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# TENSE, ASPECT AND DISCOURSE STRUCTURE

*Edited by Jakob Egetenmeyer,  
Sarah Dessì Schmid and Martin G. Becker*

BEIHEFTE ZUR ZEITSCHRIFT FÜR  
ROMANISCHE PHILOGIE EDITION NIEMEYER

**Tense, aspect and discourse structure**

# **Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie**



Herausgegeben von  
Éva Buchi, Claudia Polzin-Haumann, Elton Prifti  
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## **Band 492**

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This collective volume is a joint effort. The three editors benefitted from several funding sources, which are gratefully acknowledged. Part of the research was funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) as part of the Collaborative Research Centres CRC 1252 Prominence in language (Project-ID 281511265) and CRC 833 The construction of meaning (Project-ID 75650358).

ISBN 978-3-11-142458-3

e-ISBN (PDF) 978-3-11-145389-7

e-ISBN (EPUB) 978-3-11-145393-4

ISSN 0084-5396

DOI <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111453897>



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**Library of Congress Control Number: 2024937992**

**Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek**

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the internet at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

© 2024 the author(s), editing © 2024 Jakob Egetenmeyer, Sarah Dessì Schmid and Martin G. Becker, published by Walter de Gruyter GmbH, Berlin/Boston  
The book is published open access at [www.degruyter.com](http://www.degruyter.com).

Typesetting: Integra Software Services Pvt. Ltd.

Printing and binding: CPI books GmbH, Leck

[www.degruyter.com](http://www.degruyter.com)

## Acknowledgements

The collective volume *Tense, aspect and discourse structure* builds on our work presented at the linguistics workshop *Tense, aspect and discourse structure* at the 36<sup>th</sup> *Romanistentag – Rebuilding, reconstruction, renewal* (Kassel, 2019).

It brings together selected papers – several of which are based on talks given during the workshop, and others specifically solicited – to provide a general overview of the latest research in the field of tense, aspect and discourse structure.

We thank Tessa Say for language revision. We thank Viktoria Henn for her assistance with formatting and compiling the contributions and also Anja Hankeln and Lena Wahl for additional help.



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# Tense, aspect and discourse structure. An introduction

## 1 General notions

Temporal structuring has been a major focus of linguistic description in Romance languages since the very first grammars of these languages were written (cf. de Nebrija 1492; Bembo 1525; Estienne, R. 1557; Castelvetro 1563; Estienne, H. 1582; Correas 1625; Arnauld/Lancelot 1660; Beauzée 1767; Destutt de Tracy 1803). These grammars established the inventory of tense labels (and/or forms), thereby determining the number of parameters required to describe tense relations and disentangling their relevant features, especially those of past tenses (cf. Blumenthal 1986; Auroux 1991). Modern accounts are underpinned by important studies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and not only those dealing with the Romance languages (cf., among many others, the influential works of Reichenbach 1947; Weinrich 1964; Comrie 1976; 1985; Coseriu 1976; Klein 1994).

Many researchers have drawn attention to the fundamental contribution that tense and aspect make to the diversified structuring of texts: the interaction between them is especially crucial in narrative texts, where tense and aspect determine the temporal relief, that is, foreground and background structures (Weinrich 1964; 1982), the temporal development (Kamp/Rohrer 1983) and the hierarchical ordering of events (Becker/Egetenmeyer 2018). However, the selected tense-aspect also pre-determines other “discourse modes” (Smith 2003) and has been correlated with the position within a text (Waugh 1990). In addition, it co-varies with all sorts of variational categories, including the medium, the dialect, the genre (Caenepeel 1995 for the latter category) and discourse traditions (Koch 1997). For instance, we find pre-hodiernal uses of the Spanish compound past in different spoken varieties in Spain (Azpiazu 2019), a variety of readings of the Spanish imperfective past in newspaper texts (Böhm 2017) and a special use of the French imperfective past in football language (Egetenmeyer 2021). The only partially corresponding functions of forms with a similar diachronic origin across languages have also been analysed in terms of their discourse structural properties, for instance, the pluperfect across Romance languages (Becker 2020). Importantly, the description of tense and aspect

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is not limited to these overall correlations. In order to fully grasp the phenomena of temporality and aspectuality, the interactions between verbal meaning and tense-aspect have to be accounted for (cf., e.g., Dessi Schmid 2014; 2019; Haßler 2016). In addition, the role of adverbial expressions (cf., e.g., Vet 1980; Klein 1994; Haspelmath 1997), the rhetorical relations among clauses (cf., e.g., Lascarides/Asher 1993; Kehler 2000; Asher/Lascarides 2003; Vieu 2011) and the interactions with deictic expressions (cf., e.g., Tacke 2021) need to be considered. Forms interact within and beyond the sentence, as sequence-of-tense phenomena show (cf., e.g., Kowal 2005). Tense-aspect forms such as the imperfective past may realise different modal senses with an overtone of tense (Becker 2014). Finally, certain specifics have been discussed in the light of stylistics (cf., e.g., Blumenthal 1986; Bres 2020; Corre/Do-Hurinville/Dao 2020).

When it comes to analysing temporal discourse structure, Weinrich's (1964) insights have had a tremendous impact. His linguistic text grammar was an important contribution and is an essential reference for describing and analysing the functioning of verbal categories in texts. Weinrich (1964; 1982) draws attention to the possibility of relief formation, which enhances the basic principle of linear-temporal structuring by introducing one of foreground and background. Importantly, tense forms have the potential to indicate the discourse level to which an eventuality pertains. The descriptions given by Reichenbach ([1947] 1956), Klein (1994) and others represent a formalisation whereby several time points can be related to each other. In further developments of their accounts (Bertinetto 1982; Kamp/Rohrer 1983; Partee 1984; Comrie 1985 and others) a more thorough distinction is made between deictic and anaphoric uses of tenses and larger discourse units are captured. These advances underpin the development of a multi-layered system involving relations of sequentiality and of foreground and background, but also perspective and shifted origo (cf. also Becker/Egetenmeyer 2018). However, research focussed on developing and implementing complex accounts that simultaneously consider temporal relationships, different levels of grounding and narrative features, such as shifts between narrator and protagonist (cf. also below), is still in its infancy.

An important secondary function of tense-aspect forms in texts is to signal shifts with respect to the entity to which a proposition is attributed (cf. Sthioul 2000). In narrative texts this is evident in phenomena such as free indirect discourse and other means of perspective shifting. For instance, free indirect discourse has been shown to present features of imperfectivity (Banfield 1982, 104; Becker 2021). The use of certain tense-aspect forms in context has also been shown to contribute to creating expectations, where cancelling them may produce particular effects. For instance, perspective shifts have been argued to be indicated by tense-aspect forms which do not meet the contextually given expectations (Sthioul 2000; Becker/Egetenmeyer/Hinterwimmer 2021).

In Romance linguistics, except for a few exemplary works (e.g. Bertinetto 1986), the Romance verbal system has mainly been perceived as temporally based, with the result that the exploration of aspect has been given little attention.<sup>1</sup> However, the past thirty years have seen an increasing amount of research, especially in typology, on tense, aspect and mood, the so-called TAM categories, grammatical categories that are often realised by morphological syncretism in many of the world's languages.<sup>2</sup> Of particular interest is the interaction between tense and aspect, as opposed to their complementarity, in the temporal organisation of texts.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, there have been important developments in research on *Aktionsart*. This lexically-expressed category is often understood as being related in terms of content to (grammatical) aspect. It was given a new focus by studies conducted from an onomasiological perspective. The research literature critically discusses the semantic parallels of lexical aspect (*Aktionsart*) and grammatical aspect, and an issue of interest is whether *Aktionsart* should be subsumed under a general content category of aspectuality (cf., e.g., Squartini 1990; Sasse 2002; Dessi Schmid 2014; 2019). Important evidence for this conception comes from a wide array of languages:<sup>4</sup> despite formal (i.e. grammatical and/or lexical) and level-specific (morphological vs. syntactic) differences in the way the categories are expressed, (temporal-)aspectual information is similarly present across languages pertaining to different language families.

The discussion of aspectuality and its related functional categories, especially temporality and modality, has raised further topics of interest and new lines of investigation – notably in the analysis of lesser known and relatively unexplored categories such as evidentiality, mirativity, etc. Portner (2018, 247), for example, succinctly defines evidentiality as “the grammatical encoding of information source”, pointing out that this category is frequently related to epistemic modality. He discusses more recent approaches to evidentiality (especially Faller 2002 and Murray 2014; 2016) and states that according to these approaches evidentiality can be conceived of “as a variety of mood” (Portner 2018, 250). In Romance linguistics, the problem of whether and how Romance languages express evidentiality is raised – indeed its

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1 Cf., among others, Weinrich's (1964) study (which is valid not only for the Romance languages) and the particularly radical interpretation of the Spanish verbal system by Rojo/Veiga (1999), who deny the existence of (grammatical) aspect.

2 The research overview in this paragraph is due to Dessi Schmid (2019, 1–3).

3 E.g., Bertinetto (1997) speaks of “temporal-aspectual” systems in this regard.

4 Dessi Schmid (2019, 2, footnote 7) cites the following, among others: Verkuyl (1972; 1993); Comrie (1976; 1985); Hopper (1979; 1982); Bache (1982; 1995); Bybee (1985); Dahl (1985; 2000); Langacker (1987; 1990; 1991); Bybee/Dahl (1989); Krifka (1989a; 1989b); Binnick (1991; 2012); Jackendoff (1991a; 1991b); Smith (1991); Kamp/Reyle (1993); Bybee/Perkins/Pagliuca (1994); Thieroff/Ballweg (1994–1995); Vet/Vetters (1994); Bertinetto (1996); De Miguel (1999); Croft (2012); Dessi Schmid (2014).

status as a proper category is still disputed. While it is generally agreed that there is no unique marker for evidentiality in Romance, different categories may contribute to a determinate evidential reading. At their core we find tense-aspect forms.

The present volume falls within this movement, addressing as it does a set of particularly urgent phenomena using state-of-the-art descriptions related to the semantic and pragmatic interface. The original contributions collected here exemplify, in particular, how the emergence of new theoretical approaches and methods from within and outside the field as well as modern techniques provide valuable tools for further analysis and greater understanding of the categories.

## 2 The contributions

This volume brings together various approaches to central and pressing issues in the domain of tense and aspect, including their interaction with other categories and their functioning in discourse. The different views represented by these twelve contributions cluster around three main thematic cores: (1) the context-sensitivity of tense and aspect and their relationships with neighbouring categories; (2) their interaction with adverbs; (3) their functioning in discourse. The phenomena accounted for range from the discourse level, the properties of linguistic varieties and the traits of second language acquisition to core linguistic questions on the onomasiological properties of the forms and delimitations of categories.

All together, the contributions advance our understanding of a fascinating array of issues with complex interactions. The diversity with which the core questions are envisioned is matched by a set of shared interests. Residing in an already traditional line of research but developing various matters further, a first major component consists in onomasiological discussions of the categories at hand. Secondly, in accordance with the theme of this collection, the functioning of tense in discourse is viewed from a broad perspective. Thirdly, a recurring focus across the contributions is the imperfective past tense-aspect form and its different uses and meaning potentials, which are investigated from a wide range of standpoints. The imperfective may occur as a marker of evidentiality or of different pragmatic functions, or it may, for instance, indicate a particular perspective in narrative texts. Two further factors that distinguish the various contributions – demonstrating the collection's range of views – are the various theoretical approaches and methodologies they adopt: several contributions are deeply rooted in a formal conception of linguistics, others take a functional, data-driven perspective. The multiplicity of focal points and methods means that the findings can potentially be applied outside the field of Romance linguistics.

The volume is structured according to the three main thematic cores mentioned above. In the following sections, we present an overview of the papers included under each theme and outline their contribution to the subject matter as a whole.

## 2.1 Context-sensitivity and neighbouring categories

The contributions of Patrick Caudal (CNRS & Université de Paris), Sarah Dessi Schmid and Lydia Momma (University of Tübingen), Victoria Escandell-Vidal (Universidad Complutense de Madrid) and Susana Azpiazu (Universidad de Salamanca) deal in particular with the relationship between the (sub-)categories of tense and aspect and their neighbouring categories, and with the context-sensitivity of these categories.

In his paper *On so-called “tense uses” in French as context-sensitive constructions*, **Patrick Caudal** examines two different uses of the French *imparfait*, namely, the attenuative and the narrative. He points to the role of conventionalisation in these uses, which nonetheless leaves much room for semantic-pragmatic enrichment. The pattern of conventionalisation of attenuative cases concerns their compatibility, which is restricted to certain verbs. Narrative uses, on the other hand, always appear in one of four syntactic contexts, and these contexts contribute to the temporal determination, which allows the expression of sequentiality. He concludes that both uses may be described as belonging to discursive constructions, whose realisation is dependent upon context. A further important contribution of the paper is his development of lexical semantic entries for three attenuative *imparfait* constructions (with desiderative, movement and communication verbs). A distinction is made in the entries between an at-issue component and a non-at-issue component. The temporal-aspectual component is part of the non-at-issue component and licenses the use of the tense-aspect form. In addition, he accounts for the interactional component of attenuative *imparfait* constructions and distinguishes different degrees of commitment on the part of the speaker.

**Sarah Dessi Schmid** and **Lydia Momma**'s paper *Progressivity between lexicon, grammar and context* focusses on an analysis of the Italian construction *stare + gerund* as a grammatical means of expressing progressivity (traditionally considered a subcategory of imperfectivity) and its interaction with lexical aspect. Using data elicited in several large acceptability studies, the authors investigate the different functions of the construction, its semantic and morpho-syntactic restrictions, and its temporal-aspectual status in the verbal system of contemporary Italian. In addition, they discuss the reasons for speakers' preferences in their use of it in discourse. In contrast to commonly held interpretations, different *states* and *state types* are shown to be compatible to varying degrees with Italian *stare + gerund*,

attesting to the weakening of one of the strictest semantic restrictions of this construction. This result is surprising. In order to better understand the phenomenon, the authors show that the relaxation of semantic restrictions can be correlated with an increase in the degree of grammaticality of a construction (and therefore with its progress in the process of grammaticalisation). The article empirically verifies a set of hypotheses formulated within theories of the grammaticalisation of verbal periphrases.

**Victoria Escandell-Vidal's** article *Understanding the Spanish "imperfecto". Temporal dimensions and evidential effects* is concerned with the Spanish *imperfecto*. She explains why this particular tense-aspect form admits of so many different readings. They are distinguished with respect to their discourse-temporal reference and their world reference, and also in terms of evidentiality. She presents a (neo-Reichenbachian) geometrical account. More specifically, she creates a new three-dimensional model, which captures the different readings and also sub-classifies them. At the core of her account lies the property of accessibility, which from the outset is underspecified in the meaning of the tense-aspect form, but needs to be satisfied in one of the following three dimensions: time, world or speaker. In temporal readings, both the eventuality situation and the reference situation hold on the same plane (i.e., one speaker, same world reference); only in this case does a temporal inclusion relation need to be realised. In modal readings, the accessibility relationship holds between two parallel planes (one speaker, but two worlds). So, for instance, in hypothetical, but also in polite uses, the *imperfecto* expresses that a possible world has been accessed in the past. And finally, in evidential readings, two planes intersect (two speakers), leaving only a line of coincidence between the reference situation and the eventuality situation. As the eventuality situation only includes a sub-part of the reference situation, this reading may be used to express sequentiality. She thus refines the contribution of the temporal and aspectual components to the meaning of different readings. In addition, she solves the puzzle of why the *imperfecto* may express different temporal relationships. Her model also yields an interpretation in terms of illocutionary commitment for each of the three categories.

In her paper *Evidentiality, epistemic modality and temporality in the Spanish verbal system*, **Susana Azpiazu** discusses the potential of the Spanish verbal system to express evidentiality, the phenomenon whereby speakers indicate the evidence they have for a proposition and for which Spanish has no dedicated verb form. She discusses a wide range of forms for which evidential uses have been proposed and shows that a complicating factor is the conceptual proximity of evidentiality to categories such as epistemic modality. Drawing on an extensive research literature and by means of fine-grained categorisations she delimits the expression of evidentiality, epistemic modality and other related concepts. She argues that in order to

determine evidentiality in Spanish the origin of the propositional content is decisive (self vs. other) and not whether the evidence is direct or indirect. She presents evidence against the Spanish imperfect as realising evidentiality and, in contrast, argues that the few clear cases of evidentiality are marked for the conditional. She also addresses contact phenomena between Spanish and Quechua, which possesses an evidentiality marker. A discussion of relevant parts of the Spanish verbal system closes this paper and Section 2.1.

