

Oui and Voilà: Analysis of two discourse markers used by Chinese-L1 speakers of French in France

Delin DENG¹

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Abstract

French discourse markers, functioning as connectors in discourse which appear the most in informal register, are not explicitly taught in language classes. However, they could mainly be acquired through extracurricular interactions with native speakers. Despite many fruitful researches on discourse markers, few studies have documented the usage of French discourse markers by non-native speakers who live in France. In this paper, we conduct linguistic analysis on two functionally interchangeable discourse markers, *oui* and *voilà*, through our own oral data corpus of French non-native speakers of Chinese origin, allowing us to examine how extralinguistic factors, which have been proved significant to the speech of native speakers of French, influence the French speech by Chinese-native speakers in France.

Keywords

Discourse marker, French, non-native speakers, Social network, Extralinguistic factors

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¹ École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, France; Department of Anthropologie Sociale et Ethnologie, delin.deng@ehess.fr and/or delin.deng@gmail.com

Introduction

Since the 80s, research on discourse markers (DM) has increased significantly built on the pioneering work of Labov in Martha’s Vineyard (1962) and in New York City (1964). Fraser (1998: 19-33) considered the research on DM as an increasingly relevant topic in the field of linguistics. However, few studies are specifically interested in the use of French DM among non-native French speakers of Chinese origin. Today, an increasing number of Chinese move to France either to pursue their studies or to work. By integrating into the community, these speakers become or form a social community. Their daily contact with French native speakers then becomes a necessity. In the research on French spoken by Anglophones in Montreal, Sankoff et al. (1997: 191-217) indicated that the mastery of DM is a good indicator highlighting the integration of non-native speakers into the linguistic community. Whether they have learnt French or not before their arrival in France, these non-native speakers have never had access to an explicit teaching of DM in second language classroom, as laid out in many other studies. Hence, we may assume that the learning of DM may only be done through extracurricular contact with native speakers of French. The goal of this research is to examine how the social factors influence the use of DM by the Chinese-L1 speakers of French in France, by adopting the sociolinguistic variationist approach¹.

Firstly, previous research on DM *oui* and *voilà* will be reviewed and our hypothesis will be proposed. Secondly, our methodology including the corpus used, the data collection, the participants’ profile and the extralinguistic factors to examine will be presented. After the calculation of the occurrences of the variables and the presentation of the use of these two DM among different groups, the obtained results will be discussed. We will conclude this article with a discussion on the limitation of our approach and a research proposal for a longitudinal research on the same group of speakers in the years to come.

1. Previous Study

A first data cleaning of our corpus allowed us to observe a very high frequency of the DM *oui* and *voilà* in the speech of our non-native speakers. Before making any hypothesis, it is important to understand the function of these two particles in the speech of French native speakers.

1.1. The case of *oui*

Firstly, *oui* may be used as an agreement marker appearing after a query and therefore constituting a vis-à-vis affirmation to the query of the interlocutor. Although, in general, this particle can react to all sorts of speech acts: questions, assertions, requests, orders, suggestions, recommendations as well as excuses and wishes. Kerbrat-Orecchioni (2001:95-119) illustrates this function by the following example:

A1-le directeur est à Paris pendant toute la semaine donc euh si vous voulez me	A1- the director is in Paris for the whole week so euh if you would like to give me
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¹ Sociolinguistics is a descriptive study of the effect of social factors, such as ethnicity, religion, gender, social status, age, etc. on some language variables. Sociolinguistic variationist approach is widely believed pioneered by William Labov’s work in the 60s in New York City on some phonological variables in American English. This approach claims that language varies systematically in accordance with social characteristics of the speakers. In this article, we therefore used this approach to compare two variables that do not have the same meaning in their original definition but are functionally interchangeable as discourse markers.

donner vos coordonnées	your contact information
B1- <i>oui</i> c'est monsieur comment le directeur↑	B1- yes this is mister who the director

There are cases when *oui* does not come at the initial position but the final position of an utterance. See example of Kerbrat-Orecchioni (2001) in the same corpus:

- Qu'est-ce qui vous arrive vous avez froid	- What happened to you you feel cold
- J'ai pas chaud <i>oui</i>	- I don't feel hot yes

In this case, even though *oui* does not directly follow the utterance of the interlocutor, it always responds to the interlocutor's assertion. Thus, it is to be considered an agreement marker.

