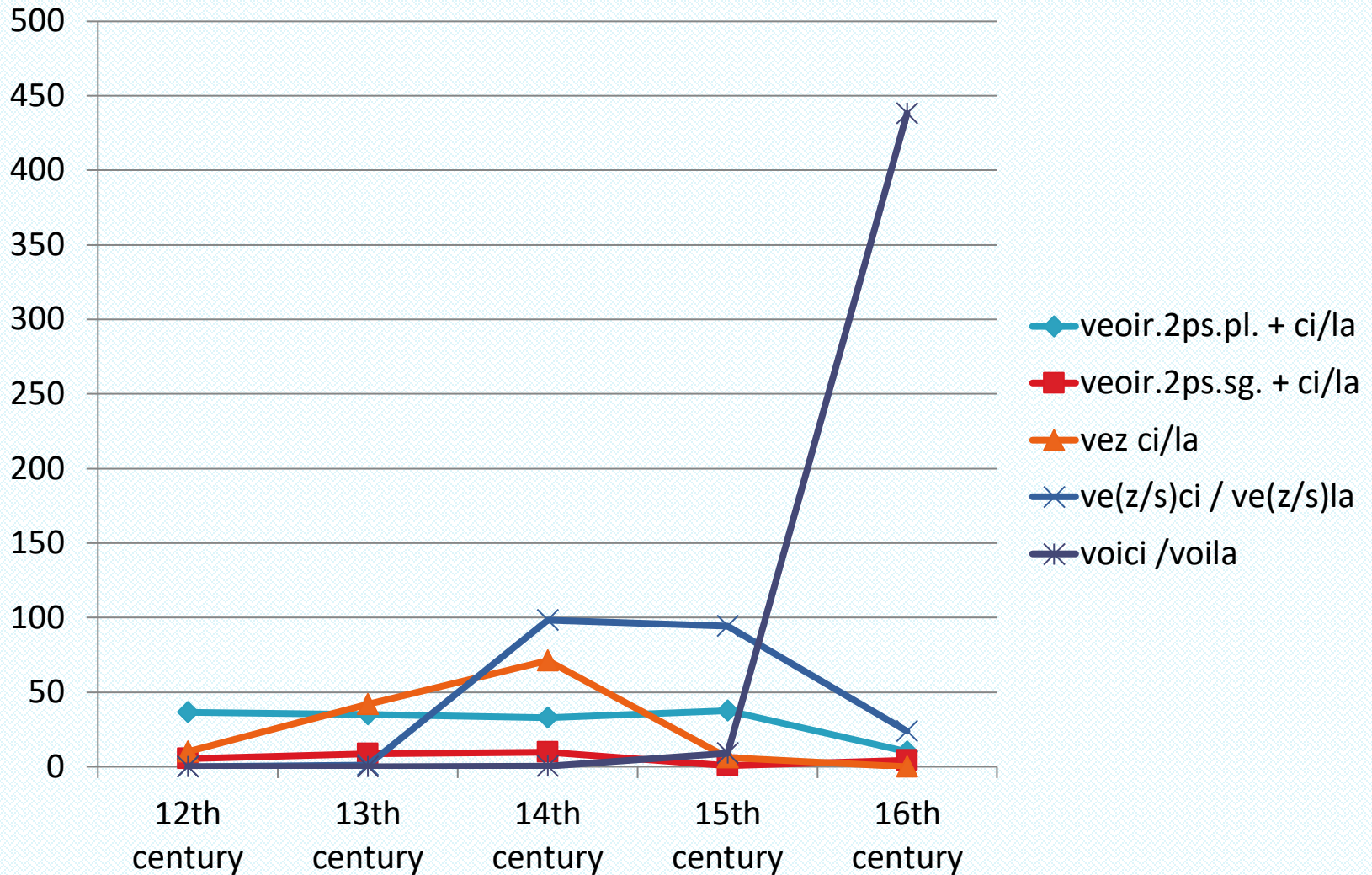
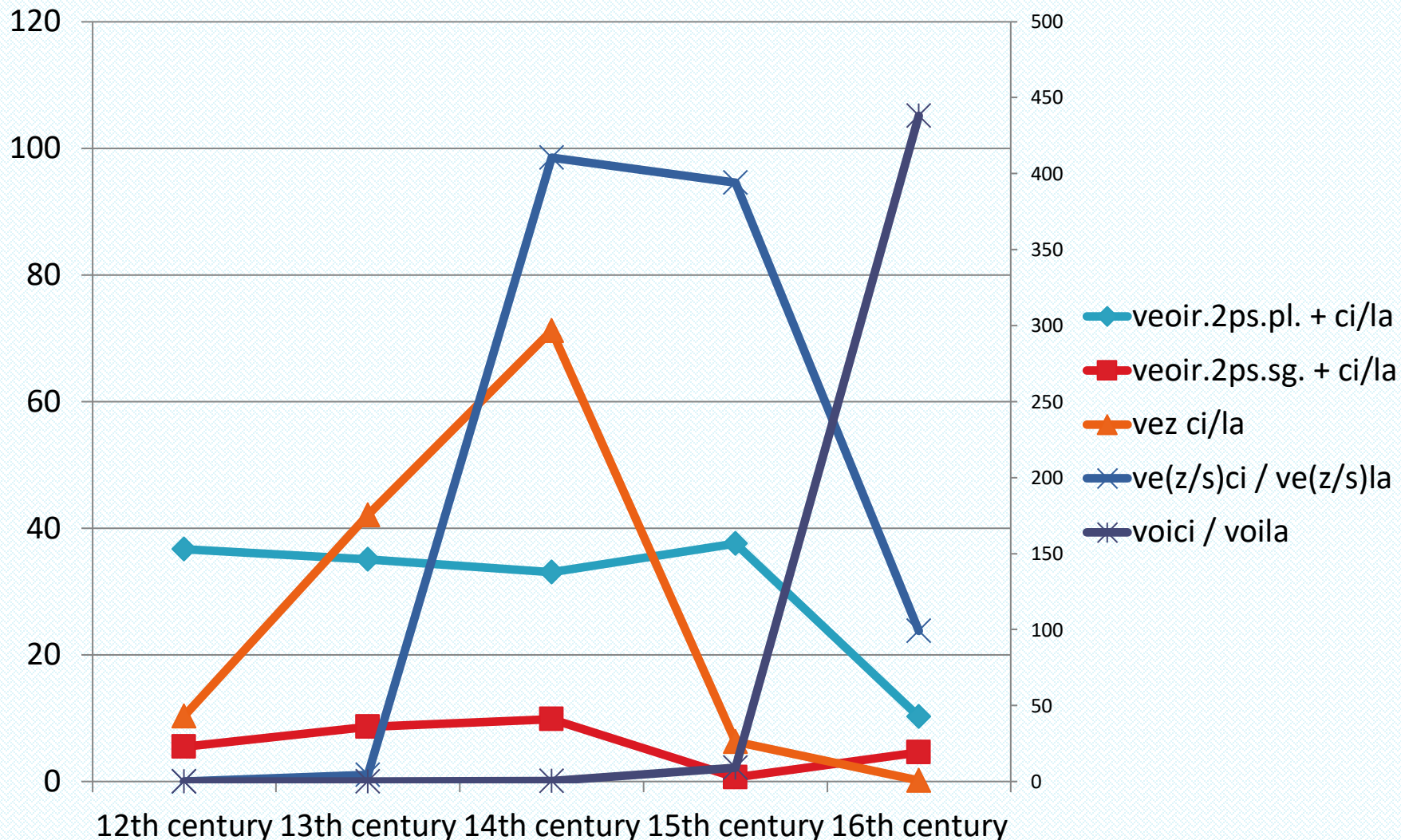