## 2.2 Aspect and *Aktionsart* and the interaction with adverbs

The functioning of *Aktionsart* and adverbs as marking aspectual relations and their interaction with aspect are the topics dealt with by Johanna Mattissen (University of Cologne), Gerda Haßler & Verónica Böhm (University of Potsdam), and Tim Diaubalick (University of Wuppertal), Lukas Eibensteiner (Friedrich Schiller University Jena) and Rafael Salaberry (Rice University).

In *Lexical actional classes in Romance languages in interaction with aspectually relevant material in the clause* **Johanna Mattissen** discusses actional classes in two Romance and other non-Romance languages. She focusses, in particular, on the interaction between the actional properties and different co-occurring components of the clause, and discusses objects, pronouns, path and goal PPs, as well as auxiliaries and, of particular relevance here, tense-aspect forms. She integrates the phenomena found in Spanish and French into a wider perspective and compares them with phenomena found in languages of other language families. Much of her Romance data come from her own field work. Central to her paper is her presentation of the actional classes introduced by Breu (1994 and subsequent publications), which she refines and fleshes out further. Breu's system comprises six main classes, ranging from totally stative verbs and two classes of two-phase verbs to different kinds of terminative verb classes. Within the two main telic groups Mattissen identifies six sub-groups according to the quality of the pre-phase and, for instance, the graduality of the terminative component. Furthermore, she analyses a subset with respect to their interaction with other components in order to determine their role on the clause level. Finally, she points out similarities among the languages discussed with respect to the detailed differentiation of actional classes, but also shows the very different constraints operating on the way they combine with other elements in the sentence, including tense-aspect.

**Gerda Haßler** and **Verónica Böhm**'s paper *Adverbs as aspect markers and their interaction with verb forms* deals with the role of adverbials in the expression of aspect. They analyse the compatibility of adverbs expressing various degrees of temporal extension and speed with different verb forms. Their aim is to estab-



lish the role adverbial phrases play in determining aspectuality in interaction with tense-aspect forms. Their hypothesis is that, in contrast to typical aspect languages, tense-aspect forms in the Romance languages are not sufficient on their own to express all the correlations, which instead are necessarily co-determined by these forms along with properties of *Aktionsart* and, crucially, adverbial expressions. The means by which the authors demonstrate this is through co-occurrence patterns. They analyse co-occurrences of: verbs bearing an imperfective aspect marker with adverbial expressions; and verbs bearing a perfective aspect marker with an adverb. They show that the imperfective co-occurs most frequently with adverbs expressing a large temporal extension or a low speed, while perfective verbs combine more easily with, for instance, adverbs expressing suddenness. The authors present a considerable amount of corpus data from several Romance languages and also distinguish the properties in these languages from phenomena in non-Romance languages. Importantly, when an expected correlation is not met, other relevant properties, for instance specific types of syntactic subordination, come into play. Their analysis shows the greater flexibility of perfective verbs allowing them to occur with non-typical adverbs, which is due to their greater degree of aspectual marking compared with imperfective verbs. In contrast, imperfective verbs interact more easily with adverbial expressions.

In their paper *The value of acquisitional data for describing cross-linguistic differences in the expression of aspectuality: A focus on learning strategies of German-speaking learners of Spanish* **Tim Diaubalick**, **Lukas Eibensteiner** and **Rafael Salaberry** draw on two second language acquisition studies on German-speaking learners of Spanish as a foreign language. They show that German-speaking learners do not use tense-aspect markers in order to express the aspectual nuances required by the context, but instead select them in accordance with temporal adverbs that function as signal words. An important conclusion drawn by the authors is that second language learners should learn the concept of aspect in order to overcome their native lexically-driven learning strategy. The results of the study also give credence to the aspectual hypothesis over other accounts of the Spanish simple past system (the contrast between the *imperfecto* and the *indefinido*). In light of these findings, the authors also discuss the relevance of the Concept-Based Hypothesis and its counterpart, the Competing Systems Hypothesis.

### 2.3 The functioning of tense and aspect in discourse

The contributions of Giuliano Armenante (University of Tübingen), Pier Marco Bertinetto (Scuola Normale Superiore, Pisa), Jakob Egetenmeyer (University of

Cologne), Elina Eliasson (TU Dresden), and Felix Tacke (University of Marburg) focus on the functioning of tense and aspect in discourse.

In his paper *Sequence of tense as aspectual harmony* **Giuliano Armenante** develops a novel Sequence of Tense Theory that emphasises the key role played by aspect in deriving the attested temporal interpretations for past-under-past attitude reports. The author's aim is to account for the availability of both a simultaneous (SIM) and a backward-shifted (BACK) interpretation for past-under-past sentences with an embedded imperfect in Romance. In particular, he shows how the strong anaphoric properties of the Romance imperfect combined with its unboundedness and its interplay with properties of lexical aspect produce the systematic ambiguity at the level of Logical Form (LF) between a bound and a free variable interpretation, thereby explaining the existence of both readings in past as well as in future attitude contexts. The author's analysis is couched in a formal semantics framework.

**Pier Marco Bertinetto's** contribution *On tense usage in Italian free indirect discourse* takes up the discussion on tense uses in free indirect discourse (FID). The author defends the view that all TAM values are essentially preserved in FID, the only requirement, given the retrospective temporal orientation of this stylistic device, being temporal backshifting. He argues that the statistical frequency of the imperfect does not imply any special property of FID. In particular, the author casts new light on the status of certain tenses that are normally used deictically with respect to the utterance time (i.e. Present, Compound Past and Simple Future). He shows that they may occur occasionally in FID licensed by a mechanism of "covert backshifting". Finally, based on his exhaustive analysis of the uses of such tenses in FID, the mechanisms underlying their licensing and their functioning in discourse, the author reassesses the systematic contrasts between FID and indirect discourse (InD).

In his article *Textual development beyond temporality and interactions between the adversative connector "pero" and the "indefinido"* **Jakob Egetenmeyer** aims to overcome the traditionally rigid text-structural opposition between temporal updates and temporal stativity. Instead, he proposes placing these concepts at opposing poles on a gradable scale of textual development. Only at the pole of typical narrative update is the reference time shifted, whereas at the stative pole the text develops without reference time shifts. He calls the latter the furnishing update, an option that consists in a motivated ordering of eventualities. Located between the two poles is a further type of textual development called the argumentative update, which is instantiated by opposing propositions. These cannot equally hold true at one point in the text, but instead are necessarily ordered. The argumentative update may co-occur with an update of the reference time. He tests

the proposed categories with Spanish data and shows that they can account for the unexpected case of the use of a perfective past lacking a temporal update.

**Elina Eliasson** presents an *Analysis of imperfective verb forms in a perfective context. A comparative study of French and Russian aspectuality*. The research interest is three-fold as it concerns French data, takes Russian as a language of comparison and proposes an additional level to Dessi Schmid's (2014; 2019) onomasiological account of lexical and grammatical aspect. Elina Eliasson presents corpus data showing that in French the *imparfait* may be combined with adverbs with a punctual meaning. She discusses this combination as an aspectual clash and in order to capture it descriptively she suggests adding to the onomasiological account a further contextual level which is able to incorporate this incongruity. She includes perspective-taking as a relevant phenomenon in the analysis. Finally, she presents evidence from Russian translations that underlines the need to resolve the clash when aspectual features cannot be implemented as flexibly as in French.

In his contribution, “*Voilà*” in the temporal discourse structure of narrative texts, **Felix Tacke** analyses presentatives of the type of *voilà*. He focusses on their role as part of the discourse structure in narrative texts. Firstly, he presents an overview of the basic functioning of *voilà* / *voici* and the way they are standardly viewed in the literature. He then focuses on the different uses of *voilà* in Lemaitre's novel *Au revoir là-haut*. He shows that it is not only a frequent, but also a polyfunctional, means of expression. Citing examples from the book, he shows that *voilà* may be used to skip an event in a storyline or may mark a salient time point. Also of particular interest is the functioning of *voilà* in the context of perspectivising phenomena, where it may pertain either to the narrator's or the protagonist's perspective. It may even mark a prominent time point within a secondary story line, that is, as part of free indirect discourse. The paper thus shows the wide variability of *voilà* and its diverse interactions with discourse structure.

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## **Context-sensitivity and neighbouring categories**





Patrick Caudal

# On so-called “tense uses” in French as context-sensitive constructions

**Abstract:** The purpose of this paper is to establish that so-called “uses” of verbal inflections such as the French *imparfait* can articulate a conventionalised, “entrenched” dimension alongside a productive, context-sensitive dimension at the semantics/pragmatics interface – i.e., that one type of modelling mechanism (entrenchment vs. dynamic context-sensitivity) does not preclude the other. In order to demonstrate the complexity of the matter at stake, I will focus here on two relatively well-known uses of the *imparfait*, namely, the so-called attenuative (or “politeness”) *imparfait*, which is associated with utterances conveying polite, negotiable requests, and the so-called “narrative *imparfait*”, which is associated with sequence-of-events narrative discourses. The term “construction” highlights a fundamental hypothesis explored in these pages, namely, that tense uses are often conventionalised in one way or another. I will use the term here in two distinct senses: in the (strong) sense of a special set of lexicalised syntactic constructs in the *imparfait* paired with a conventionalised semantic content non-compositionally derivable from the elements making up the construct, and in the (weaker) sense of a conventionalised meaning attached to the lexical entry of a verbal inflection. More specifically, I will analyse the so-called “attenuative *imparfait*” as an instance of strong construction, and the “narrative *imparfait*” as an instance of weak construction, i.e., as a matter of semantic homonymy, the main point of this paper being that in spite of their constructional nature, these “tense uses” are nevertheless endowed with significant context-sensitivity.

**Keywords:** attenuative *imparfait*, narrative *imparfait*, conventionalisation, context-sensitivity

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**Acknowledgements:** I gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Labex *Empirical Foundations* of Linguistics (ANR “Investissements d’Avenir” programme, ANR-10-LABX-0083); this paper has especially benefitted from interactions with members of the GD4 and GL3 (Strand 3) and MEQTAME (Strand 2) operations. The Labex EFL also funded fieldwork I conducted in Australia between 2013 and 2020, which deeply influenced my understanding of TAM categories in general. I would also like to thank two anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments, as well as the audience and organisers of the *Sektion 12* “Tempus, Aspekt und Diskursstruktur” workshop at Romanistentag 2019 in Kassel – it was a privilege to be invited by Martin Becker and Jakob Egetenmeyer to give a talk at this exciting workshop. Of course, any remaining errors and misconceptions are entirely mine.

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## Introduction

Until recently (cf., e.g., Caudal 2017; Patard 2017; Caudal 2018), most accounts of “tense uses” in French placed emphasis on various kinds of productive, online, semantic and/or pragmatic strategies to contextually adapt and/or enrich some underspecified “core” meaning. From the 1990s onwards, this was usually achieved through various productive interpretative mechanisms (semantic composition, discourse structural parameters, such as discourse relations or other contextual parameters in general, either purely pragmatic or at the semantics/pragmatics interface), the nature of which do not matter here. Typically, such works ascribed a relatively adaptable nucleus of meanings to tenses, which could be enriched by semantic and/or pragmatic means.<sup>1</sup> Analyses of the various known uses of the *imparfait* are no exception to this, from Molendijk (1990) to Brisard (2010).<sup>2</sup> However, concerns were soon voiced that this might not be a suitable explanation for at least some so-called tense uses. This was notably the case for the “attenuative” and the “narrative” uses of the *imparfait*, as early as Berthonneau/Kleiber (1993; 1999), who made a strong case for analysing the “narrative *imparfait*” as a case of homonymy, or Abouda (2001; 2004) and Anscombe (2004), who stressed that the attenuative *imparfait* looks suspiciously like a lexicalised, syntactically-entrenched construction. In time, such observations gave rise to a (still limited) number of novel constructional analyses, where there emerged *de facto* a clear tendency<sup>3</sup> to analyse conventionalised “uses” – be they “weak” (mere tense homonyms) or “strong” constructions – in static semantic terms (i.e., disregarding context-sensitive mechanisms), with non-conventionalised uses being treated as hinging on productive, dynamic, context-sensitive mechanisms (i.e., by resorting to a non-static approach to their meaning, based on contextual update mechanisms). This raises an obvious question: is it legitimate to view “tense uses” as falling squarely either within the realm of entrenched, static meanings, or within

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1 *Polysemy* or *monosemy*, depending on how one defines these terms and how much a particular account relies on what kind of meaning extension mechanisms are at play, were frequently invoked when trying to account for the wide variety of the so-called uses exhibited by French tenses. The distinction does not matter for the purposes of the present investigation, though.

2 A partial list of relevant references would include Molendijk (1990), Gosselin (1996), Bres (1999, 2009a, 2009b), Caudal (2000), Caudal/Vetters/Roussarie (2003), Saussure (2003), Saussure/Sthioul (2005), Patard (2006), Bres (2006), De Mulder/Brisard (2006), Patard (2007), and Brisard (2010); most of them focus on only one of the above uses of the *imparfait*, plus its standard past imperfective reading.

3 I believe this follows from an unconscious bias in constructional approaches, which tend to downplay or disregard (but do not overtly exclude) context-sensitivity in a reaction to its excessive use in many previous works on “tense uses”.

the realm of dynamic, context-sensitive meanings? Or more specifically, can constructionalised, conventionalised uses of tenses remain context-sensitive? And if so, how?

While the present analysis will argue that what has been dubbed “tense uses” is indeed generally the by-product of some kind of conventionalisation process, I will try to demonstrate that it does not imply all their connections with context-sensitivity *qua* dynamic semantic and/or pragmatic mechanisms contributing to their interpretation should be severed. By studying so-called *attenuative* and *narrative* uses of the *imparfait* in turn, and after demonstrating their conventionalised nature, I will compare the manner in which context sensitivity (and a dynamic theory of meaning, whether seen as a formal pragmatics or a formal theory of the semantics/pragmatics interface) plays a different role in each case.

## 1.1 Research question and core hypothesis investigated in the paper

I intend to highlight the joint necessity for the following approaches:

- Conventionalisation-based constructional approaches, with various types of form/meaning pairing conventionalisation mechanisms being at stake. I will claim that “attenuative” uses of the *imparfait* derive from cross-linguistically common patterns of language change, originating in the pragmatics of tenses and later becoming properly semanticised, albeit in a lexicalised, constructionalised fashion. Those patterns involve *conventionalised implicatures* in the sense of Potts (2005; 2007b), i.e., they involve an arbitrary network of “strong”, complex verbal constructions. In contrast, I propose to analyse the narrative *imparfait* as a separately encoded (i.e., homonymous) meaning of the *imparfait*, whose semantic contribution is conventionally distinct from that of the normal, past imperfective reading of the *imparfait*, but does not involve a complex construction;<sup>4</sup> this is a “weak” instance of constructionalisation à la Michaelis (2011).
- Semantic and pragmatic contextualisation mechanism-based approaches; such mechanisms, I will argue, may be needed even by well-established or acquired constructions. I will show in this paper that some constructions call

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<sup>4</sup> I must thank an anonymous reviewer for very constructive criticism in this respect. It led me to abandon my initial “strong” constructional analysis of the narrative *imparfait*, in favour, eventually, of a “weak” constructional analysis.

for dynamic pragmatic interpretative processes (as is the case with the attenuative *imparfait*), or are sensitive to discourse structural parameters (as is the case with the narrative *imparfait*).

Or, to put it in a nutshell, I will claim that the two “uses” studied here embody two different types of conventionalised form-meaning pairings (strong vs. weak constructions), as well as two different types of context-sensitivity, and illustrate two different sorts of interplay between semantics and pragmatics (multidimensional meanings/conventionalised implicatures in the sense of Potts 2005; 2007a vs. the integration of aspectuo-temporal and semantic discourse structural meaning within so-called “common sense entailment” reasoning in the sense of Asher/Lascarides 2003).

## 1.2 A quick review of existing approaches to tense uses in context

The contextual interpretation of French verbal inflection has been a much debated topic among Romanists and semanticists/pragmaticists alike for well over forty years now, starting with seminal references such as Vet (1980) and Kamp/Rohrer (1983) on the theoretical and formal semantics front, or Molendijk (1983) on the theoretical-descriptive front, although one should probably go as far back as Weinrich (1964). The decade from 1995 to 2005 was truly a “golden age” for semantic extension/pragmatic enrichment models, when a convergence was seen among researchers with respect to the descriptive tools and principles they adopted to account for the seemingly endless variability in tense meanings in context. I will not say much about these here, as I am going to focus on their successors, namely those approaches more concerned with formal, arbitrary constraints on so-called tense “uses”.

