

### More on *au final*: a postscript and a moral

In an article (« From *le finale* to *au final* » to appear in JFLS 5.2 (Autumn 1995), I say of the new inter-assertional adverb *au final* « No dictionary appears to have recorded [...] the existence of the structure. » In recent days, it has been graciously drawn to my attention by a first-year student, Ms Francesca Giorlando, that this is an error: the expression is recorded in the *Nouveau Petit Robert* of 1993.

I missed it in the *Nouveau Petit Robert* because, in accordance with my hypothesis that the connector *au final* derives from the noun *le final(e)*, I had acquired the habit of checking in dictionaries only the entries for the latter word. And the *Nouveau Petit Robert* gives the connector not in its entry for the noun *le final(e)*, but under *final*, adjective. How the dictionary reasons a derivation from *final*, adjective, to *au final* is not clear. It may be that it sees *au final* as following the model of an expression such as *au juste*, which may derive from *juste*, adjective, rather than from *le juste*, noun. My own initial hypothesis, on discovering *au final* in, I think, *L'événement du jeudi*, some time in the early 1990s, was that it must be, like *au fond* and *au total*, derived from a noun. This deduction led me first to *le finale* and eventually to my attempt to trace a plausible history from the Italian common noun *il finale* to the contemporary inter-assertional connector *au final*. Though peeved by my carelessness in not noticing the entry in the *Nouveau Petit Robert*, and though it disproves my sentence, I do not think it invalidates my hypothesis.

One reason why *Robert* fails to see a relation between the noun *le final(e)* and *au final* is, I suspect, that the dictionary goes on declining to admit the noun spelled as *le final*; and this, despite the fact that the latter, once a minority variant at a time when the noun was a technical term restricted to the usage of the musically educated, most of whom probably knew its Italian origin and spelled the word accordingly, appears to have become the dominant spelling in current usage.

The example quoted in the *Nouveau Petit Robert* comes from a number of the newspaper *Libération* printed in 1989. My own earliest example, from Serge July's book *Les années Mitterrand* (Grasset & Fasquelle, 1986: 27), could very likely be dated earlier than 1986. And it too may well have first appeared in *Libération*, since Serge July was then the editor of that newspaper and much of *Les années Mitterrand* appears to derive from newspaper articles which he wrote during the years 1981-1985.

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**La prochaine livraison des *Cahiers* AFLS contiendra**

*Sur le pif!*

— **bien entendu, mais aussi,**

Avis de recherche:

Fabienne Kovacic (boursière AFLS 1994-95)

« Research report on verbal clichés and stereotypes in French political speeches »<sup>1</sup>

Deux articles de fond:

Marie-Madeleine Kenning & Marie-Noëlle Guillot,

« Adopting a process-oriented approach to vocabulary expansion »

Ian Baillie,

« Business French — what is it and how can we teach it ? »

et, je l'espère, vos nouvelles de la vie de notre association, rapports d'ateliers, des compte-rendus de livres, (peut-être même, qui sait?) une vue personnelle du congrès de Paris...

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<sup>1</sup> J'ai reçu le texte, mais il est bien trop long pour que je le fasse passer dans ce numéro déjà (exceptionnellement) étendu. NDLR.