Secondly, *oui* can simply receive the value of recording or the value of regulation. For example:

B3-s'il vous plaît parce que j'aime bien noter les noms quand même	B3-please because I would like to write down the names as well
A4- <i>oui</i> non mais je comprends bien de toute façon elle ne fera rien	A4-yes no but I understand well anyway she will do nothing

(Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2001: 98)

In this example, *oui* functions more like a regulator than an agreement marker, since it does not express a real position taking and does not bring any information element. This function is therefore different from the function of agreement marker.

In both cases, the function is not necessarily the function of DM, which we are interested in. In fact, Chanet (2004: 83-106) established a list of the 85 most used French DM by French native speakers and *oui* was not on that list. Yet, this absence does not mean that *oui* may not function as DM in their discourse. It may simply be less frequent than other DM. In order to find out if French native speakers also use *oui* as DM, we used the corpus PFC (Phonologie du Français Contemporain: <http://www.projet-pfc.net> Durand et al. 2002, 2009) as a reference. The following example that illustrates well this function:

E : Les garçons et les filles ?	E : The boys and the girls?
DL1 : Non, non. Non, non, non. (XXXX), il y avait l'école, bon il y avait l'école libre, l'école privée, enfin euh, pour les filles, et l'école pour les garçons. Et on se mélangeait pas hein <i>oui</i> .	DL1 : No, no. No, no. No. (XXXX), there was the school, well there was the free school, the private school, in the end euh, for the girls, and the school for the boys. And we did not get mixed hein yes.

In this example, *oui* does not appear at the beginning of the utterance to show agreement of the speaker with his interlocutor. Moreover, this utterance does not follow a concrete question raised by the interlocutor and therefore cannot be considered as the speaker's position-taking vis-à-vis his interlocutor. *oui* does not function as regulator either, since it does not prove a function of recording. Here, *oui* is rather to be considered as a DM, more precisely, a discursive progress marker that marks the end of the utterance.

In order to have a clearer picture of the distribution of the aforementioned functions of *oui* in the discourse of native speakers, we randomly chose 8 speakers from the Parisian area from the same corpus: 4 men and 4 women. We examined a free conversation of 30 minutes for each

speaker (4 hours in total for 8 speakers). **Table 1** represents the distribution of the usage of *oui* in their discourse.

Table 1: Distribution of *oui* used by French native speakers

Occurrence of <i>oui</i>		Agreement markers and Regulators		Discourse Markers	
Total	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
143	100%	117	81.82%	26	18.18%

Firstly, we notice that *oui* is not used with high frequency. Being engaged in free conversation, the interviewer and the interviewee are not in a simple turn's taking of question-answer. The interviewee takes the turn of discourse for most of the time, which would theoretically facilitate the emergence of the use of *oui* as DM. Nevertheless, our results show that, in fact, *oui* is used mostly as agreement marker and regulator. Only in 18.18% of the occurrences *oui* is used as a DM.

However, these results support our hypothesis that *oui* may function as a DM in the discourse of native speakers. In the empirical chapter, we will compare the native speakers' use with the use of *oui* by our Chinese-L1 speakers of French. For our analysis, we excluded the occurrence of *oui* used as agreement markers or regulators.