However, not all analyses of “tense uses” resorted to such strategies. Non-enrichment-of-meaning-based accounts of tense uses for English appeared at least as early as Michaelis (1994). For French, Berthonneau/Kleiber (1993; 1999), Abouda (2001; 2004), Kleiber (2003) and Anscombre (2004) were some of the first accounts *de facto* advocating what can be retrospectively branded “weak” (homonymy-based) or “strong” constructional accounts for so-called “uses” of the *imparfait*. Theoretically constructional analyses of tense uses followed those pioneering analyses, i.e., analyses effectively advocating the use of a construction grammar-based approach (cf., e.g., Goldberg 1995) or some other lexicalised, formal syntax-based approaches (Pollard/Sag 1994; Dalrymple 1999; Ginzburg/Sag 2000; Dalrymple 2001). For English, Michaelis (2004; 2011) pursued a fully developed, formal syntac-

tic constructional approach to various tense-aspect grammatical phenomena. For French, a related line of analysis (though of an informal kind, syntactically speaking) can be found in Patard (2014; 2017) and Caudal (2017; 2018), especially for the *conditionnel* and the *imparfait*.

According to these approaches, most form/meaning pairings for so-called tense uses are not achieved by means of online, contextual meaning enrichment, as they are either:

- cases of *homonymy/polysemy*, with polysemy then referring to separately conventionalised meanings as well (if one assumes that the relevant form/meaning pairings operate at the morphological exponent level for tenses)
- instances of separate, fully-fledged constructions à la Goldberg (1995), i.e., involving entirely different forms extending well beyond the *imparfait* morphology.

One important defect of such constructional approaches, though, is that they tend to strictly separate constructionalised meanings (their relation to context-sensitivity effectively being considered non-existent, or at least left unexplored) from non-constructionalised uses (the analysis then almost exclusively focuses on their context sensitivity). In what follows, I will show that this *de facto* divide may not be warranted by certain “tense uses”, whose constructionalised nature does not preclude context-sensitivity (it does not preclude them possessing a dynamic semantics and/or pragmatics in order to construe their context-dependent interpretation). It is my intention here to lay the foundations for a complex theory of the “uses of the *imparfait*”, that involves a constructional component and a dynamic semantics/pragmatics component. Theoretical syntactic concerns will be mostly set aside for want of space to address them in detail.<sup>5</sup>

### 1.3 The structure of the paper

My argumentation will proceed as follows. I will first (§2) show that “attenuative uses” of the *imparfait* are an instance of verbal constructions in a strong sense and involve a lexicalised multidimensional semantics in the sense of Potts (2007a), Gutzmann (2015), Gutzmann/McCready (2016). At the same time, I will argue that a dynamic pragmatic account of the notion of attenuation (*qua* attenuated directives)

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<sup>5</sup> Most existing approaches to the uses of the *imparfait* do include an explicit, formal constructional analysis, with the exception of, e.g., Michaelis (2004; 2011). Due to space limitations, this paper, will not, alas, be able to deal with this issue.

based on Portner's (2018) theory of commitment management in dialogue is also necessary to account for their contextual interpretation. I will then show in §3 that discourse structural parameters (especially discourse topics, as well as rhetorical relations) play a key role in the contextual licensing and interpretation of so-called “narrative *imparfait*” sequences, which, even though they also require the presence of some manner of supporting syntactic markers, do not constitute lexically-discontinuous, verbal constructions. In my conclusion (§4) I will argue that this suggests that the study of “tense uses” calls for a complex articulation of (a) the morphosyntax to semantics interface (i.e., the conventionalised form-meaning pairing part of the analysis), with (b) a formal pragmatics and/or semantics/pragmatics interface (i.e., the context-sensitivity part of the analysis), and that this results in a much more nuanced and complex picture of the interaction between conventionalisation and context sensitivity in the grammar of TAM forms than has hitherto been assumed in the literature.

## 2 The attenuative *imparfait*

Let us turn to the analysis of the so-called “attenuative *imparfait*”. I will first attempt to define the semantic and pragmatic properties of attenuation as a root modal semantic category – for root modality is obviously involved here, as will be seen.

### 2.1 Defining attenuative modality

Examples (1) and (2) will be my empirical starting point for the definition. These are non-attenuated uses of verbs in the present expressing some form of deontic meaning, although deontic meaning is only one of the many modal categories for which attenuative readings are available and is also only one of the many possible modal meanings of *devoir* and *falloir*. As will soon become apparent, non-dynamic root modal meanings will be of key importance to the present investigation. I will adopt Portner's (2007) concept of *priority modals* to refer to such modals, as they involve a notion of preference over possible worlds. The term can cover a wide semantic range, notably comprising both subject-internal and subject-external necessity (van der Auwera/Plungian 1998), i.e., both deontic and non-deontic uses of such modals, as well as teleological and bouletic modal meanings.

- (1) *Vous devez partir.*  
 You NECESS-PR.2sg go.INF  
 ‘You must go.’
- (2) *Il faut partir.*  
 It IMPERS.NECESS-PR.3sg go.INF  
 ‘We/you must go.’

The first important empirical observation grounding the descriptive notion of modal attenuation is that the priority modals in (1)–(2) (indirectly) convey directives *qua* orders – i.e., they implicate a directive meaning, although they lack a *performative* dimension (they are not equivalent to an imperative, which has an at-issue, not implicated, directive meaning). They exhibit what is known as strong modal force – here strong *directive* modal force (Portner 2007). Quantificationally, if one adopts a formal analysis in the spirit of Kratzer (1991), necessity modals will involve a universal quantifier over possible worlds (all accessible worlds must ratify the choice imposed upon the addressee). In (3)–(4), in contrast, the presence of the conditional inflection on the modal verb means the speaker is merely issuing a request,<sup>6</sup> and the quantificational force of the corresponding *possibility* modal is of a weaker, existential type (i.e., only some of the accessible<sup>7</sup> possible worlds will realise the choice the speaker is requesting the addressee to make; it is much less directive).

- (3) *Vous devriez partir.*  
 You NECESS-COND.2pl go.INF  
 ‘You should go.’

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6 While such a request meaning is most common with the deontic verbs *devoir* and *falloir*, it also extends to deontic/preference periphrases (e.g., *être bon/souhaitable de*) in the *conditionnel*. Furthermore, combining the *conditionnel* with epistemic verbs yields intuitively related attenuated readings, cf. *il se peut que P* ‘P might be true’ vs. *il se pourrait que* (attenuated ‘P might be true’ > lesser degree of certainty). Although it is tempting to argue that this is a thoroughly compositional process whereby an “attenuative”, negotiable meaning attaches to the *conditionnel* and then combines with different modal bases, it could also be a matter of collostructional networks in the sense of Timponi Torrent (2015), as evidenced by the existence of certain lexical gaps in the *conditionnel passé* (cf. *il se pourrait que P* vs. *\*il s’aurait pu que P*). I will leave this question open for future discussion, as it does not concern the matter in hand.

7 According to the relevant accessibility relation *R* attached to the modal of concern here. Note that if we assume this relation to be lexically attached to the modal used, the difference in modal strength between (1)–(2) and (3)–(4) cannot be modelled in terms of an accessibility relation *R*<sub>2</sub> yielding a subset of the worlds accessible via another, modally stronger accessibility relation *R*<sub>1</sub>, (cf., e.g., Portner 2009, 33–36).



- (4) *Il faudrait* *partir.*  
 It IMPERS.NECESS-COND.3sg go.INF  
 ‘We/you should go.’

Of course, the proposed quantificational contrast between (1)–(2) and (3)–(4) also reflects on a difference in terms of social standing, i.e., the speaker presents herself as holding authority when the present inflection is used, but not when the conditional inflection is used (or at least, chooses not to do so overtly).

In formal terms, if one adopts Portner’s (2007) theory of modals and imperatives, deontic modals contribute to both the COMMON GROUND (or CG for short) and a TO-DO LIST associated with a richer structure involving participant-specific “commitment slates” – see Portner (2018) and below. Thus, the contribution of the imperative sentence (5) to the latter discourse component consists in adding (6) to the addressee’s TO-DO LIST.

- (5) Sit down!

- (6)  $\llbracket \text{Sit down!} \rrbracket =_{\text{def}} [\lambda w \lambda x : x = \text{addressee}_C : x \text{ sits down in } w]$

A related contrast can be found with the special conventionalised use of imperatives in the context of a social call, i.e., to convey, e.g., invitations/permissions, cf. (7). These differ from a more mundane and stronger priority/deontic interpretation, as in (8). Thus, even if the addressee in (8) is a guest, this utterance conveys a strong request, i.e., one that cannot be directly dismissed by the addressee, e.g., by merely answering *no*, *thank you* (whereas this is possible in (7)).<sup>8</sup>

- (7) Have a piece of fruit / a seat! (<sup>OK</sup>invitation/#request: declining is costless)

- (8) Leave your coat on the peg! (#invitation/<sup>OK</sup>request: declining is costly)

I will sidestep a more thorough formal definition of the standard Kratzerian approach to modality in terms of modal bases vs. ordering sources. These are two conversational backgrounds, i.e., functions from possible worlds to propositions,

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<sup>8</sup> (Portner 2007, 359–360) argues that such examples convey realistic (circumstantial) modal bases with the ordering source – a set of desires in (7) vs. a set of requirements in (8) – providing the required “invitation” vs. “request” meanings. However, the division of modal meanings between these two sets of examples is clearly not a contextual, but a conventional matter – *have an N* conventionally expresses an invitation, regardless of contextual parameters; verbs able to receive similar readings in the imperative belong to a very limited semantic class and otherwise convey either orders or requests, i.e., they have a deontic reading.

respectively pointing to propositions (information states or bodies of evidence) constraining accessible worlds (the modal base) vs. propositions ordering worlds in terms of the most desirable/best possible outcome (the ordering source). While a very worthwhile issue in its own right, this question is largely irrelevant to the matter in hand, particularly as we will see that the kinds of modal readings under scrutiny are not purely contextually construed, but involve a conventionalised modal core (i.e., the modal bases/ordering sources underlying the attenuated request meaning I am focusing on here will be shown to be lexicalised semantic elements).

In the remainder of section §2, I will assume that attenuated vs. non-attenuated uses of priority modals are understood as being part of a graded interpretative continuum between two polar opposites: *negotiable* vs. *non-negotiable* requests. I will define as negotiable request-denoting modals those priority modal forms indicating that the speaker overtly acknowledges the addressee’s right to dismiss the request thus expressed and at no cost (except maybe by reciprocating in her response the polite attitude of the initial speaker). Attenuation *via* a conditional marking of French priority modal verbs or constructions will be presented as a conventional way of mapping a lexically non-negotiable request expression (e.g., *devoir*) onto a negotiable *inflected* request expression.

## 2.2 A recent development: past conditionals as novel attenuated request markers

Before moving on to examine the so-called “attenuative” uses of the *imparfait*, I would like to stress that the attenuative value of the *conditionnel présent* (present conditional, COND.PR for short) seems to be currently heading towards a less marked, and possibly non-existent, attenuated meaning, while a novel, marked attenuation inflectional marking is on the rise, namely the *conditionnel passé* (past conditional, COND.PA for short), as was shown in Caudal (2018).

As the COND.PR has been usually associated with a polite priority modal meaning in interactional contexts since the Old French period, it is hardly surprising that its attenuative function is now slowly eroding and that a marked attenuation marking has emerged with bouletic and teleological modals, though not with deontic modals. Caudal (2018, 58–59) gives two early examples of the “bouletic verb-COND.PA INF” construction, cf. (9)–(10). The emergence of the COND.PA as a well-established, past counterfactual/conditional inflection is relatively new, only dating back to the 16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> centuries (Patard/Grabar/De Mulder 2015); the evolution of this construction is, therefore, remarkably recent.

(9) Mme. DE ROSELLE. –*Mais, entre nous, pourtant, j’aurais voulu savoir. . .*

M. DE PLINVILLE. –*Savoir ? quoi ?* (J.-F. Collin D’Harleville, *L’Optimiste ou l’Homme toujours content*, 1788, 141)

‘But, between you and me, I would like<sub>COND.PA</sub> (lit. ‘would have liked’) to know...’

- (10) *Mon cher ami, Je vous ai apporté les épreuves, j’aurais désiré que Théo les lût.* (Flaubert, *Correspondance* (1854–1857), 139)

‘My dear friend, I have brought you the proofs, I would like<sub>COND.PA</sub> (lit. ‘would have liked’) Theo to read them.’

The above constructional development results in an interesting contrast between utterances involving “bouletic modal-V INF” vs. “deontic modal-V INF” patterns in the COND.PA: while the former have become semantically ambiguous between a past irrealis (avertive) use and an “entrenched” (strongly) attenuated request use (obligatorily in the 1<sup>st</sup> person), cf. (11), the latter only have a past irrealis (admonitive) use (12).

- (11) *J’ aurais voulu lui parler.*

I have-COND.1sg WANT.PP OBL.3sg talk-INF.

1. ‘I wanted to talk to her/him [but I didn’t]’

2. ‘I wish I could<sub>COND.PA</sub> talk to her/him (= let me talk to her/him, please).’

- (12) *J’ aurais dû lui parler.*

I have-COND.1sg DEONT.PP OBL.3sg talk-INF.

‘I should have talked<sub>COND.PA</sub> to her/him.’

In light of these data, it is clear that COND-marked modal attenuation (i) is *gradable/scalar* in some way (the attenuation in (11) is stronger than in (13)<sup>9</sup>) and (ii) is of an arbitrary nature; while the COND.PR can attenuate any type of priority (as well as an epistemic) modal, the COND.PA can only attenuate some priority modals, i.e., bouletic modal constructions, and no epistemic modal whatsoever.<sup>10</sup>

- (13) *Je voudrais lui parler.*

I have-WANT-COND.1sg OBL.3sg talk-INF.

‘I would like to talk to her/him.’

<sup>9</sup> For a general discussion of scalarity in modal meanings, see e.g., Lassiter (2010; 2014), Katz/Portner/Rubinsten (2012). This is closely related to the function of the *ordering source* in a Kratzerian model of modality, as it must provide a ranking function ordering accessible worlds.

<sup>10</sup> Epistemic modals in the COND.PA only have a past irrealis meaning – and again, the COND.PA cannot even mark some epistemic constructions (cf. *il se pourrait* vs. *\*il s’aurait pu*, note 6).

### 2.3 Attenuative uses of the *imparfait*, or attenuative structures in the *imparfait*?

In addition to bouletic modals in the *conditionnel*, attenuated priority meanings can also be conveyed by *imparfait*-marked structures in French. Treated as a lexicalisation phenomenon as early as Abouda (2001) and Anscombe (2004), this so-called “use” of the *imparfait* has been recently analysed as a set of conventionalised structures forming in effect a network of constructions (Caudal 2017).<sup>11</sup> It is indeed limited to a handful of arbitrary lexical verbs and constructions,<sup>12</sup> in particular bouletic constructions (*vouloir* INF, *désirer* INF, *souhaiter* INF ‘want/wish to INF’), the motion-cum-purpose (teleological motion) construction *venir (pour) INF* ‘come in order to INF’, i.e., a deictic variant of English ‘go and V’, and a class of verbs and constructions involving various means of communication (e.g., *écrire* ‘write’ *pour* INF, *téléphoner* ‘give a call’ *pour* INF) with a performative dimension.<sup>13</sup>

- (14) *Excusez-moi, je voulais vous parler.*  
Excuse me, I want-IMPF.1sg you talk-INF.  
‘Excuse me, I wanted [= would like] to talk to you.’

According to Caudal (2017), the earliest members of this relatively small constructional-lexical network emerged in Old/Middle French, beginning with *vouloir*+INF; the network then recruited new members among other bouletic constructions (*désirer* INF, *souhaiter* INF). The motion-cum-purpose, teleological *venir pour* INF construction and “communication-cum-purpose” teleological constructions (*appeler/écrire pour* INF) were incorporated into the network at a later period. Caudal (2017) notes that not all bouletic/teleological or motion-cum-purpose constructions can have attenuative modal readings with the *imparfait*. Thus #*avoir*<sub>IMPF</sub> *l'intention de* INF ‘intend to INF’ or #*aller*<sub>IMPF</sub> INF ‘go INF/go and V’) cannot yield attenuated modal meanings, which suggests that the observed form-meaning pairings are lexicalised/constructionalised, cf. (15)–(16). These facts seem to refute

<sup>11</sup> Accounts based on meaning expansion can be found in, e.g., Patard (2007) and Bres (2009a).

<sup>12</sup> For want of space I will leave aside attenuative structures containing declarative and interrogative verbs (*dire* ‘say’, *démander* ‘ask’). I believe that the analysis I will develop here can also be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to those structures – for the most part. See note 16 below.

<sup>13</sup> See Caudal (2018) for a detailed account of the lexicalised, constructionalised nature of these structures, which cannot be reiterated here for want of space. While the last class listed here seems at first sight to be semantically productive, its obligatory *pour* INF element proves it is also conventionalised; these constructions come across as conveying an attenuated request, whereas they should compositionally convey an attenuated teleological modal; their temporal meaning, too, is non-compositional.

those theories that attempt to construe the interpretation of these structures from a compositional semantic perspective and/or pragmatic contextual enrichment mechanisms that tap into the semantics of the *imparfait*.