Table 4: Relative frequencies of presentative categories per million tokens.

2. Diachrony: Corpus Study



*Table 5: Relative frequencies of presentative categories per million tokens, right y-axis only valid for *voici/voilà*.*

3. Grammaticalization Path of *voici/voilà*

3. Grammaticalization Path of *voici/voilà*

Hypothesis based on corpus findings:

Free Collocation* > **Fixed Formula*** > **Contraction** > **Univerbation*** > **Substitution**

(voz) veez ici/ > *veez ci/la* > *vez ci/la* > *veci/vela* > *voici/voila*
la sus etc. > *veiz ci/la*

* The terms „free collocation“, „fixed formula“ and „univerbated form“ are inspired by L. Brinton’s analysis of eng. *look*-forms (cf. Brinton 2001).

3. Grammaticalization Path of *voici/voilà*

3.1 Free Collocation

(voz) veez ici/la sus/...
voi ci/la

cf. en: look that/how
(Brinton 2001)

- Variation of locatives, beyond *ci/là*:

(9) « Seingnors, fet il, [...] ces dames que **veez la sus**, ce sont les filles Adrastus, Deyphilé et Argÿa, [...]. »
« Gentlemen, he says, [...] these ladies that **see.2PL there up** [over there], those are Adrastus' daughters, D. and A., [...].”
(Anonyme, Roman de Thèbes 2, p. 127, v. 10145, ca. 1150.)