1.2. The case of *voilà*

Voilà can be used as agreement markers in numerous cases like *oui*. The following example illustrates well this function (Delahaie, 2009):

E- c'était l'hôtel (nom) hein c'est ça hein ?	E- it was the hotel (name) hein that's it hein?
C- <i>voilà</i> à Lesbos et il y a une semaine à Kyos (agence de voyage, « Lesbos », données personnelles)	C- there it is in Lesbos and there is a week in Kyos (agency of travel, « Lesbos », personal data)

In this exchange, the employee E already knew the answer to the question (she has the clients' dossier in front of her) and she only requires the confirmation to the person the most informed (the client C wants to add a person to his journey to Lesbos and to Kyos). On contrary, the real questions-requires of information does not allow an answer in *voilà*.

E- est-ce que vous avez un passeport ?	E- do you have a passport?
C- oui ?? <i>voilà</i> (exemple inventé)	C- yes ?? <i>there it is</i> (exemple invented)

According to Heddesheimer (1974), the above mentioned example is to be seen as a verbal act by which the interlocutor B marks expressively that he would have pronounced the same utterance as the interlocutor A. The request of confirmation refers to acts that Delahaie (2009) calls A-B, which means: A asserts something about a fact B, but A is not sure about it, B is more suitable to know what it is and B interprets the utterance of A as a request of

confirmation. Here, *voilà* functions as an intermediate structure between assertion and question. This structure is often preceded by a marker of research for approbation like *c'est ça* or *hein* and ends the asserted utterance, whose function often corresponds to that of *oui*.

In addition to this function, *voilà* may also function as a DM that appears at the end of the utterance. For example:

après j'ai fait l'année 2012 et 2013 à Clermont Ferrand pour améliorer la partie de français voilà c'est un peu près euh un peu près deux ans voilà oui bien sûr ce sont des français euh voilà euh ils sont-ils sont Auvergnés oui ils sont Auvergnés mais dans/dans différentes villes euh ma prof de compréhension orale c'était prof qui vient de Aurillac après le prof de cultu/euh civilisation elle est originale de clermontoise après euh ils sont tous Auvergnés voilà	afterwards I did the year of 2012 and 2013 in Clermont Ferrand in order to ameliorate the French part there it is it's a little about euh a little about two years there it is yes of course these are French euh there it is euh they are they are Auvergnés yes they are Auvergnés but in/in different cities euh my professor of oral comprehension that was a professor who comes from Aurillac afterwards the professor of cultu/euh civilization she is of clermontoise origin afterwards wuh they are all Auvergnés there it is
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(Wei-H-P-2014)

In this example, the DM *voilà* appears in the final position of every utterance to mark the end like a punctuation of the sentence. In fact, according to the list of Chanet (2004), *voilà* is the 13th most used DM by French native speakers. Its frequency in their discourse is about 1 occurrence every 2 minutes 52 seconds. In our study, *voilà* functioning as an agreement marker is excluded from the analysis.

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There are several reasons why we chose to compare these two DM for our analysis. On one hand, these two particles may both function as agreement markers and are considered as essential markers in native speakers' speech (Delahaie, 2009). On the other hand, these two particles may as well function as DM in native speakers' discourse, even though this function is not highly frequent for *oui*. Admittedly, *oui* and *voilà* are neither the only agreement markers that are functionally interchangeable; nor they are the only DM used at the end of the utterance. It is rather the fact that these two particles are interchangeable in both cases mentioned above that makes them more suitable for comparison than other particles that may have the same function in either case. This article focuses on the influence of the social environment on the use of the two DM. Hence, we will not analyze the effect of L1-transfer in detail; despite we do consider it a possibility.

2. Methodology

2.1. Corpus

The data in the corpus we used in this article were collected in France in 2014. The analysis presented here is based on the sub-corpus of 27 semi-directed conversations in French collected involving 27 speakers, which is about 15 hours of recording in total. It is important to point out

that the questions asked by the interviewer during the interview only served to elicit free speaking in a more informal register. For this purpose, questions like “Est-ce que vous avez l’expérience d’être volé?” (Do you have the experience of being stolen?), “Est-ce que vous vous souvenez encore de vos premiers jours en France?” (Do you still remember your first days in France?) were often asked.