- (15) #J' avais l'intention de vous parler. (past desire)  
 I have-IMPF.1sg the.intention of you talk-INF  
 'I intended to talk to you.'
- (16) #J' allais vous parler. (past counterfactual)  
 I go-IMPF.1sg you talk-INF.  
 'I was about to talk to you.'

But how did this conventionalised meaning arise? As independently proposed in a number of works (cf., e.g., Hogeweg 2009; Patard 2014), many so-called tense uses appear to derive from former conversational implicatures, thus illustrating a widely recognised pattern of semantic change (cf., e.g., Traugott 1988; Palmer 2001). Following Caudal (2017) (see this work for further details), I hypothesise that attenuative structures in the *imparfait* also follow this developmental path.

Briefly, what paved the way for these constructions was the so-called “super-interval property” of imperfective tenses first identified by Bennett/Partee (1978) for the English past progressive, cf. (17). Although this exact formulation has a number of undesirable correlates, it does capture the correct and important intuition that some classes of past, imperfectively viewed events (i.e., atelic and durative events) *may* extend up to the present time.

- (17)  $\llbracket \text{Imperfective } (\phi) \rrbracket = 1$  at interval  $I$  if there exists an interval  $I'$  such that  $I \subset I'$ ,  $I$  is not a final subinterval of  $I'$ , and  $\phi$  is true at  $I'$ .

If a similar property holds true for a stative verb marked in the *imparfait*, then it follows from (17) that (18) describes a state of a baby being sick, which, although past, can extend up to the present interval. If we take a neo-Reichenbachian approach to tense along with event reification, the crude Lewis/Klein-style representation of (18) given in (19) says that the topic time<sup>14</sup> interval  $t$  is anterior to the

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<sup>14</sup> Klein's (1994) topic time will play an even more important role in my analysis of the narrative *imparfait*, but it is worth noting that it was also instrumental in the development of the so-called “attenuative *imparfait*”, showing how central the notion is to the study of “tense uses”.

“now” utterance interval and is included in the temporal trace of  $e$  (here notated  $\tau(e)$ ). Such a strict inclusion relation entails that  $\tau(e)$  outlasts  $t$ , and even extends up to, say, the *now* interval.

(18) *Le bébé était malade.*

(19)  $\exists e [\text{sick}(e, \text{baby}) \wedge t <_{\text{now}} \wedge t \subset \tau(e)]$

This fact intuitively explains why (18) can be used to imply that the baby is still sick, cf. (20)–(21), where speaker B uses this very *imparfait* utterance to tentatively suggest that the baby might well be sick now. In fact, in the absence of specific information to the contrary, (18)/(19) can be associated with a conversational implicature that  $\tau(e)$  possibly extends up to *now*.

(20) A : *Est-ce que le bébé va mieux ?*

A : ‘Is the baby doing<sub>PR</sub> better?’

(21) B : *Je ne sais pas, mais il y a deux heures il était (encore) malade.*

B : ‘I don’t know, but two hours ago, he was<sub>IMPF</sub> (still) sick.’

I will here assume that such a temporal conversational implicature lies at the diachronic root of the so-called attenuative uses of the *imparfait*, but applied to a bouletic construction. Yet I will propose that it applied not just to the bouletic state itself, but also to an implicated directive meaning.

As we saw in §2.1, directive meanings can be implicated by priority modals and this also applies to bouletic modals. In example (22), the present-marked counterpart of (14), is also naturally interpreted as having a (non-attenuated) directive interpretation (Condoravdi/Lauer 2011; 2012); all priority modals can indirectly convey a non-attenuated request through a pragmatic enrichment process (cf. (23)). This does not, however, come across as polite, and the speaker believes that her wish cannot be easily denied by the addressee, i.e., that she is in a position of authority; it is not an attenuated directive. This is confirmed by the fact that (22) cannot really combine with a polite address expression such as “excusez-moi” (such indirect requests are unattenuated, unlike (14)).

(22) *(??Excusez-moi), je veux vous parler.*

(Excuse me) I want-PR.1sg you talk-INF.

‘(Excuse me) I want to talk to you.’

(23) ‘I want you to P.’ *implicates* ‘Do P!’

Similarly to attenuative COND structures, attenuative *imparfait* structures synchronically present the realisation of the speaker's priority as negotiable (and can also be dismissed at no cost) and give the addressee full authority to grant or reject said request. Since (22) is not a negotiable request, this indicates that the negotiability of (14) must have originated in the past temporal meaning of the *imparfait*. This idea is further supported by the fact that cross-linguistically similar attenuated patterns are often diachronically derived from former past, imperfectly viewed bouletic expressions (cf., e.g., English *would*, originally the past of the verb *will* 'want', or Romance conditionals, which derive from imperfective/underspecified past-marked priority modal constructions).<sup>15</sup>

I propose that the originally defeasible status of the temporal implicature associated with stative utterances in the *imparfait* (cf. (20)) is the source of the modal attenuation here. Indeed, not only did this defeasibility bear on the present validity of the volitional state itself, but it also came to affect the secondary, indirect directive meaning implicated by the bouletic "preference" state (cf. (23) and Condoravdi/Lauer 2011; 2012), similar to the implicated directive reading of (22). In other words, since the present validity of the bouletic state was presented as (possibly) given *but* deniable by the speaker, the indirect directive meaning that inevitably came to be associated with this present bouletic state was *also* construed as deniable, i.e., negotiable, when it became conventionalised as a secondary, non-at-issue meaning – and negotiability of a directive meaning was the very definition I gave for attenuated COND bouletic constructions in §2.1. Later on, this implicated attenuated directive meaning became the main, at issue meaning of such utterances, and as such became performative – like an imperative – and its older bouletic content lingered on as a merely implicated meaning. This, I suggest, is the diachronic process which led *je voulais<sub>IMPF</sub> INF* to mean 'I would like to INF'.

Note that, unlike conventionalised "interrogative" requests such as (24) (cf. Sadock's (1974) concept of *whimperatives*), attenuative *imparfait* requests (must) have a declarative form. They do not need an explicit move to grant or accept a question, but like the conventionalised interrogative request (24), they are expected to be followed by either a polite rejection or an acceptance utterance, which indicates

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<sup>15</sup> These developments obtain not only with monosemous past imperfective tenses, but also with aspectually underspecified past tenses, such as the "simple past" tenses in Germanic languages, including the English and Dutch simple pasts and the German *Präteritum*. With stative verbs, such tenses typically receive an imperfective viewpoint reading (*pace* an anonymous reviewer's suggestion), unless the verb contextually has a coerced inchoative/change-of-state reading. It should, therefore come as no surprise that Modern English has developed a similar attenuative bouletic verb-based construction in the simple past (cf. "Excuse me, I wanted to know if. . .").

they have performative force, i.e., are at-issue directives, like imperatives. Unlike imperatives, however, their directive effect can be easily rejected by the addressee, who does not need to make any special verbal effort (nor take any social risk, i.e., a kind of risk that is clearly not present in (14)) to challenge the speaker’s authority and reject the directive. One can therefore conclude that attenuative *imparfait* structures convey *performative attenuated* directives that are clearly subordinate to the addressee’s willingness to ratify an update of her TO-DO LIST, i.e., they express negotiable requests, and their performative nature does not take away their attenuated meaning (the two parameters are orthogonal, of course).

- (24) *Puis- je vous parler ?*  
 CAN-PR.1sg I you talk-INF?  
 ‘May I speak to you?’

There is no doubt that the formerly indirect, pragmatically performative directive content of attenuative *imparfait* structures is now fully conventionalised. Proof of this can be found in the observation that the sincerity of utterances like (14) cannot be challenged, as in, e.g., (25). I take this to indicate that they are performative (attenuated) directives, not unlike imperative utterances (Condoravdi/Lauer 2011; 2012), as the sincerity of the latter cannot be challenged either. At-issue directive expressions are performative in the sense that by uttering them a speaker effectively prompts someone else to act according to the implicated priority state (i.e., a desire) grounding the performative directive, cf. (26), and such a directive update of somebody’s commitments cannot be denied (Condoravdi/Lauer 2011; 2012).

- (25) No, you’re lying. You don’t actually want to talk to me.

- (26) ‘Do P!’ *implicates* ‘I want you to do P.’

Put simply, these observations strongly suggest that attenuative *imparfait* structures are very similar to directive structures like imperatives in three important respects: (a) their sincerity cannot be challenged, so both types of expression denote a performative directive; (b) they associate a priority state (a desire) with said performative directive meaning, the priority state *grounding* the directive content. For imperatives, and in fact all conventionalised directive expressions, this priority bouletic state is not directly conveyed, merely implicated (26). And a third similarity emerges with attenuative IMPF structures: (c) given that synchronically they both convey a conventionalised performative directive, this entails that the original bouletic meaning of “attenuative *imparfait*” structures was reanalysed as



a secondary meaning, grounding their now mainly directive content. Therefore, from an interpretative structure like (23), “attenuative *imparfait*” structures came to have a structure similar to (26), that of an imperative. I believe that the – obviously late – recruitment of communication verbs, such as *téléphoner* ‘make a call’, etc., strongly supports such an assumption: indeed, they can have an obvious performative meaning when used in the 1<sup>st</sup> person, while in combination with the teleological preposition *pour* they even have a clear performative directive meaning.<sup>16</sup>

Independent evidence supporting (c) can also be found in some particular temporal properties of attenuative IMPF structures. As Anscombre (2004) noted, it is obvious that at least some elements of the original past at-issue meaning of these structures is still available, but only as a lingering, entailed content. That is, although this is not semantically prominent, (14) requires a context in which the speaker’s desire must be anterior to the *now* interval. Caudal (2017) observed a sharp difference between the so-called “attenuative *conditionnel*” and the “attenuative *imparfait*” in this respect. The former can be used to express a novel desire, i.e., one that the speaker has just acquired, e.g., as a result of some commitment update, while the latter cannot, cf. (27) vs. (28).

(27) [Context: speaker has just been rebuked by a retail employee]

*Puisque c’est comme ça, je voudrais parler à votre supérieur.*

‘Given the way you’re handling this, I’d like<sub>COND</sub> to talk to your supervisor.’

(28) *Puisque c’est comme ça, \*je voulais parler à votre supérieur.*

‘Given the way you’re handling this, \*I wanted<sub>IMPF</sub> to talk to your supervisor.’

But even more interestingly, as was shown in Caudal (2017), not only are attenuative *imparfait* structures incompatible with temporal modifiers referring to the present (29), they also seem to lose their constructionalised nature and request-conveying

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<sup>16</sup> It should be noted that *vouloir*<sub>IMPF</sub> *INF* constructions also often crop up with *verba dicendi* or interrogative verbs to express an “attenuated assertion” or “attenuated question” rather than an “attenuated directive” (cf. *A propos, je voulais*<sub>IMPF</sub> *te dire/te demander*. . . ‘By the way, I wanted to tell/ask you. . .’), where the speaker indicates that although this is a performative speech act, the addressee is entitled not to accept the assertoric or interrogative update normally associated with it (“you can disregard what I’m saying/asking, but I’m saying/asking it nevertheless”). This further confirms the prominence of a performative component in the denotation of attenuative *imparfait* constructions. For reasons of space, though, I am leaving this question to future investigations.

function when combined with a past temporal modifier in their left periphery. The only possible reading obtainable for (30) is a plain (and compositional) past bouletic, and (31) makes little aspectual sense as only its priority meaning is stative (otherwise it describes a punctual achievement, for which it is contextually difficult to accommodate an imperfective reading). Finally, attenuative *imparfait* constructions cannot combine with negation (contrary to, e.g., *vouloir*<sub>COND</sub> attenuated requests and other request utterances in the *conditionnel*).

(29) (*Excusez-moi,*) \**maintenant, je voulais vous parler.*  
Excuse me, now I want-IMPF.1sg you talk-INF.  
'Excuse me, \*now I wanted to talk to you.'

(30) (*Excusez-moi,*) #*hier, je voulais vous parler.*  
Excuse me, yesterday I want-IMPF.1sg you talk-INF.  
'Excuse me, I wanted to talk to you #yesterday.'

(31) (*Excusez-moi,*) *hier, ??je venais chercher ma*  
Excuse me, yesterday I come-IMPF.1sg fetch-INF my  
*mère.*  
mother.  
'Excuse-me, yesterday?? I was coming (litt.) to fetch my mother.'

All these facts, combined with the arbitrarily restricted set of bouletic verbs and bouletic/purpose constructions that can appear in so-called attenuative *imparfait* structures, very strongly suggest these are conventionalised constructions, derived from a former conversational implicature. Their dual temporal dimension (i.e., both past and present) seems to be thoroughly entrenched and the *imparfait* does indeed behave non-compositionally in both of them, i.e., it is just as irrelevant to ascribe a meaning to the *imparfait* alone in such structures as it is to treat the verb in a light verb construction (e.g., “make a decision”) as an event-description-denoting expression. Therefore, there is in fact no such a thing as an attenuative use of the *imparfait* – the attenuative meaning is attached to the overall *imparfait*-inflected attenuative structure, not to the tense itself.<sup>17</sup>

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17 As we will see in §3, this sets it apart from the so-called narrative uses of the *imparfait* in a lexico-syntactic manner: while there exists a conventionally separate (homonymous) narrative use of the *imparfait*, there is no such a thing as an “attenuative” use of the *imparfait* – the locus of the conventionalised attenuative meaning is not the tense, but the overall “verb+tense” construction.

## 2.4 A multi-dimensional semantics and dynamic pragmatics-based analysis

I will now sketch a formalised theoretical analysis of the interpretation of attenuative *imparfait* structures. How should we represent their semantic (especially temporal) complexity, bearing in mind they originated in conversational implicatures attached to (now conventionalised) essentially bouletic constructions in the *imparfait*? Following Caudal (2017), I will assign to attenuative *imparfait* constructions a multi-dimensional semantics in the spirit of Potts (2005) and Gutzmann (2015). I will argue that this allows us to capture how the initially implicated, indirect (non-attenuated) performative directive meaning associated with *je voulais*<sub>MPF</sub> *INF* became a (constructionalised) conventionalised implicature, combining an at-issue directive meaning (a request) with an implicated bouletic state meaning. Given the discussion in §2.3, it seems reasonably well established that the original at-issue bouletic state meaning of the construction has been demoted to backgrounded/secondary/non-at-issue status, while the novel, attenuated performative directive meaning has been promoted to foregrounded/primary/at-issue status.

However, *contra* Caudal (2017), I will not assume that this secondary dimension of meaning should incorporate something as straightforward as the normal, past imperfective lexical meaning of the original construction they derive from. The main reason behind this is the complexity of the temporal properties of attenuative *imparfait* structures, revealed in (29)/(30)/(31), which turns out to be even more marked for motion-cum-purpose structures in the *imparfait*. Thus, the attenuative *imparfait* structure (32) comes across as conveying in its secondary dimension a bouletic state *grounding* a (now accomplished) teleological motion event (as in English “I’ve come to tell you. . .” roughly means ‘I’ve come as I want to tell you. . .’). This contrasts with the contribution of “standard” motion-cum-purpose constructions in the *imparfait* in (33), where the subject did not reach his destination and/or did not achieve his purpose, and the underlying, grounding bouletic state is unequivocally past. Coming back to bouletic attenuative IMPF constructions such as (14), or communication-cum-purpose attenuative IMPF constructions such as (34), their secondary backgrounded meaning describes an atelic event predicate extending up to the present time (respectively a simple desire or a ‘call-cum-desire’ in these examples), which also contrasts with standard *imparfait* uses of similar constructions in (35) and (15), the latter describing events that do not conventionally extend up to the utterance interval. This secondary backgrounded meaning differs from the temporal meaning of a merely past imperfective reading of equivalent *imparfait*-marked structures.

- (32) *Veillez m’excuser, chef, de la liberté. . . Je venais vous demander un petit service. . .* (P. Segonzac, *Mademoiselle*, in *La Presse*, 10/09/1900, 4)  
 ‘Please forgive me, Chief, for taking the liberty. . . I’ve come<sub>IMPF</sub> to ask you a small favour. . .’
- (33) *L’avocat du chercheur français Roland Marchal, [a été] arrêté alors qu’il venait rendre visite à la chercheuse Fariba Adelhah. . .* (*Ouest France*, 28/10/2019)  
 ‘The French researcher Roland Marchal’s lawyer, [was] arrested when he came<sub>IMPF</sub> to visit the researcher Fariba Adelhah.’
- (34) *J’espère que je ne vous dérange pas. Je vous appelais pour voir si mon rendez-vous de 16 heures pouvait me rendre admissible à la clinique dès aujourd’hui. . .* (Cl. Schalck, *Accompagner la naissance pour l’adoption*, Érès, Toulouse, 2011, 175)  
 ‘I hope I’m not disturbing you. I was calling<sub>IMPF</sub> to see if my 4:00 p.m. appointment could make me eligible for admission to the clinic today?’
- (35) *(. . .) d’un geste las [il] lui désigna un siège pendant qu’il appelait quelqu’un au téléphone.* (J.-L. Lambert, *Témoins à charge*, De Borée, Clermont-Ferrand, 2017)  
 ‘(. . .) with a weary gesture he pointed to a seat while he was calling<sub>IMPF</sub> someone on the telephone.’