- The locative adverb is still flexible in its position:

(10) « Sire Willame, un petit m'atendez. Ices couarz que vus **ici veez**, Ceste est ma torbe, [...] »
« Sir William, wait a bit. Those cowards that you **here see.2PL**, this is my troop, [...].”
(Anonyme, Chanson de Guillaume, p. 117, v. 2975, ca. 1140.)

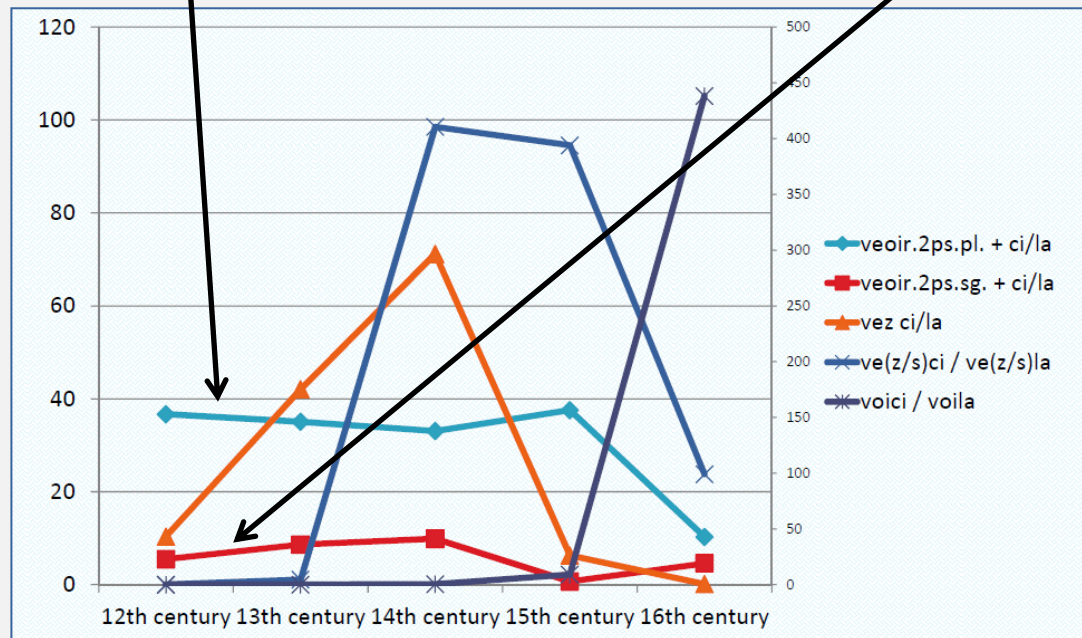
3. Grammaticalization Path of *voici/voilà*

3.2 Fixed Formula

veez ci/la (2PL)
veiz ci/la (2SG)

cf. en: *look you/ye*
(Brinton 2001)

- Combinations of *ci/la* with forms of the verb *veoir* in most of the cases with the 2PL, in a few cases also with the 2SG



3. Grammaticalization Path of *voici/voilà*

3.2 Fixed Formula

veez ci/la (2PL)
veiz ci/la (2SG)

cf. en: *look you/ye*
(Brinton 2001)

- Since Old French was a pro-drop language:
-> A distinction between use in the indicative mood and the imperative mood is not always clear to make:

(11) si dist li uns a l'autre : « **Veez la** le bon chevalier, [...]
so said one to the other: « **see.2PL there** the good knight, [...]
(anonyme, Queste del saint Graal, p. 206d, ca. 1230.)

3. Grammaticalization Path of *voici/voilà*

veez ci/la (2PL)
veiz ci/la (2SG)

3.2 Fixed Formula

cf. en: *look you/ye*
(Brinton 2001)