We analyzed all occurrences of DM *oui* and *voilà* presented in our corpus. Consequently, we calculated the occurrences per thousand words for each speaker. In this way, even though the interviews vary in length, its impact on the statistical treatment is minimized. The number of words produced by the interviewer is excluded from this calculation. Taking into account the limited number of interviews realized at this point, the current study is to be seen as a starting point on the subject.

2.2. Speakers

The sample of 27 speakers (12 from Paris and 15 from Nice) consists of a quasi-equal number of men and women. Despite their current nationality, they are all of Chinese origin and lived in France at the time of the interview. They all speak French as L2. They were recruited through the personal network of the interviewer and the interviewees. They are aged from 20 to 36 years old and represent the younger generation. Therefore, we will not analyze the influence of age on their use of DM.

We are aware of the relative small size of the sample of speakers, which is not uncommon in sociolinguistic studies, considering this is only the beginning stage of a longitudinal study of this community. Thus, we do need to underline that with such a sample, it is not possible to reach more statistically conclusive results from the sociolinguistic point of view. Hence, the results are descriptive and should be still taken as a qualitative apprehension of figures, instead of statistics per se. However, the statistical results related to occurrences analysis are consistent with a sufficient sample size.

2.3. Extralinguistic Factors

Regarding extralinguistic factors, firstly, we hope to determine if the gender of the speakers has an influence on their use of *oui* and *voilà*. Do men and women privilege the usage of one of the two DM?

Secondly, we divided our speakers into four groups based on their length of stay in France: less than 1 year, 1-3 years, 4-6 years, more than 6 years. Numerous studies showed that the length of stay in a foreign country has a positive influence on second language acquisition. The speakers, who are more exposed to the language, would master the authentic and informal usage better. Thus, the length of stay is to be regarded as a factor with a potentially crucial impact on DM usage by our speakers. Concerning their social network, we divided the participants into two groups: those with a restrained social network, that’s to say, who only go out with Chinese friends, and those who have a mixed social network, that’s to say, who go out with French friends as well as Chinese friends. As laid out earlier, DM is not taught explicitly in class. Extracurricular contact with native speakers hence appears to be an important and essential way for the acquisition of DM. Consequently, we expect to observe differences in DM use with respect to the social network of the participants.

2.4. Quantitative Analysis

We used T-test (Snedecor & Cochran, 1989) and one-way ANOVA (Field, 2007) to determine the significance of the factors. The T-test is used to see if two groups differ significantly; and the one-way ANOVA allows the comparison of the behavior of three or four groups. For our analysis, we consider the p-value in the result. If the p-value is above 0.05, the result is not statistically significant and the hypothesis is null. But if the p-value is below 0.05, then, the result is statistically significant and the null hypothesis is to be rejected. Since there is no correlation between these two DM, we test them separately. We will have a p-value for each DM and for each group.

For ANOVA, the factor is proven statistically significant if the obtained p-value is below 0.05. We then conducted a post-hoc test, in which we only compare two groups at a time in order to see what the significant differences are.

3. Results

3.1. General Tendency

The case of oui

Table 2 : Distribution of oui used by Chinese speakers

Occurrence of <i>oui</i>		Agreement markers and regulators		Discourse markers	
Total	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
1554	100%	962	61.9%	592	38.1%