It follows from the above observations that the process of conventionalisation of such constructions has altered their original aspectuo-temporal meaning. Furthermore, given (32)–(35), it is clear that distinct lexical entries are required for the denotation of motion-cum-purpose and communication verb-based attenuative IMPF constructions – their at-issue dimension does not only comprise a bouletic stative predicate, but also another event predicate.

To set out a precise formal treatment of my analysis, I will resort to Gutzmann’s (2015) multi-dimensional logic for hybrid semantics  $L_{TV}$ . According to the present analysis, the denotation of attenuative *imparfait* constructions associates (a) an at-issue, directive meaning with (b) an underlying, non-at-issue, implicated bouletic state meaning – in effect a conversational implicature, or CI-type of meaning – which I will call a “preference state”, inspired by Condoravdi/Lauer’s (2011) notion of preference.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Note that the implicated preference state meaning of the imperative does not appear to be pre-suppositional as it is affected by negation, cf.

‘Sit down!’	<i>Implicates</i>	‘It is a preference of mine that you sit down’
‘Don’t sit down!’	<i>Implicates</i>	‘It is a preference of mine that you don’t sit down’

Like all current multi-dimensional logics inspired by Potts (2005) and Gutzmann (2015),  $L_{TU}$  posits an essential distinction between *truth-conditional content* vs. *use-conditional content* (abbreviated to TCC vs. UCC), the latter making an expressive/evaluative contribution rather than a plain truth-conditional contribution. Originally, Potts had assumed that TCC and UCC needed to be encoded in separate dimensions, with UCC typically expressing connotation or implied meaning, while the notation typically used a meta-logical “bullet” operator ( $\bullet$ ) to construe a mixed type expression from them. However, this view soon proved difficult to maintain (McCready 2010), given the existence of at-issue, evaluative UCC meanings, or at-issue combinations of evaluative and expressive meanings, i.e., with a *hybrid type* UCC $\times$ TCC meaning – see, e.g., “gawk”. As  $L_{TU}$  was specifically designed to allow for hybrid type expressions *within* either the at-issue or the non-at-issue dimensions,<sup>19</sup> I will propose that the denotation of attenuative IMPF structures is of an  $L_{TU}$  type (36), where  $\blacklozenge$  is an inter-dimensional meta-logical, complex type-making operator, where  $^c$  marks a UCC (performative directive<sup>20</sup>) semantic type, and  $^a$  marks a TCC type. In other words, their denotation has a hybrid type UCC $\times$ TCC primary/at-issue dimension (since they express a present (TCC) performative directive (UCC)), while its CI/secondary/non-at-issue dimension is of a purely TCC type (a TCC $\times$ TCC type) (see Gutzmann 2015, 126 ff. for further details on the  $L_{TU}$  type system).

$$(36) \langle \alpha: \sigma^c, \tau^a \rangle \blacklozenge \langle \beta: \sigma^a, \nu^a \rangle$$

(37) provides a tentative lexical representation of the meaning of bouletic attenuative IMPF structures in  $L_{TU}$ ,<sup>21</sup> where an at-issue (UCC $\times$ TCC type) performative

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However, since negation cannot apply to attenuative IMPF structures, this argument cannot be used to demonstrate that their implicated preference state meaning is not presuppositional.

<sup>19</sup> In other words, the “type mixity” combining at-issue and CI meanings must be distinguished from the “type mixity” combining UCCs and TCCs.

<sup>20</sup> That performative directives can be seen as having a UCC content follows from their very performativity – this performative component (i.e., the speaker’s sincerity) cannot be denied (challenged).

<sup>21</sup> It is unclear to me whether, e.g., Gutzmann/McCready’s (2016) simpler  $L^*_{CI}$  logic could have been used instead. However, the compositionality mechanisms of  $L_{TU}$  could also be useful to explain the impossibility of, say, fronted framing temporal adverbials in attenuative IMPF constructions, but as these are not VP-modifiers, the temporal entrenchment argument put forward above may not be sufficient. Indeed, assuming that fronted (framing) adverbials convey discourse topics (see §3.3 below), and given that both dimensions of meaning of (37) are truth-conditional types, we could theoretically integrate the temporal conditions of the primary and secondary dimensions into those of the truth-conditional content of such topics at the discourse semantic level. Such a combination, however, would fail with both past- and present-framing fronted temporal adverbials: the “presentness” of the at-issue dimension rules out straightforward past temporal interpreta-

directive meaning, akin to a polite request, such as (13), is combined with a CI/secondary bouletic meaning grounding the at-issue directive content. Crucially, this construction is lexically inflected, i.e., it conveys tense-aspect information, and therefore its event variables are existentially bound in the lexical semantic entry; this aspectuo-temporal entrenchment might explain why modification by temporal adverbials is not allowed (but see note 21).

- (37) Lexical semantic entry for attenuative IMPF<sub>BouleticV</sub> constructions:  
 $\lambda\phi\lambda x.\exists e_1[\text{AttenDirective}(e_1)(x)(\phi)\wedge\text{Speaker}(x)\wedge t\subset\tau(e_1)\wedge t=\text{now}]$  [*at-issue*  
*UCC×TCC*]  
 $\blacklozenge\lambda\phi\lambda x.\exists e_2[\text{Intend}(e_2)(x)(\phi)\wedge\text{Speaker}(x)\wedge\tau(e_2)<^{\circ}\text{now}]$  [*non-at-issue TCC×TCC*]

The above representation can be rendered in plain English as follows.

- In the secondary, non-at-issue, purely truth-conditional dimension, the preference state meaning  $\text{Intend}(e_2)(x)(\phi)$  corresponds to a partially past, partially present bouletic state, as its run trace left-overlaps with the utterance interval ( $\tau(e_2)<^{\circ}\text{now}$ ), i.e., the bouletic state (slightly) overlaps with the left-most part of utterance interval. This state anchors a preference to which some agent is committed, i.e., it is part of her preference structure in the sense of Condoravi/Lauer (2011; 2012). I will therefore call it a *preference state*.
- In the primary, at-issue dimension with a hybrid UCC×TCC directive meaning, the directive predicate  $\text{AttenDirective}(e_1)(x)(\phi)$  describes a “polite”, attenuated directive event (in fact, a performative directive speech act event) controlled by the speaker; it is indirectly grounded in the preference state described by the *Intend* predicate<sup>22</sup> contained in the secondary, non-at-issue dimension.  $t$  is the reference time interval temporally anchoring the directive event  $e_1$  in the present and is used to add truth-conditional, temporal conditions (presentness).

Unlike Caudal (2017), and capitalising on §2.3, I hypothesise that (37) emerged in three diachronic steps:

1. A temporal implicature (“past imperfective states can extend up to the utterance time”) prompted the original past bouletic state of the construction to be seen as possibly (but deniably) valid at speech time, e.g., something like

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tions, while the (partial) “pastness” of the secondary dimension rules out straightforward present temporal interpretations. I believe this correctly predicts examples (29)–(31) to be problematic.

<sup>22</sup> The semantic type of these modals is identical to that of a modal auxiliary seen as a stative verbal predicate with a propositional complement (it requires an event variable for the relevant speech act – directive or otherwise).

$Intend(e_2)(x)(\phi) \wedge t < \tau(e) \wedge t <^{\circ} now$  was conventionalised as a slightly enriched, locally implicated meaning – not a CI type of meaning

2. In turn, this deniable bouletic state implication gave rise to another, also deniable, implicated, indirect, performative, directive meaning (cf. “Do P!” in (23)), in accordance with axiom (38), and these two meanings were re-analysed as a two-dimensional CI structure, with the “older” implicated, past+present bouletic meaning becoming at-issue, and the newer directive meaning becoming a CI/non-at-issue type of meaning.
3. Finally, the indirect/implicated attenuated request took on a conventionalised performative directive meaning and was therefore promoted to at-issue status, while the (older) bouletic state meaning was reanalysed as the preference state grounding the performative directive and demoted to non-at-issue status (the grounding information of a conventional directive must be secondary information (cf. (26))). This primary/secondary dimension reversal in a CI structure constitutes an instance of what Caudal (2017) calls a *pragmatic inversion*.

**(38) Pragmatic axiom on deniable/negotiable preference states as sources for indirect performative (attenuated) directives:**

Given a deniable/negotiable preference state predicate *Intend*, a speaker  $x$  and a preference  $\phi$  such that  $Intend(e)(x)(\phi)$  holds in the present, then an implicated attenuated directive event  $e'$  is accessible in the current context, such that  $AttenDirective(e')(x)(\phi)$ . Preference state  $e$  grounds the implicated attenuated directive event  $e'$ , such that  $\tau(e) <^{\circ} \tau(e')$  and  $t < \tau(e')$  with  $t = now$  – i.e.,  $e$  is the (both past and still presently valid) source of the (present)  $e'$  performative directive.

The lexical entries for motion-cum-purpose (39) and communication-cum-purpose (40) attenuative IMPF constructions differ only with respect to their mixed, non-at-issue, secondary dimension.<sup>23</sup> They essentially add a third event description, respectively, a (past) itive motion event, and a (past and still ongoing) communi-

<sup>23</sup> I believe these were recruited as novel patterns after bouletic IMPF constructions had already reached full attenuative conventionalisation. Although I was able to find clear instances of *vouloir*-IMPF constructions in the Frantext corpus as early as the 15<sup>th</sup> century, I could not find clear instances with *venir*<sub>IMPF</sub> before the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

“Mon bel prieur, je suis bien prest/De mon trespas et finement :/Je vouloie mon testament/Ordonner en vostre presence.” (*Le Mystère de S. Bernard de Menthon*, 1450, Anon.)

‘My dear prior, death and the end of my life are looming close; I would like to draw my will in your presence.’

cation event, but they retain the same preference state element of meaning found with *bona fide* bouletic attenuative IMPF structures, i.e., they have an underlying bouletic content.

(39) ...◆λφλx.∃e<sub>2</sub>,e<sub>3</sub>[Intend(e<sub>2</sub>)(x)(φ)∧Speaker(x)∧Itive.Motion(e<sub>3</sub>)(x)∧τ(e<sub>2</sub>)<<sup>o</sup>now∧τ(e<sub>3</sub>)<now ∧τ(e<sub>3</sub>)<τ(e<sub>2</sub>)]

(40) ...◆λφλx.∃e<sub>2</sub>,e<sub>3</sub>[Intend(e<sub>2</sub>)(x)(φ)∧Speaker(x)∧Communication(e<sub>3</sub>)(y)∧τ(e<sub>2</sub>)<<sup>o</sup>now∧τ(e<sub>3</sub>)<<sup>o</sup>now∧τ(e<sub>3</sub>)<τ(e<sub>2</sub>)]

## 2.5 Interpretation of attenuative IMPF constructions within a dynamic pragmatics

We must now address the question of the dynamic dimension of attenuated *imparfait* structures. Specifically, what is the dynamic pragmatic role of *AttenDirective* in (37)? How can it update – or not – the addressee’s To-do List? What can be said of the grounding function of *Intend*? Given the speaker’s lack of authority in these structures, s/he leaves room for the addressee not to ratify the priorities s/he is committed to, but we need to clarify the manner in which an attenuated directive and the underlying preference are contextually managed in terms of the relationship between the speaker’s commitment to a preference and the addressee’s (shared) commitment (intuitively, negotiability is about the speaker giving the addressee substantial freedom regarding this connection).

In order to account for a comparable phenomenon with respect to the management of commitment to preferences, namely weak vs. strong imperatives, Portner (2018, 305) introduces a novel definition of dynamic pragmatic context, essentially based on the distinction between individual commitments (*IC*) (a function from individuals to information as commitment slates (*cs*) and preferences as encoded in a To-do list (*tdl*) (Portner 2007)), mutual commitments (*MC*), and projected commitments (*PC*) – projected commitments being the projected extensions of mutual commitments, i.e., anticipated future developments of the conversation. Portner defines context as follows (*cg* = *common ground*, *cs* = *commitment slate*<sup>24</sup>):

24 A commitment slate is essentially a set of commitments (assertions) and priorities (i.e., preferences; cf. Condoravdi/Lauer (2011)).



- (41) A context is a tuple  $\langle MC, IC, PC \rangle$ , where:
1.  $MC = \langle cg, tdl \rangle$
  2. For each participant  $p$ ,  $IC(p) = \langle cs_p, tdl_p \rangle$
  3.  $PC = \langle pc_{cg}, pc_{tdl} \rangle$

Portner uses the distinction between the speaker's and the addressee's committed preferences in his novel context model to capture the variation in strength between two uses of the imperative, namely the so-called *weak* vs. *strong* imperatives, with, respectively, rising (42) vs. falling intonation (43).

- (42) Have a seat!  $\uparrow\uparrow$  (weak, polite imperative, of the 'have a biscuit' type)
- (43) Have a seat!  $\downarrow\downarrow$  (strong imperative; speaker does not care whether addressee wants to sit or not)

Portner (2018) argues that both types of imperative add to the addressee's projected To-do List ( $pc_{tdl}$ ) an expectation that the imperative's underlying preference will be incorporated into it (the  $pc_{tdl}$ ), i.e., an expectation that the interlocutors will come to a mutual commitment to how the addressee's actions will be judged (in other words, that they will share the view of the speaker's higher ranking of the worlds in which the addressee sits down). In addition to this, Portner argues that falling (strong) imperatives add the imperative's content to  $tdl_{speaker}(addressee)$ , while rising imperatives add it to  $tdl_{addressee}(addressee)$ , with the former conveying that it is the *speaker's preference* which serves as the basis for establishing a novel shared commitment, whereas the latter conveys that it is the *addressee's preference* on which this novel shared commitment should rest.

I will here adopt Portner's dynamic pragmatic approach and claim that the at-issue meaning of attenuative IMPF structures has a dynamic pragmatic effect akin to that of rising, "weak" imperatives, i.e., it is a type of directive meaning updating  $tdl_{addressee}(addressee)$  rather than  $tdl_{speaker}(addressee)$ ; cf. (44). Indeed, it is left to the addressee to accept  $\phi$  as a preference shared with the speaker.

- (44) The conventional effect of an attenuated directive trying to bring about some preference  $\phi$  in context  $C$  is:  $C + \phi = C'$ , where:
1.  $tdl'_{addressee}(addressee) = tdl_{addressee}(addressee) \cup \{\phi\}$
  2.  $pc'_{tdl}(addressee) = \{c \cup tdl(addressee) \cup \{\phi\} \mid c \in pc_{tdl}(addressee)\}$

It should be noted that this type of request does not require overt ratification by the addressee, contrary to, e.g., (24). As Portner (2018) suggests, the update of the

addressee’s commitment is therefore backgrounded/implicated in some sense; the ratification process is not “put on the table” as in (24).

Though perfectly legitimate and useful, Portner’s (2018) analysis is probably not sufficient to capture all the relevant properties of attenuated directives – and Portner himself acknowledges that his analysis does not preclude additional, complementary developments. I have pointed out above that all directives have an intrinsic (implicated, secondary) volitional dimension and must be grounded by an associated preference state. In a Kratzerian theory of modality, an agent’s desires provide the relevant ordering sources for a priority modal, i.e., possible worlds will be ranked with respect to their desirability. And crucially, it seems to me that non-attenuated directives and attenuated directives differ fundamentally with respect to this ranking property. If one considers (45), the *conditionnel* marking clearly conveys that the “target” desired worlds are not absolutely desirable; they are mildly superior to worlds where the speaker’s preference is not ratified. The set of worlds where the speaker’s preference is ratified and the complementary, alternative set of worlds where it is not at odds with this desirability property (i.e., desirable worlds are only mildly desirable, and undesirable worlds are only mildly undesirable). This is not so with the present-marked *devoir* in (46), where alternative worlds<sup>25</sup> are decidedly worse than the preferred target worlds. A scalar model of modality such as Lassiter’s (2014; 2017) is obviously well-adapted to capturing such intricacies and would be necessary in order to account for all the semantic properties of attenuated priority modals or attenuated directive expressions in general. But for want of space to elaborate on it here, I must set this issue aside for the time being.

(45) *Tu devrais partir.*

‘You should<sub>COND</sub> go/I’m urging<sub>COND</sub> you to go.’

(46) *Tu dois partir.*

‘You have<sub>PR</sub> to/need<sub>PR</sub> to go.’