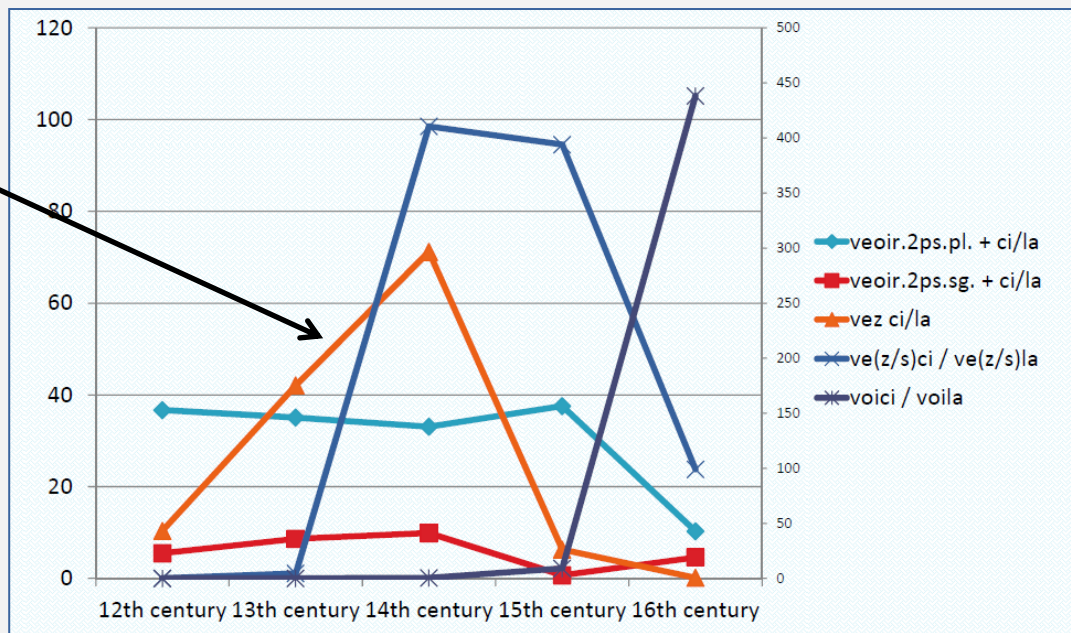
- Certain occurrences can be identified as indicatives due to their embedding in relative clauses and/or overt personal pronouns:

- (12) **Donc valt mialz li uns de ces trois javeloz **que vos veez ci** , car quanque je vuel an oci, oisiax et bestes, a besoiing ;**
So one of those three darts **that you see.2PL here** is better, because for everything that I want to kill, birds and animals, one needs it.
(Chrétien de Troyes, Conte du Graal (Perceval), p. 361, v. 201, 1181-1185.)
- Clitic pronouns are consequently in enclitic position, even when the inflected verb does not occupy the first position in the sentence:
- (13) **Or Veez mei ci** en vostre curt ;
Now see.2PL me.ACC.1SG here at your court ;
(Jordan Fantosme, Chronique concernant la guerre d'Écosse, p. 26, v. 334, ca. 1175.)
- > Both indicative and imperative mode occur in the same fixed formula.

3. Grammaticalization Path of *voici/voilà*

vez ci/la

3.3 Contracted Form



- 13th – 14th century: Increasing frequencies of the syntagm *vez ci/vez la*

3. Grammaticalization Path of *voici/voilà*

vez ci/la

3.3 Contracted Form

14th century (Frantext) : Absolute frequencies			
<i>vez ci</i>	<i>vez la</i>	<i>vez</i> + other locative	<i>vez</i> alone
257	53	5	10
318			10

Table 6: Absolute frequencies of *vez* in the 14th century subcorpus.

3. Grammaticalization Path of *voici/voilà*

vez ci/la

3.3 Contracted Form

14th century (Frantext) : Absolute frequencies			
<i>vez ci</i>	<i>vez la</i>	<i>vez</i> + other locative	<i>vez</i> alone
257	53	5	10
318			10

Table 6: Absolute frequencies of *vez* in the 14th century subcorpus.

- -> *vez* can not be a synonym for a regular form of the paradigm of *veoir*
- contraction of *veéz ci* (2PL) to *vez cí*

3. Grammaticalization Path of *voici/voilà*

vez ci/la

3.3 Contracted Form

Ve as an uninflectable form:

13th century (BFM 2022) : Addressees of <i>vez ci/la</i>			
honorific form	2ps.pl.	2ps.sg.	reader
49	5	9	9

Table 7: Absolute frequencies of the addressees of *vez ci/vez la* in the 13th century subcorpus.

- (14) - Se **tu** voloies mengier pain, / **vez=en la** .l. lez cel autel.
- If **you.2SG** wanted to eat bread, / **vez=PARTITIVE there** one next to this altar.
(anonyme, Roman de Renart (branche XI), p. 97, v. 12401, déb. 13e s.)