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As shown in Table 1, which is about the DOM use of native speakers, only 26 DM *oui* are produced in over 4 hours conversation, i.e. 6.5 occurrences per hour. According to Table 2, our Chinese-L1 speakers of French produced 592 DM *oui* in 15 hours, i.e. 39.47 occurrences per hour. The frequency of DM *oui* is much more important in the speech of our French L2 speakers than in that of native speakers. The question of the L1-transfer may be raised. In her article on the most used DM in Mandarin, Liu (2009), briefly analyzed on DM *dui*, equivalent of *oui* in Chinese. She indicated that even though there are not too many works regarding the analysis of Chinese DM, *dui* functions as DM either at the initial or at the final position of an utterance. Its omission does not affect the integrity of utterance. In this case, the DM *dui* offers a textual function as pause filler or delay device. In addition, in her statistics regarding the frequency of Chinese DM in mandarin, the DM *dui* is the 10th most used by Chinese. This would then explain why our Chinese speakers privilege the DM *oui*, while the French native speakers do not use it this much often as DM, even though this usage does exist in French. This confirms our hypothesis on the possibility of L1-transfer.

The case of voilà

According to the list of Chanet (2004) regarding the DM use of French native speakers, the frequency of *voilà* is 1 occurrence every 2 minutes 52 seconds. The DM *voilà* is hence much more frequent than *oui* in the speech of native speakers. For Chinese speakers, 234 occurrences are produced over 15 hours interview, i.e. 1 occurrence every 3 minutes 51 seconds. This

frequency is slightly inferior to that of native speakers. One possible reason of this could be the difference in speech speed between the native speakers and the non-native speakers. Normally, native speakers talk faster than the nonnative speakers (at least this is the case for our participants). This is why counting the frequency per minute is always problematic at statistical level, since the speech speed of the speaker could influence the result, especially when we compare the performance of non-native speakers with native speakers. This leads us, to rather consider the frequency per thousand words for our analysis.

3.2. Extralinguistic Factors

Gender

13 male speakers and 14 female speakers participated in this research. This quasi-equal distribution between the two genders allows us to reach more statistically conclusive results.

Table 3 : Distribution of DM between the two gender groups

	oui (per thousand words)	voilà (per thousand words)
Female	10.31	0.52
Male	6.12	5.38
P	0.1709	0.0096

Nota Bene: the sample size is under 30 observations, thus these figures should be taken as qualitative and indicative.

Table 3 shows that there is a net statistical difference between the two gender groups for the DM *voilà*. It seems that men's usage of this DM is considerably different from women's usage. However, it should also be noted that the DM *oui* is used more frequently by women, even though the difference between the two groups does not reach a statistically significant level.

We could notice that, for men, the usage of *oui* and *voilà* does not differ much with respect to their frequency. These two DM are used substantially similarly. However, for women, the difference between the usages of these two DM is significant. Women seem to privilege the usage of DM *oui* rather than *voilà*.

If the frequency of DM *oui*, higher among Chinese speakers, is interpreted as a result of L1-transfer, can we consider that the difference of the use of these two DM between men and women corresponds to a difference of linguistic competence? It seems that the answer is not as simple as this. Based on the calculation, it can be found that the occurrences of these two DM in total vary little between the two groups: 10.83 per thousand words for women and 11.5 per thousand words for men. The difference between these two groups consists notably in the distribution of the two DM. The more one uses one DM, the less the other DM is used. As previously stated, the DM *voilà* is much more employed among French-L1 speakers. In this case, the men's usage is closer to that of native speakers with an important use of *voilà* and a decreased use of *oui*. If the linguistic level is the only factor that allows explaining this difference in linguistic behavior, we would expect a usage closer to that by native speakers, when the linguistic level is higher. That is, a higher linguistic level correlates with a less frequent use of DM *oui* and more frequent use of DM *voilà*. Following this logic, the men in our study do have a higher linguistic level than the women in question.