### 3 On so-called “narrative” uses of the *imparfait*

Let us now move on to the so-called “narrative uses” of the *imparfait*. Two main types of analyses of such uses are currently found in the literature. A classical, meaning

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<sup>25</sup> Following an intuition formulated by Ramchand (2014), I hold that modals crucially involve an *alternative set* in order to capture what is generally seen as a quantificational phenomenon.

enrichment approach argues that these uses can be derived from the standard past imperfective meaning of the *imparfait* (cf. e.g., Gosselin 1999; Bres 1999; Caudal/Vetters 2003; Patard 2007) and offer an essentially aspectual viewpoint-based analysis, in which the aspectual meaning of the *imparfait* is considered flexible enough to accommodate such contextual variations. In contrast, Tasmowski-De Rijck (1985), Berthonneau/Kleiber (1993), Berthonneau/Kleiber (1999) and Kleiber (2003) hold that narrative *imparfait* sequences are very sensitive to what can be described as discourse structural parameters, and require some kind of framing or temporal-anchoring adverbial, a temporal-succession adverbial, a connective (cf. (47)–(48)), or some other sort of temporal-ordering/framing or additional sequence-inducing material. In short, that they need markers that serve to manage what has been compared to “anaphoric chains” with respect to events in discourse. As the *imparfait* is strongly anaphoric and discursively much less autonomous than perfective tenses it only ever arises in contexts compatible with its “anaphoricity”.<sup>26</sup>

- (47) *Quelques instants plus tard, Maigret descendait l'escalier; traversait le salon aux meubles disparates, gagnait la terrasse ruisselante des rayons déjà chauds du soleil.* (Simenon, *La nuit du carrefour*, LdP 2908, 61; in Caudal/Vetters (2005))  
 ‘A few moments later, Maigret descended<sub>IMPF</sub> the stairs, crossed<sub>IMPF</sub> the living room with its disparate furniture, and reached<sub>IMPF</sub> the terrace bathed in the already warm rays of the sun.’
- (48) *Deux semaines après, on lui coupait les deux jambes (. . .).* (M. Rolland, *La pipe en sucre*, Edmond Nalis, 200, *ibid.*)  
 ‘Two weeks later, both her legs were cut<sub>IMPF</sub> off (. . .).’

In support of their opposition to the aspectual approach proposed in many other works, Berthonneau/Kleiber (1999) and Kleiber (2003) argued that the narrative *imparfait* is in fact a separate homonymous tense from the “standard” imperfective viewpoint *imparfait*, and that it conveys a perfective viewpoint. The analysis I will defend here is largely influenced by this *de facto* weak constructional view and essentially represents an attempt to provide a novel, more theoretically precise, discourse-structural account of the “anaphoric” properties of the narrative *imparfait*. I will claim, furthermore, that these properties relate to an ongoing, aspectual

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<sup>26</sup> The later empirical generalisation might also *prima facie* seem to favour a strong constructional approach akin to that elaborated above for attenuative *imparfait* structures. However, I will suggest below that such an approach should be eschewed in this case, as so-called “narrative *imparfait*” uses cannot be strongly constructional.

semantic change that this homonym is undergoing, rendering it partly (but not completely) similar to a perfective tense (in other words, I will add an aspectual twist to the Kleiber/Berthonneau analysis).

### 3.1 Identifying support expressions and the *imparfait narratif*

In his critique of the anaphoric view, Bres (1999) tried to demonstrate that discourse structural markers, temporal adverbials, etc. – i.e., what I will call *support expressions* – are optional in narrative *imparfait* sequences and only play a reinforcing role, whereas Kleiber/Berthonneau are adamant that such markers are necessary (though not sufficient) to licence narrative *imparfait* readings. After examining a corpus of 700 examples of narrative *imparfait* sequences, Bres (1999) concluded that they can arise perfectly well without any temporal adverbial or connective, and claimed that 74% of the occurrences he examined did not include any of these markers, which seems to give credit to his non-anaphoric, aspectual approach.

However, if we carefully review Bres’s list of counter-examples, we are forced to draw a somewhat different conclusion, as his list comprises four distinct syntactic types of structure, all functioning as overt support material with at least some kind of discourse structural contribution or effect, which suggests that discourse structure-inducing support expressions are in fact required (or at least strongly preferred) by the narrative *imparfait*, thus giving additional credit to the anaphoric view instead.

A first type of support expression (49)–(50) consists of “sequential narrative clauses” in the *imparfait*, a well-known type of syntactic structure enforcing strict temporal ordering provided a *Narration*, *Occasion* or *Result* discourse relation attaches the relative clause discourse referent to the matrix clause discourse referent. I am here adopting an SDRT-based analysis of the interaction of tenses with discourse structural parameters; see Caudal (2012) for a detailed discussion.

(49) *Il se jeta à ses genoux qu’il baisait éperdument à travers la robe de nuit* (Maupassant, “Un Coq chanta”, in Bres (1999, 6))

‘He threw himself at her knees, which he madly kissed<sub>IMPF</sub> through her nightgown.’

(50) *Rosalie approcha son front où Numa posait timidement les lèvres* (Daudet, *Numa Roumestan*, in Bres (1999, 6)).

‘Rosalie moved her forehead closer, where Numa shyly placed<sub>IMPF</sub> his lips.’

The second type of structure identified by Bres concerns *bona fide* causo-temporal subordinate clauses, also encoding overt temporal succession in (51)–(54).

- (51) *La course était achevée depuis 6 heures, lorsque le tour de France entamait l'étape la plus difficile de sa riche histoire* (*Le Monde*, in Bres (1999, 6)).  
 'The race had been over for 6 hours when the Tour de France began<sub>IMPf</sub> the most difficult stage of its rich history.'
- (52) *La malle de Saint-Omérois n'était pas au bout de la rue qu'Anatole sautait rue Lafayette* (Goncourt, *Manette Salomon*, in Bres (1999, 6)).  
 'Before the Saint-Omérois stage coach even reached<sub>IMPf</sub> the end of the street Anatole jumped<sub>IMPf</sub> down into rue Lafayette.'
- (53) *A peine venaient-ils de frapper à la porte du véhicule que des coups de feu claquaient* (*Midi Libre*, in Bres (1999, 6)).  
 'No sooner had they knocked<sub>IMPf</sub> on the vehicle's door than shots were fired<sub>IMPf</sub>.'
- (54) "Oh! il n'y a pas de danger!" *s'écriait avec une telle conviction le futur auteur dramatique que Bertrand faiblissait, lui accordait sa demande* (Goncourt, *Journal*, in Bres (1999, 7)).  
 "Oh, there is no danger!" the future playwright cried<sub>IMPf</sub> out with such conviction that Bertrand weakened<sub>IMPf</sub> granted<sub>IMPf</sub> him his request

The third type involves temporal duration modifiers, entailing a perfective-like interpretation and a strict ordering of events when combined with the *Narration*, *Occasion* or *Result* discourse relations (as is the case in (55)–(56)).

- (55) *La jeune fille marchait ainsi pendant une bonne heure, peut-être plus* (Souvestre/Allain, *Le train perdu*, in Gosselin (1999, 109))  
 'The girl walked<sub>IMPf</sub> thus for a good hour, maybe more.'
- (56) *Les deux hommes erraient ainsi quelques instants, gênés, bousculés*. (Souvestre/Allain, *Le train perdu*, in Gosselin (1999, 68))  
 'The two men wandered<sub>IMPf</sub> thus for a few moments, discomforted, jostled [by the crowd].'

The fourth and final type of narrative *imparfait* structure involves framing adverbials and temporal ordering adverbials and connectives, and is the most common type in Bres's corpus, accounting for 26% of overall occurrences. It is also the main type mentioned by Tasmowski-De Rijck (1985) and Berthonneau/Kleiber (1999), cf. (47)–(48).

But what should we make of these four different patterns? Crucially, Bres (1999) does not offer a single example of the *narrative imparfait* without these various syn-

tactic types of support material. Two structure types he lists are multi-clausal constructions, and two involve clause-level modifiers. Given their syntactic coherence, a first plausible solution to this puzzle that comes to mind would be to treat these datapoints as simple instances of conventionalised associations, i.e., collostructions (Stefanowitsch/Gries 2003). But this is not totally satisfying, as the support material seems to behave compositionally - and because ultimately, convincing examples without support material could possibly be found in a larger corpus.<sup>27</sup>

I will instead explore a different solution in the remainder of this section, based on what I will call *discourse structure-sensitive constructions*. But let us first take a closer look at the type of semantic contribution that can be ascribed to the support material in Bres’s (1999) inventory.

### 3.2 Semantic variation among support expressions and the contextual or discourse structural parameters at play in narrative *imparfait* patterns

Semantically speaking, I will argue here that although the various classes of support expressions identified in §3.1 exhibited some significant semantic differences, they also overlap in three important respects: (i) some semantically encode a “forward moving” temporal function, while others contextually, pragmatically come to have such a temporal shift function,<sup>28</sup> (ii) they all prompt or are associated with a perfective-like viewpoint interpretation of the *imparfait* inflection, and (iii) they are endowed with a temporal framing/temporal topic-introducing function in discourse, at least by enforcing a perfective viewpoint like reading – we will come back to this last point later. I will first focus on (i) and (ii), and make some important observations about the semantic differences among the various support expressions.

Concerning (ii), I believe it is obvious that narrative *imparfait* utterances do not describe imperfectively-viewed – i.e., “partial” – sections of a certain event: thus in (57) the described fall of Barzum’s body is complete (it cannot consist of a mere “slice” of the falling of Barzum’s body, so to speak), and the corresponding utterance cannot be complexified with a periphrastic progressive such as *être en train de* ‘be in the process of’. This shows that we are not dealing here with a “part-of” aspectual operator reading in the spirit of, e.g., Jayez (1999), or any other analysis

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<sup>27</sup> I must again thank an anonymous reviewer for bringing this to my attention.

<sup>28</sup> This empirical generalisation was most clearly established in Berthonneau/Kleiber (1994; 1999), hence the label *imparfait de rupture* ‘disruption *imparfait*’ in the literature; see also Tasmowski-De Rijck (1985).

of the semantics of imperfective viewpoints;<sup>29</sup> see, e.g., Berthonneau/Kleiber (1999) for a detailed critique of what can be called the “imperfective view”.

- (57) *Il y eut un choc sourd, un cri plaintif, puis le corps de Barzum s'écroulait en arrière.* (Souvestre/Alain, *Le train perdu*, ed. R. Laffont, Paris, 264)  
 ‘There was a dull shock, a plaintive cry, and then Barzum’s body toppled<sub>IMPF</sub> backwards.’

Turning to (i), I will argue that the (semantically encoded and/or contextually acquired) forward-moving function of narrative *imparfait* support expressions comes in different varieties. A first broad set of support expressions comprises those with an inherent, obligatory, temporal forward-shifting function that will trigger a narrative *imparfait* reading, sometimes regardless of contextual factors – this point is important. It contains multi-clausal structures such as (52)–(54), and caudo-temporal connectives and adverbials such as <duration> *plus tard* ‘<duration> later’, or *puis* ‘then’. Some of these expressions only encode a strict caudo-temporal ordering (alongside either *Narration*, *Occasion* or *Result*) and require a perfective viewpoint interpretation: this is the case with, e.g., *puis* ‘then’, *à peine* ‘no sooner. . .’ constructions; when combined with an *imparfait* marking, they monotonically trigger a narrative *imparfait* reading (this is not dependent on contextual parameters).

A second broad class contains aspectually ambiguous expressions that can give rise to both narrative/perfective and ordinary imperfective readings of the *imparfait*. Adverbials rigidly encoding temporal shifts are certainly the most prominent elements of this class, cf., e.g., <duration> *plus tard* ‘<duration> later’. Contextual parameters (especially world knowledge of causal chains/event ordering) will play a crucial role in determining which reading (perfective/sequence-of-events vs. imperfective/event overlap) should prevail. To illustrate this, compare (47) with (58): common sense entailment reasoning indicates that the run trace of the shouting event is temporally “encapsulated” and surrounded by that of the motion event in (58), but not in (47), so that *descendait* receives a standard imperfective

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<sup>29</sup> This does not, however, mean that the type of perfective meaning attached to the *imparfait* in such contexts comes with all the usual semantic bells and whistles associated with *bona fide* perfective viewpoints. Its coercion ability is thus very limited, e.g. to stative verbs, and it hardly ever occurs with stative predicates. This is completely expected, given Caudal’s (2020) findings regarding the slow pace at which inchoative readings have developed historically with other tenses having a perfective viewpoint semantic content, such as, e.g., the *passé composé*; I will leave this issue open for future research, though.

viewpoint reading only in (58).<sup>30</sup> (Causo-)temporal subordinates introduced by, e.g., *lorsque* or *quand* are the second most prominent members of this class; they, too, are ambiguous between a sequence-of-events, temporal shift/perfective reading, and a temporal overlap/imperfective reading (I will come back to this below).

- (58) *Quelques instants plus tard, Maigret descendait l'escalier, quand un cri retentit.*  
 ‘A few moments later, Maigret was coming<sub>IMPF</sub> down the stairs when a shout rang out.’

Absolute temporal adverbials such as *à X heure* ‘at X o’clock’ also pattern with <duration> *plus tard* adverbials and *lorsque/quand* biclausal structures, i.e., they are aspectually ambiguous expressions. They only differ in that knowledge about the temporal ordering of intervals plays a particularly salient role here (and causal chains, a minor role at best) in determining which of the temporal shift/sequence-of-events/perfective vs. temporal overlap/imperfective readings prevails.

Finally, duration adverbials constitute the third semantic class of support material for narrative *imparfait* patterns. They do not naturally have an event ordering ability (i.e., they do not have a temporal anchoring, forward-shifting function *per se*), but rather semantically enforce a perfective viewpoint reading of the *imparfait*, so that when combined with an appropriate context they can contribute to licensing a sequence-of-event/perfective (typically realised through the contextual establishment of *Narration*). The degree of acceptability of such sequences is far more dependent on contextual factors than any of the other types of support material (speakers are often reluctant to accept such utterances for this very reason, I believe). Without such a narrative (or iterative/habitual) context, duration adverbials are known to reject the *imparfait* (cf., e.g., Berthonneau/Kleiber (1999, 127)). I will argue that it comes about because of the temporal forward shift content seemingly required by the narrative *imparfait*. As duration markers do not possess such a meaning, it will have to be independently established in the context – and, indeed, an attested example like (55) is impossible to process without its original context, i.e., it must appear within a well-established, coherent sequence-of-event structure to be felicitous.

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<sup>30</sup> To take another example, adopting an SDRT-based approach (Asher/Lascarides 2003), in the Glue Logic component a discourse structural pragmatic principle such as MDC (*Maximize Discourse Coherence*) dictates that the relative clause in, e.g., (49) is interpreted as conveying temporal succession, so it must receive a narrative *imparfait* reading: world knowledge requires the kissing event to follow the kneeling event, which disambiguates the temporal contribution of the relative clause structure.



### 3.3 Introducing topics as key discourse structural parameters in the semantics of the narrative *imparfait*

I would now like to point out that in addition to discourse relations, a proper contextual interpretation of narrative *imparfait* sequences (esp. involving discourse relations such as *Occasion*, *Narration* and *Result*) requires another essential discourse structural parameter; namely an encompassing, coherent *discourse topic* (Asher/Prévot/Vieu 2007), such that a narrative *imparfait* enters a sequence-of-event chain. Thus, in (59) the discourse topic of the narrative *imparfait* sequence is the character's careful approach and it involves *Occasion* and *Narration* (i.e., it is a sequence-of-event-structured discourse). Furthermore, in this example – like in many narrative *imparfait* patterns (see e.g., (58)) – the narrative sequence involves elliptical VPs sharing a subject NP, rather than, e.g., “full” juxtaposed or coordinated clauses, all arrayed in temporal sequence – this is a strong syntactic signal for topic coherence and highlights the key role played by it in narrative *imparfait* patterns.

- (59) *Dans l'alignement de la hampe en pin, il vit le chapeau du Navajo apparaître tandis qu'il progressait lentement sur la pente. Puis ses épaules, sa ceinture. Il s'arrêtait. Regardait l'arbre abattu, la touffe de jeunes pins.* (Hillerman, *La voie de l'ennemi*, Rivages/Noir, 205)  
 '[Looking] in-line with the pine shaft, he saw the Navajo's hat appear as he slowly advanced<sub>IMPF</sub> down the slope. Then his shoulders, his belt. He stopped<sub>IMPF</sub>. He looked<sub>IMPF</sub> at the felled tree, the clump of young pine trees.'