3. Grammaticalization Path of *voici/voilà*

vez ci/la

3.3 Contracted Form

- Extension to the singular: fits into the universally observed mechanism that Bates/McKenzie (2021) call the “**plural-to-singular reanalysis cycle**”:

“For a plural form to be used in singular contexts, it must be **reanalyzed by hearers as lacking the plural feature.**” [...]

“For number reanalysis, the process begins when a **common ground disparity** exists between the speaker and hearer. “ [...]

“The number-neutral form then **pushes out other forms**, destroying the paradigmatic number contrast here.” (Bates/McKenzie 2021, 1-7)

3. Grammaticalization Path of *voici/voilà*

3.4 Univerbated Form

ve(z/s)ci
ve(z/s)la

cf. en: *looker (here)*
lookahere
(Brinton 2001)

- vezci/vezla* and all its variants are clearly the univerbated form of *vez ci/la* (and **not** of the imp. sg. form):

vezci	vezcy	vesci	vescy	veci
245	75	49	9	8
vezla		vesla		vela
27		11		3

Table 8: Absolute frequencies of *ve(z/s)ci/ve(z/s)la* in the 14th century subcorpus.

voici	voicy	voisci	voiscy	voyci	voycy
0	0	0	0	1	0
voila		voisla		voyla	
1		0		0	

Table 9: Absolute frequencies of *voici/voila* in the 14th century subcorpus.

3. Grammaticalization Path of *voici/voilà*

3.5 Alignment to changing verbal paradigm

veci > *voici*
vela > *voilà*

cf. en: *looker (here)*
> *look (here)*
(Brinton 2001)

- *ve(z)la / ve(z)ci* undergoes the same alignment to the changing verb stem as the regular forms of the verbal paradigm

-> Even if *voici/voilà* are at this stage non-inflecting forms (having lost their number feature): the originally verbal morpheme still seems to bear a **[+V]** feature

Sound change of *veoir*

12th century: [vəoir] > [vəwɛr]

end of 13th - **beginning of 14th century:**

elimination of the hiatus [ə];

[vwɛr] > [vwa]

-> alignment of the whole paradigm of the verb to the new stem

4. Conclusions and Outlook

- *Voilà/voici* is an uninflectable item that behaves syntactically as a verb (with a null subject)
- The origins of the particle lie in *veez.2PL* (Ind./Imp.) > *vez*
 - At this stage, the construction already loses its markedness for number (and the plural-to-singular reanalysis cycle applies)
 - The verbal element of the unverbated form is therefore an already impoverished one
- The unverbated form *vezci/la* > *veci/la* > *voici/là* still contains a [+V] feature
- Outlook: With *voilà* developing into a discourse marker (from the 16th century onwards), the particle will also lose its remaining verbal properties

5. Discussion

References

Corpora:

- BFM = *Base de Français Médiéval* (en ligne), ENS de Lyon, Laboratoire IHRIM, 2022, Lyon, <txm.bfm-corpus.org>.
- Frantext = ATILF. *Base textuelle Frantext* (en ligne), ATILF-CNRS & Université de Lorraine, 1998-2023, <<https://www.frantext.fr/>>.

Cited Literature:

- Bates, Jonah/McKenzie, Andrew (2021): „A plural-to-singular reanalysis cycle“, in: *Journal of Historical Syntax* 5, 1-26.
- Brinton, Laurel (2001): „From Matrix Clause to Pragmatic Marker. The History of *look*-Forms“, in: *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* 2, 177-199.
- Buridant, Claude (2000): *Grammaire nouvelle de l'ancien français*, Paris, Sedes.
- FEW = Wartburg, Walther von (1961): *Französisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Basel, Zbinden.
- Lambrecht, Knud (1988): „Presentational cleft constructions in spoken French“, in: J. Haiman/ S. Thompson (Ed.), *Clause combining in grammar and discourse*, Amsterdam/Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 135-179.
- Rabatel, Alain (2001): „Valeurs énonciative et représentative des 'présentatif' *c'est, il y a, voici/voilà*: effet point de vue et argumentativité indirecte du récit“, in: *Revue de Sémantique et Pragmatique* 9, 111-144.
- Spencer, Andrew (2020): „Uninflectedness. Uninflecting, uninflectable and uninflected words, or the complexity of the simplex“, in: L. Körtvélyessy/P. Štekauer, *Complex words: Advances in morphology*, Cambridge, CUP, 142-158.
- Tacke, Felix (2022): *Sprachliche Aufmerksamkeitslenkung : historische Syntax und Pragmatik romanischer Zeigeaktkonstruktionen*, Bonn, Klostermann.