This finding leads us to another question: why do men in this study seem to have a more advanced language level than women, since very often we think women are better than men at language study? However, we should always keep in mind that when we talk about language learning, we usually refer to the acquisition of formal forms of language in formal settings, which stresses the mastery of what we call the “standard language form” that should conform to the norms prescribed in grammar books and dictionary. And if we look into the dictionary we would notice that the usage of DM never appears. As put earlier in this article, DM are not taught explicitly in classroom setting, therefore the acquisition of DM may have nothing to do with language learning ability in L2 classrooms, but social environmental influence. In other words, what we see here does not indicate that men have a more advanced language level than women, but a very different extracurricular activity type, otherwise this would be an overgeneralization of the situation. The results can only be interpreted as that the male speakers in our study do seem to have more contact with French native speakers. We would then ask the question: is this difference due to the difference of their length of stay in France or is the difference caused by their social network?

Length of Stay

Table 4 : Distribution of DM among the four groups of length of stay

Length of stay	<i>oui</i> (per thousand words)	<i>voilà</i> (per thousand words)
<1 year	18.84	0
1-3 years	6.53	3.59
4-6 years	9.75	1.17
>6 years	6.64	4.82
p	0.18	0.36

Nota Bene: the sample size is under 30 observations, thus these figures should be taken as qualitative and indicative.

Table 4 indicates that the length of stay is neither statistically significant for *oui* nor for *voilà*. Nevertheless, it is worth underlining that the new-arrivals, living in France for less than 1 year, show a heavy use of the DM *oui*, while the DM *voilà* is totally absent from their discourse. This tends to correspond to our hypothesis that the excessive usage of DM *oui* is the result of L1-transfer, and the acquisition of DM *voilà* necessitates a longer stay in the target country.

Apart from this, the development of the usage of these two DM does not necessarily follow a linear itinerary of development, since the linguistic behavior regarding these two DM is closer to that of the new-arrivals in the group staying in France between 4 and 6 years. However, this could be the case in foreign language acquisition. Their linguistic competence in second language develops until a certain point before their linguistic performance decreases. In consequence, the non-native speakers at this stage are easily seen as beginners. This is why the length of stay does not impact the linguistic level of a speaker linearly. In addition, it is always very difficult to determine which phase of acquisition the speaker is at. Also, the use of these two DM does not correlate with the length of stay in France. The length of stay may not be a good indicator of a good mastery of DM. The use of these two forms must hence be related more directly to other extralinguistic factors such as the social network.

Social Network

For this grouping, we have 17 speakers who have a restrained social network and 10 speakers who have a mixed social network.

Table 5 : Distribution of DM between two groups of social network

type of network	oui (per thousand words)	voilà (per thousand words)
restrained	11.47	1.99
mixed	3.00	4.37
P	0.00099	0.1976

Nota Bene: the sample size is under 30 observations, thus these figures should be taken as qualitative and indicative.

Table 5 shows that the type of social network is statistically significant to the DM *oui*, but not to the DM *voilà*. The interaction with native speakers leads to a less important use of the DM *oui*, while it facilitates the use of the DM *voilà*. The findings indicate at the same time that the rate of occurrences for each DM is substantially the same for the speakers with a mixed social network, but there is a wide gap between the uses of the two DMs regarding speakers with a restrained social network. These results tend to show that a mixed social network allows a better mastery of the alternation between the available forms for the same function.

In addition, we also find that the linguistic behavior regarding the use of these two DM between the two groups relates to different DM use of men and women: one group relies heavily on one of the two DM, while the other uses them in a quite balanced way. At first glance, these findings might suggest that women have a more restrained social network than men.

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In fact, in the group of restrained social network, we do have more women than men. In other words, women may prefer to stay inside their community, while men are more open to the exterior world. We wanted to understand why women and men have different social network. An interviewee gave us a quite astonishing answer to this subject:

...mais je n'ai pas l'ami français j'ai déjà dit donc s'il y a le chance je veux on me inviter je vais aller mais en fait je pense comment dire i/i/il y a un/un XXX c'est dans mon école il y a des d'in/d'in/d'information pour les Chinois pour trouver un f/un f/français pour bava/bavarder comme ça mais j'ai essaie de envoyer mes/mes XXX un/un français mais en fait je trouver que il vient que coucher avec moi c'est vrai c'est comme ça parce que on a on a on a dit que c'est si vous voulez habituer habilement ici tu dois coucher avec un	...mais je n'ai pas l'ami français j'ai déjà dit donc s'il y a le chance je veux on me inviter je vais aller mais en fait je pense comment dire i/i/il y a un/un XXX c'est dans mon école il y a des d'in/d'in/d'information pour les Chinois pour trouver un f/un f/français pour bava/bavarder comme ça mais j'ai essaie de envoyer mes/mes XXX un/un français mais en fait je trouver que il vient que coucher avec moi c'est vrai c'est comme ça parce que on a on a dit que c'est si vous voulez habituer habilement ici tu dois coucher avec un français oui
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français oui
(Yu-F-P-2014)

We hypothesize that women may feel less safe like this interviewee and thus feel the need to protect themselves by staying with their compatriots. Very often, women tell us similar stories in which they talk about their difficulties in integrating in the French social life or in making new friends outside the community. On contrary, men complain less about this problem. Several male speakers even mentioned that from the very beginning of their arrival they tried to avoid Chinese. These two completely different attitudes towards their own community have a possible influence on their linguistic attitude, which subsequently influences their acquisition of the target language.

In order to answer this question, we scrutinized the social structure within the Chinese community in France into depth. For example, even within a restrained social network, it is always possible to have well-integrated individuals and isolated individuals. In the first case, we would find at least one central person in the network whose suggestions count for the other members of the community. In this case, the linguistic attitude of this leader would be crucial. In the second case, the analysis of the leader of the community would be less relevant for the linguistic behavior of those isolated persons, since for the latter, the suggestion of the leader does not count. At first glance, it seems that women are quite closely connected with each other within the community while this is not necessarily the case for men. As future work, an analysis of social network, both qualitative and quantitative, is proposed for providing much more accurate answers to this question.

Conclusion

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Adopting a sociolinguistic approach, initiated by Labov (1962, 1964) in the 60s, we presented the first results of our project to document the French spoken by Chinese-L1 speakers in France.

The results of this analysis show that, firstly, although the DM *oui* and *voilà* are functionally interchangeable, *voilà* is the preferred form by French native speakers, while *oui* Chinese-L1 speakers of French. Such a difference could be explained by a L1-transfer, since *oui* is also the preferred form in Mandarin Chinese.

Secondly, the alternation between the two DM for non-native speakers is restricted by several non-linguistic factors: gender and social network. Regarding language proficiency, it seems that women are less advanced than men regarding the acquisition of social variables, even if they spent the same amount of time in France than men. This difference may be explained by the fact that women generally have a more restrained social network than men. Since DM acquisition requires interaction with native speakers, a restrained social network does not facilitate a good control. This explains why women use much more *oui* than men.

Thirdly, the length of stay is not necessarily a relevant indicator with respect to the good control of these variables, because of the nonlinear nature of the development of language learning.

Finally, by studying the use of these two French DMs by the Chinese community in France, we aim to better understand how the social environment influences the use of the target language and what differentiates them from speakers of other language communities. In this context,

other variables would also be useful to study. The Chinese community, like other linguistic communities of immigrants, has its own characteristics, not only linguistically, but also socially. These features are part of a particular cultural context. Very often this context determines the social structure of the community. Moreover, this structure influences the perception and language attitude towards the target language. Thus, integration into the host community becomes a permanent issue for non-native speakers abroad. To confirm our hypothesis, we will spend more time with the community, firstly, in order to limit the observer's paradox (Labov, 1973: 113) and, secondly, to be able to determine whether the data collected during our interviews correspond to the actual practices of our speakers. We may also consider the effect of the passage of time on the use of linguistic variables. In this regard, a longitudinal study of the use of French by speakers of Chinese origin in France would allow further reflection on these issues.

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