Topic coherence is a well-known structural property of narrative discourses, as has been shown by several analyses of such phenomena within the SDRT framework (cf., e.g., Asher/Lascarides 2003, 163), including “narrative” discourse relations. The LIC (Logic of Information Content) SDRT axiom associated with the *Narration* relation is given in (60), where  $\sqcap$  calculates the common content of two formulas; this condition roughly says that discourse segments  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  have a contingent common content, i.e., they should share a topic. The richer this common content is, the more coherent the topic thus formed will be. I will call *narrative topics* the kind of discourse topic referents furthered by (coordinating) narrative relations such as *Narration*, *Occasion* and *Result*.<sup>31</sup> Bras/Le Draoulec/Vieu (2003) hold a slightly different

<sup>31</sup> See Asher/Vieu (2005) and Asher/Prévot/Vieu (2007) for a discussion of coordinating vs. subordinating relations in SDRT; for want of space I cannot offer a definition of these concepts here. Obviously, only coordinating narrative discourse relations can further a narrative topic, in the sense of “adding up” segments contributing to a temporally ordered, topically coherent accumulation on the right edge of the topic (subordinating relations will only add information *layers* to a narrative topic);

view and propose instead that topic referents are monotonically (and therefore, necessarily) introduced by the *Narration* relation; their representation, shown in (61), has the form of a LIP axiom (Logic of Information Processing, the semantics/pragmatics interface component of the theory where discourse relations are established in a discourse context  $\tau$ ).

$$(60) \quad \varphi_{\text{Narration}(\alpha,\beta)} \Rightarrow \neg \Box(K_\alpha \sqcap K_\beta)$$

$$(61) \quad \langle \tau, \alpha, \beta \rangle \wedge \text{Narration}(\alpha, \beta) \rightarrow \exists \gamma (\text{Topic}(\gamma, \alpha) \wedge \text{Topic}(\gamma, \beta)) \text{ (Bras/Le Draoulec/Vieu 2003)}$$

I will adhere to the latter, stronger view here, observing that in the absence of a coherent narrative topic supporting a sequence-of-event reading, narrative *imparfait* readings cannot arise, as was made abundantly clear in, e.g., Berthonneau/Kleiber (1999). This is illustrated in (62), where, given an empty context, it is impossible to find a contextually coherent narrative topic bringing together the sun rising and the weather deteriorating events, so that only *Background*( $\alpha, \beta$ ) can be established, not *Narration*( $\alpha, \beta$ ); in other words  $\beta$  cannot further the “sequence-of-event” discursive potential of  $\alpha$ . We cannot attach it to  $\alpha$  as another subsequent change-of-state event segment and *Narration* cannot be established –  $\beta$  can only be subordinated to as *Background* conveys a subordinating discourse relation.

$$(62) \quad \# \text{Le temps se dégrada } (\alpha) \text{ quand le soleil se levait } (\beta).$$

‘The weather deteriorated as the sun was rising’ (and not: ‘when the sun rose.’)

In view of this empirical generalisation, it is hardly surprising that framing adverbials are so frequent with narrative *imparfait* sequences in Bres’s corpus (an observation also central to Tasmowski’s and Kleiber/Berthonneau’s accounts). Now, following Vieu et al. (2005) and Asher/Prévot/Vieu (2007), who convincingly argue that, especially in an IP-adjunct position, the primary function of framing adverbials is to introduce a topic referent, I will hypothesise in what follows that introducing such a discourse topic is a key semantic function shared by all the support expressions associated with narrative *imparfait* sequences, including duration adverbials (these impose a fully-fledged perfective viewpoint meaning, which I take to be associated with a narrative topic – see below). This hypothesis should be complemented with the idea that where several topic referents are introduced

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they cannot extend it as a sequence of events (i.e., add overlapping or temporally included events, or add causally-reversed appendices to some segment under the narrative topic (by *Explanation*), etc.).

within the same segment or set of segments, they must unify as long as they further the current, already-established narrative (and the corresponding narrative topic referent ensuring its coherence).

Accounting for such discourse structural constraints should be a major concern for any theory of the narrative *imparfait*, regardless of its nature. Consider (63): like (62), this example does not have a narrative *imparfait* reading as it lacks a narrative topic, i.e., one associated with a temporal ordering of the two events it encompasses (in an empty context, one assumes that Monique's departure is prompted by Jean being on his way). Adding a framing adverbial would immediately license a narrative *imparfait* reading of (63), as it semantically denotes a temporal shift and therefore must contribute a topic ensuring the coherence of the narrative sequence (64). This strongly suggests that the very function of support material is to provide or at least facilitate the introduction of such a discourse topic. Therefore, unless a theory makes the successful emergence of the narrative *imparfait* reading dependent on the emergence of a narrative topic and connects this with the addition of support material, it runs the risk of predicting a narrative *imparfait* where one doesn't obtain, thus over-generating.

(63) *Monique quitta la ferme. #Jean gagnait les alpages.* (no narrative *imparfait* reading)

'Monique left the farm. Jean was going<sub>IMPF</sub> to the mountain pastures.'

(64) *Monique quitta la ferme. Le soir même, Jean gagnait les alpages.*

'Monique left the farm. That very evening, Jean went<sub>IMPF</sub> to the mountain pastures.'

Turning now to (65), it appears that the theory should also predict that support material is only absolutely required in the first segment of a narrative *imparfait* sequence. Otherwise, it runs the risk of actually under-generating by requiring all utterances (or at least VPs) in the narrative *imparfait* pattern to have support material triggering/introducing a narrative framing topic, whereas it is only required in the first segment (tensed utterance or VP) in the pattern.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Note that (59), a very literary and exceptional example with its "discontinuous syntax" nature, is unproblematic in this regard, in that the first segment of this narrative sequence in the *imparfait* is verbless and can therefore be assumed to have an underlying, silent *imparfait* verb form.

- (65) *A 18h42, Soper regagnait son stand. La voiture était poussée à l'intérieur de son box et toute l'équipe s'empressait d'enlever les éléments arrière de la carrosserie (Auto-Hebdo, 18.6.97, in de Saussure/Sthioul (1999))*  
 ‘At 18:42, Soper returned<sub>IMPF</sub> to his pit. The car was pushed<sub>IMPF</sub> inside his garage and the whole team rushed<sub>IMPF</sub> to remove the rear bodywork’

### 3.4 A key theoretical proposal: imperfective vs. perfective tenses denote different types of “discourse topics” (or why discourse-structural meaning must be incorporated into the denotation of tense-aspect forms, including that of the narrative *imparfait*)

Let us now turn to the core theoretical part of my account of the narrative *imparfait*. I will suggest viewing the latter as a *discourse structure-sensitive construction* (and a “weak” construction). This assessment rests upon a fundamental theoretical hypothesis that I suggest we make, namely that the semantic denotation of tense-aspect inflections incorporates discourse structural conditions. More specifically, the idea I would like to explore here is that the special, and in fact slightly deficient, perfective viewpoint interpretation I will ascribe to the *imparfait* in narrative patterns is paired with explicit discourse structural conditions in its denotation (and that the said denotation constitutes a separate, homonymous, conventionalised sense of the *imparfait*).

I will concentrate here on the discourse structural semantic conditions conveyed by the narrative *imparfait* and propose that they differ from the discourse structural conditions found in both the denotation of “normal” imperfective tenses (including the homophonous, past imperfective viewpoint entry for the *imparfait*) and the denotation of *bona fide*, fully-fledged perfective tenses. In other words, I will put forward an account suggesting that those special discourse structural properties originate in what are also special aspectual properties and will claim that variations in aspectual viewpoint meanings must correlate with (and determine) variations in discourse structural meanings. As the main focus of this paper is on context sensitivity, I will not attempt to provide a narrow, sentence-level truth conditional semantics for the possibly hybrid aspectual viewpoint that I assume the narrative *imparfait* might convey (or at least, trigger) as this would lead us too far astray, but it is certainly an important issue to investigate in future research (and a necessary defect of this paper!).

Directly associating discourse-structural effects with adverbials, connectives and even temporal subordinators was pioneered by the Toulouse SDRT group, cf.,

e.g., Bras/Le Draoulec/Vieu (2001). The following representation of the discourse structural role of the French temporal subordinator *quand* ‘when’ formulates this view as an inference rule incorporated into the LIP, i.e., not as an element of the denotation of *quand* itself:

- (66) *Quand*: [ $?R(\lambda, \alpha, \beta) \wedge \text{quand}(\alpha, \beta) \wedge \text{cause}(e_\alpha, e_\beta)$ ]  $\rightarrow$  [Narration( $\alpha, \beta$ )  $\wedge$  [( $e_\alpha < e_\beta$ )  $\vee$  ( $e_\alpha < e_\beta$ )]] (Caudal 2015, 191)

The approach I will pursue here is at once simpler and more radical, as I will propose that discourse structural conditions should be part of the at-issue denotation of most (if not all) aspectuo-temporal expressions, including tenses. This is in line with the now widely held view that many linguistic expressions, and certainly most tense-aspect expressions (not just a handful of prominently discursive items such as connectives or causo-temporal complementisers) should be credited with playing a much more directly semantic role in determining the discourse structure than was assumed in previous SDRT works on tense-aspect – this function was then assigned to the Glue Logic via general pragmatic principles such as, e.g., “Maximise Discourse Coherence” (Asher/Lascarides 2003).<sup>33</sup>

Let us reconsider the discourse structural meaning of *quand*. As already noted in §3.2, biclausal *quand* structures are (causo-)temporally ambiguous. They can either convey (causo-)temporal succession with a perfective viewpoint event reading, or temporal simultaneity with an imperfective viewpoint event reading. As a result, *quand* should receive two aspectuo-temporally and discourse structurally distinct lexical semantic entries.<sup>34</sup> And as we have seen above, this also means that LIP/Glue Logic will play a decisive role in determining which of these two readings of *quand* should prevail, including in *imparfait*-marked sequences, although it operates in a pre-existing, decidedly semantic discourse structural space.

I believe that treating complementisers, tenses, aspectuo-temporal modifiers, causo-temporal constructions, etc. as denoting discursive structural conditions offers enormous theoretical advantages,<sup>35</sup> as it makes it possible to capture seman-

<sup>33</sup> This reflects an attempt to give the discursive dimension of the SDRT framework a decisive grammatical turn, and capitalises on recent developments (Asher (2011) in particular) in lexical semantic meanings, notably those inspired by Danlos (2007).

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Traugott/Dasher (2002) for an account of this type of ambiguity in a grammaticalisation theory perspective, which strongly suggests these are indeed *homonymous* meanings.

<sup>35</sup> Note that early, partial precursors of this idea can be found in Caudal/Vetters’s (2006) view that tenses and connectives are extremely similar with respect to their discourse structural functions, and in Caudal/Roussarie’s (2005) intuition that tenses can only be associated with specific sets of discourse relations, albeit without the substantial theoretical and technical moves made here.

tic discourse structural differences between linguistic expressions. I will here assume that tenses can combine two types of discourse structural information in their semantic denotation:

1. Conditions relating to discourse relations proper: tenses denote an underspecified, but semantically constrained discourse relation  $Rel(\alpha, \beta)$  (verbal inflections tend to restrict the kind of discourse relation they can enter into, notably in relation to their aspectual meaning), where the novel discourse referent  $\beta$  is integrated into the discourse context by existential quantification (this is an extension of the classic Lewis-Kratzer view that tenses existentially bind event referents); and – most importantly for the matter in hand –:
2. Conditions relating to discourse topics (which are also binary rhetorical functions). The most significant question investigated here will be whether or not tenses can bind a discourse topic referent (though how they structurally relate to discourse topics should obviously matter too)

To avoid needlessly listing many different kinds of discourse structural meanings in the semantics of tenses, I will assume that discourse structural semantic functions are part of a multiple-inheritance-based hierarchy of semantic types, as in, e.g., the *Type Composition Logic* framework (Asher 2011).<sup>36</sup> This means, e.g., that the semantic functions corresponding to *Narration*, *Occasion* and *Result* can be subsumed under a common super-type in such a hierarchy, as they all appear in sequence-of-event discourse structural contexts.

I will here generalise Vieu et al.’s (2005) and Asher/Prévot/Vieu’s (2007) hypothesis that the semantics of certain aspectuo-temporal adverbials should relate to discourse topic referents (these authors argue that IP-adjunct adverbials contribute framing topics). More specifically, I will propose that past imperfective and past perfective viewpoint tenses essentially differ in how they relate to discourse topics, and, in particular, with respect to whether or not various types of aspectual viewpoints can introduce them in the discourse context or merely convey discourse structural conditions regarding them. This move can be seen as giving discourse structural flesh to the well-known neo-Reichenbachian analysis of past perfective vs. past imperfective tenses according to Klein (1994) using so-called “topic times”, which, I argue, directly relate to discourse topics.

I will first hypothesise that the Kleinian/neo-Reichenbachian intuition, according to which past perfective tenses denote a past topic time interval which includes the run trace of the described event (i.e.,  $t < now \wedge t < \tau(e)$ ), should be rendered by

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<sup>36</sup> Such an “IS-A” semantic type hierarchy for discourse relations *qua* (relational) functions over speech act type was proposed in Caudal/Roussarie (2005, 276) on comparable grounds.

giving past perfective viewpoint tenses the ability to introduce via existential quantification a *framing* topic (or FramingT) referent in the current discourse context, i.e., a topic discursively (and temporally) *encompassing* a complex, discursively coherent narrative; intuitively, semantic dominance is what being a framing topic is about.

Furthermore, I will hypothesise that the Kleinian/neo-Reichenbachian tenet, according to which the topic time interval is temporally included *within* the run trace of the event described by an imperfective tense-marked verb, should be rendered by ascribing to imperfective viewpoint-marked discourse segments the mere ability to relate to an independently introduced topic referent, and therefore they require “topic triggering” support expressions in the context. I believe that this naturally follows from the fact that *Background* and *Explanation* (two prominent narrative discourse relations associated with imperfective segments) are subordinating discourse relations (Fabricius-Hansen et al. 2005; Asher/Prévot/Vieu 2007) and are therefore dependent on another, independently introduced discourse referent in order to acquire topic coherence (it can be a framing topic itself, or a discourse segment introducing a framing topic). By definition, *Background* must relate a novel imperfective segment to an independently established perfective segment,<sup>37</sup> which, according to my previous hypothesis regarding perfective viewpoints, triggers a *FramingT* topic referent per se.<sup>38</sup> I will argue that as the *Background* segment is discursively subordinated to the perfective segment it attaches to, it must also be dominated by the *FramingT* topic referent introduced by the latter, while still temporally encapsulating the associated perfective event description. This can be seen in an example such as (67), where  $\pi_2$  is discursively subordinated to segment  $\pi_1$ , that is, to the “main event” segment in the overall narrative topic associated with this discourse. Yet the run trace of  $e_{\pi_2}$  temporally encapsulates the run traces of  $e_{\pi_1}$ ,  $e_{\pi_3}$  and  $e_{\pi_4}$  (all associated with “foregrounded”, perfective segments), though not those of  $e_{\pi_5}$  and  $e_{\pi_6}$ , the corresponding foregrounded segments furthering the *FramingT*, narrative topic introduced by  $\pi_1$  (while each perfective-marked segment contributes a *FramingT* topic referent in (67), these are “merged” with the initial topic referent introduced by  $\pi_1$ ; see Asher/Prévot/Vieu (2007) for more on the SDRT management of framing topics).

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<sup>37</sup> This phenomenon also lies at the foundation of the so-called “anaphoric” theory of imperfectivity.

<sup>38</sup> See also Asher/Prévot/Vieu (2007, 22), who similarly claim that “as far as Background<sub>forward</sub> is concerned (. . .), introduction of the FT [framing topic] is triggered by the attachment of the eventive clause to the stative one”.

- (67) *Marie sortit se promener* ( $\pi_1$ ). *Il pleuvait* ( $\pi_2$ ). *Elle sortit son parapluie* ( $\pi_3$ ). *Elle marcha longtemps* ( $\pi_4$ ). *L'averse s'arrêta* ( $\pi_5$ ). *Marie rangea son parapluie* ( $\pi_6$ ).  
 ‘Mary went out<sub>PERF</sub> for a walk. It was raining<sub>IMPF</sub>. She took<sub>PERF</sub> out her umbrella. She walked<sub>PERF</sub> for a long time. The rain stopped<sub>PERF</sub>. Mary put<sub>PERF</sub> her umbrella away.’

To put it briefly, despite being temporally encapsulating, *Background* imperfective segments are discursively dominated by, and dependent on, a framing topic referent, typically introduced into the context by a perfective-marked utterance or by an overt temporal adverbial, for they can attach to either a perfective segment or to a temporal adverbial – and, unsurprisingly, the latter have been claimed to introduce framing topic referents, especially in an IP-adjunct position (Asher/Prévot/Vieu 2007, 20); cf. (68), where *ce jour-là* ‘on that day’ introduces such a framing topic referent to which a *Background* segment attaches (and is subordinated),<sup>39</sup> with subsequent perfective segments further elaborating it. Technically, this entails that imperfective viewpoint tenses do not existentially bind framing topics, although they must relate to one.

- (68) *Ce jour-là, il pleuvait. Marie prit son parapluie, et sortit se promener.*  
 ‘On that day, it was raining<sub>IMPF</sub>. Marie took<sub>PERF</sub> her umbrella, and went out<sub>PERF</sub> for a walk.’

Drawing on the above reasoning, and on the additional, diachronic assumption that narrative *imparfait* utterances involve a type of viewpoint meaning currently evolving towards perfectivity, (69) offers a tentative lexical semantic entry for the narrative reading of the *imparfait*. Given a discourse context  $\tau$  containing two segments  $\beta$ ,  $\alpha$  and a topic  $\gamma$ ,  $\beta:[. . .V. . .]$  indicates that  $V$  is the event predicate underlying segment  $\beta$ . Viewpoint function *Impf\_Perf(V)* states that the event predicate denoted by the underlying verb receives a hybrid, (partially) perfective-like/imperfective-like viewpoint meaning<sup>40</sup> specific to the narrative *imparfait*. *Sequence\_of\_Event\_Rel* denotes the super-type for all sequence-of-event discourse relations able to further a narrative topic (*Narration, Occasion, Result*) – a narrative *imparfait*

<sup>39</sup> The “attachment site” function of such fronted adverbials was, of course, well known from earlier works, cf., e.g., Berthonneau/Kleiber (1999, 128).

<sup>40</sup> See note 29 for some speculation on the actual semantics of this “hybrid” aspectual. I will not say any more here, though, as this issue has (complex) ramifications not entirely relevant to the discourse structural focus of this paper.



reading requires a forward temporal shift.<sup>41</sup> Condition *Narrative\_FramingT*( $\beta, \gamma$ ) specifies that  $\beta$  must be subordinated to/controlled by an independently introduced (framing) narrative topic  $\gamma$  in discourse context  $\tau$  (I am assuming that a narrative framing topic must involve at least one sequence of events). Finally, conditions  $\alpha=? \wedge \gamma=?$  indicate that these discourse referents are still unbound.  $\alpha$  is a free variable because *Narrative\_Rel* is still in need of an attachment segment  $\alpha$  (yet to be provided by the context in which  $\beta$  will be incorporated), whereas – and this is crucial –  $\beta$  is free because the denotation of the narrative *imparfait* cannot introduce/existentially bind the framing topic to which it relates (i.e., is subordinated to): it is not (or not yet, at least) a “topically” autonomous tense, unlike fully-fledged perfective viewpoint tenses.<sup>42</sup>

(69) Lexical semantic denotation of the narrative *imparfait* (NARR.IMPF) in context  $\tau$ :

$$\text{NARR.IMPF} =_{\text{def}} \exists \beta([\beta: [ . . V . . ] \wedge \text{Impf\_Perf}(V)] \rightarrow [\text{Sequence\_of\_Event\_Rel}(\alpha, \beta) \wedge \text{Narrative\_FramingT}(\beta, \gamma) \wedge \alpha=? \wedge \gamma=?])$$

Assuming that the felicity of a narrative *imparfait* crucially depends on  $\gamma$  receiving a contextual value has, I think, the advantage of predicting that agrammatical readings only arise if an imperfective reading of the *imparfait* cannot be alternatively established (e.g., a precise duration adverbial, as in (55), is not enough to warrant a narrative *imparfait* reading). Otherwise, failure to assign a contextual value to  $\gamma$  or to establish a discourse relation will simply result in an incoherent (not infelicitous) discourse, in line with recurrent observations at least since Tasmowski-De Rijck (1985).<sup>43</sup>

Let us summarise. My analysis involves two key ingredients in addition to the general idea that tenses denote discourse structural conditions and the hypothe-

<sup>41</sup> Hence the descriptive term “*imparfait de rupture*” used by Tasmowski-De Rijck, Kleiber/Berthonneau, etc.

<sup>42</sup> (69) also sharply differs from the axiom on *Narration* formulated in (61), where  $\exists \gamma$  existentially binds the topic referent  $\gamma$ . I will assume, for my part, that semantic axioms related to *Narration*, *Occasion* and *Result* may not introduce any topic referent, in spite of their sequence-of-effect nature. I believe that the introduction of narrative topic referents is possibly controlled by overt grammatical or lexical material.

<sup>43</sup> I must confess that it is still unclear to me whether or not the effect of support material is always absolutely categorical. Berthonneau/Kleiber (1999) offer numerous examples suggesting that removing support material blocks any narrative *imparfait* reading, so it seems to be at least near-categorical. However, establishing a proper, coherent narrative topic depends on a host of contextual factors. Therefore, while the presence of support expressions is very probably necessary, it should be borne in mind that it is by no means sufficient.

sis that the Kleinian topic time approach to aspect actually has a strong discourse structural basis as well. I argue that the special lexical entry attached to the narrative reading of the *imparfait* denotes a *deficient* (not fully-fledged) perfective viewpoint content because its discourse structural conditions are intermediate between those of the imperfective and perfective viewpoint tenses. Specifically, I argue that the meaning of the narrative *imparfait* requires independent triggers to introduce the narrative framing topic it relates to. Unlike a perfective tense, and like an imperfective tense, its semantics cannot introduce (i.e., existentially bind) a framing topic referent in context  $\tau$ . These independent triggers need to be provided by the various types of support expressions identified in §3.2 and §3.3 – provided context coherence, world knowledge, etc. do not stand in the way.<sup>44</sup> Last but not least, note that (69) correctly predicts that such framing topic triggers (i.e., support expressions) are only needed in the first segment of a narrative *imparfait* sequence, as shown in, e.g., (65). Indeed, once a topic referent has been introduced in context  $\tau$ , additional applications of (69) will, because of additional, subsequent *imparfait* forms, be able to access the said topic referent in  $\tau$ , provided narrative coherence is preserved – thereby ensuring that the topic variable  $\gamma$  in (69) receives a value.

Finally, note that in the Kleiber/Berthonneau account, the “anaphoric” nature of the narrative *imparfait* is deprived of any aspectual import; this is where my analysis most differs from theirs – I am claiming that context-sensitivity is grounded in an ongoing aspectual change and has to do with the narrative *imparfait* having retained some key discourse structural properties of an imperfective viewpoint tense (hence its “anaphoricity”) while having partially acquired the truth-conditional sentence-level aspectual semantics of a perfective tense.

## 4 Conclusion

With the sequential analysis of two different so-called “uses” of the *imparfait* presented here, I hope to have established that there is no principled reason to even

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<sup>44</sup> For instance, when supporting markers possess aspectually ambiguous lexical entries (cf. *lorsque* or *quand*), only their perfective viewpoint, sequence-of-event readings will have the ability to bind a topic referent. If, due to, e.g., the integration of linguistic information and world knowledge in the Glue Logic (cf. de Saussure/Sthioul (1999) for a related, relevance theory-based investigation of such issues), the MDC principle does not favour a perfective viewpoint, sequence-of-event reading of the support expression, then a framing topic referent cannot be introduced and a narrative *imparfait* reading is ruled out. I believe this can explain why even attested instances of narrative *imparfait* may sound odd or are difficult to process, especially when considered outside a somewhat extended context.

consider believing that context-sensitivity and constructionalisation (or conventionalised form-meaning pairings) are mutually exclusive, water-tight, form-meaning pairing mechanisms, and that many so-called “tense uses” are probably associated with both mechanisms.

With respect to the study of the conventionalised meanings of tenses (or, if you will, the lexicon-morphosyntax/semantics interface for inflected utterances), I think we can safely conclude from this comparative analysis that at least two lexico-syntactic subtypes of form-meaning pairings with an at least partially conventionalised basis should be distinguished:

- (i) *bona fide* “strong” complex constructions involving a complex tensed form, as illustrated by the set of inflected bouletic constructions (either purely bouletic or combining bouletic and motion/communication-cum-purpose meanings) found in attenuative *imparfait* structures (in effect, inherently inflected discontinuous lexicalised verbal roots), and
- (ii) separate conventionalised meanings directly attached to a tense morpheme, which can be considered constructions only in the weaker sense of Michaelis (2000; 2004; 2011) and are clear cases of morphological homonymy. If one assumes a lexicalised grammatical framework, in the vein of LFG or HPSG, the narrative *imparfait* would be encoded in a lexical entry separate from the standard, straightforwardly past imperfective *imparfait*; not so for the so-called “attenuative *imparfait*”, which is not a “tense use” at all, as it involves conventionalised inflected constructions.

I have shown that while both attenuative and narrative *imparfait* patterns involve a conventionalised form/meaning pairing, their respective interpretations remain essentially context-sensitive, in the sense that their construal as a saturated interpretation requires complex contextual parameters. These often play the part of “licensing” – i.e. enabling – parameters by contributing to the binding of so-far unbounded variables, etc., and do not lead to what could be described as polysemy *qua* contextual variability. Although some variability was discovered for attenuative *imparfait* structures, they rather point to sub-types of conventionalised constructions, with “plain” bouletic constructions differing from motion/communication-cum-purpose constructions in their respective coded meanings. Otherwise, the contextualisation of these “uses” boils down to that of run-of-the-mill semantic compositionality, discourse structure construal or other dynamic pragmatic processes.

Due to their context-sensitivity, so-called “tense uses” cannot be analysed in simple static semantic terms as constructions with a “rigid” denotation. They need to be dealt with using, e.g., a dynamic pragmatic approach and/or an SDRT-style discourse structural approach at the semantics/pragmatics interface. Or to put things the other around, in spite of their (weak or strong) constructional nature, their

interpretation must mobilise a variety of context-sensitive mechanisms – see for instance the role played by Portner’s dynamic pragmatic theory of commitment slates in my analysis of attenuative *imparfait* structures (§2), or that of framing topics and discourse relations in my analysis of the narrative *imparfait* sequences (§3) (the narrative *imparfait* conventionalised meaning constituting what I have called a “discourse structure-sensitive construction”). While this paper has focused on contemporary French data, I believe similar phenomena can easily be identified both diachronically and crosslinguistically – and can probably be analysed along the same lines. Attenuative meanings are thus not typologically rare and often seem to evolve in connection with categories not unrelated to past volitionals, e.g., proximative volitionals,<sup>45</sup> and volitionals combined with an otherwise avertive-decessive particle.<sup>46</sup> However, all of these categories point to a possible “presently invalid”, “contrary to fact” expression based on a bouletic verbal root combined with a past temporal element or past inflection having developed into a “presently relevant” use in order to acquire an attenuation function.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, I believe that the diachronically and crosslinguistically common interaction between discourse-sensitive particles (or causo-temporal markers in general) and tense uses offers a very promising empirical domain for identifying other conventionalised, discourse-structural sensitive meanings for tenses.<sup>48</sup>

The above investigation has also shed light on the existence of very different ways in which semantic vs. pragmatic contents can relate to conventionalisation.

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45 E.g., *nguwān-ampa* ‘almost-want’ + V patterns in Yankuntjatjara, meaning ‘I would rather like to V [attenuated]’ (Goddard 1992, 102).

46 Cf. the Papago avertive particle /čim/ combined with a past volitional (‘I wanted to V’), which means something like ‘I wanted to V’, i.e., it has an attenuated requested meaning, with /čim/ + V-past normally receiving a decessive past (‘used to V’) or avertive meaning (‘was going to V but didn’t’) (Hale 1969, 206) and not a plain past meaning.

47 It should be noted that past volitionals, proximatives, counterfactuals and avertives often have connected developmental paths, crosslinguistically speaking (cf., e.g., Caudal 2023, which is not accidental, of course).

48 To give an example, consider my own account of the evolution of the *passé composé* in Old French (Caudal 2015), where I observed that narrative uses of this tense were initially restricted to a variety of syntactic patterns, all related to causo-temporal ordering (e.g., causo-temporal biclausal *quand* structures). This is strikingly reminiscent of the narrative *imparfait* being dependent on (semantically similar) supporting material. I now believe this stems from the fact that the *passé composé* had retained certain key properties of resultative tenses, i.e., perfects: these are essentially derived from *imperfective* resultative constructions and therefore do not inherently possess the ability to introduce a narrative framing topic. This explains why support material possessing the ability to introduce a framing topic referent was required to license those early narrative uses in Old French – the requirement was relaxed when the *passé composé* was later reanalysed as possessing a fully-fledged perfective component of meaning, i.e., when it became able to introduce a narrative framing topic by itself.

I have therefore proposed that attenuative *imparfait* structures be modelled as involving *conventionalised implicatures* in a multi-dimensional semantic framework (Gutzmann 2015) so as to reflect on the semanticisation of a former defeasible, contextual implicature from which I believe they stem. In contrast, narrative *imparfait* patterns require highly elaborate discourse structural conditions, jointly determined by explicit semantic content encoded by the conventionalised meaning of the narrative *imparfait* itself (plus some supporting material) and by the integration of linguistic information and world knowledge at the semantics/pragmatics interface (*via* the so-called SDRT Glue Logic).

Before closing this paper, I believe it is important to point out that it has potentially far-reaching theoretical consequences for the study of tense-aspect phenomena in discourse and in general for our understanding of the interaction between discourse structure and the grammar (as well as the lexicon) of tense-aspect. A decade or two ago, a significant portion of formal works on tense-aspect phenomena in discourse were couched in the SDRT framework – see Caudal (2012) for a review – and logically embraced the then prevalent view that the Glue Logic should be given the upper hand in computing discourse structural questions, including tense-aspect inflections. Only comparatively minor changes to this view have generally been introduced to those SDRT analyses of tense-aspect phenomena, and on a purely lexical basis, with, e.g., the meaning of certain discourse connectives being used as “triggers” for inferring discourse relations. More recently, the importance of the Glue Logic in the construal of discourse structural interpretation has been *de facto* downplayed in proposals ascribing a discourse structural denotation to various types of (non-tense-aspect) lexical or lexico-grammatical expressions.<sup>49</sup> Inspired by those developments, I have attempted here to lay partial, preliminary foundations for building a substantially *grammatical* SDRT approach to the discourse structural properties of tenses, and have striven to turn the tables on the old SDRT “information flow” from tense-aspect forms to their contextual interpretation in the LIP,<sup>50</sup> by claiming that:

- many tense-aspect expressions, including purely grammatical expressions (and first and foremost, tenses), should incorporate discourse structural conditions in their denotation

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<sup>49</sup> See for instance the use of discourse structural meaning in the lexical semantic representations of aspectual light verbs in Asher (2011, 240–245), or in the lexical semantic treatment of so-called “discourse verbs” (e.g., *precede*, *cause*, *follow*) and “discourse prepositions” (cf., e.g., *John died of cancer*) in Danlos (2007).

<sup>50</sup> Including in my own work, even in my (modest) attempt (Caudal 2012) at improving on the classic SDRT information-flow in the analysis of tenses in discourse; in many respects, the latter has remained fundamentally unchanged since Lascarides/Asher’s (1993) seminal proposal.

- when it comes to the determination of event ordering and aspectuo-temporal meaning in discourse, special attention should be paid to the aspectual content of tenses,<sup>51</sup> because aspectual viewpoint plays a fundamental role in the construal of *topic structures*, which are fundamentally related to “topic time” in a theory of viewpoint aspect in the vein of Klein (1994).
- the role of “common sense entailment” reasoning in the LIP is essentially to narrow down and/or enrich the interpretative, discursive space initially shaped by grammatical means (by “filtering out” unwanted semantic possibilities and/or by specifying incomplete or missing information, i.e., enriching the semantically-encoded information). The result of this is that the importance of the part played by dynamic processes in the pragmatics or semantics/pragmatics interface is variable. For instance, the importance of LIP processes is relative to, and dependent on, the specificity of the discourse structural semantic contribution of certain linguistic items (some leave open a large number of discursive possibilities, while others can be quite specific and do not require additional interpretative processes at the semantics/pragmatics interface).

The above claims (especially the second) can be seen as bringing to fruition a line of analysis structuring much of my earlier work on tenses, notably collaborative work with Laurent Roussarie and Carl Vetters – see in particular the notion of tenses being *illocutionary viewpoint functions* put forward in Caudal/Roussarie (2005), and the idea defended in Caudal/Vetters (2006) that tenses and connectives should be treated equally with respect to their discourse structural function. But, of course, these hypotheses need to be examined with additional phenomena and must await future work to prove their worth (or not!).

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Sarah Dessì Schmid and Lydia Momma

# Progressivity between lexicon, grammar and context

**Abstract:** This paper deals with the properties and restrictions of the Italian progressive verbal periphrasis *stare* + gerund, relating them to the question of the degree of grammaticality this construction has reached in the verbal system of Italian, and discusses the reasons for speakers' preferences in their use in discourse. In analysing the processes of grammaticalisation of verbal periphrases, we refer to a distinction introduced by Dessì Schmid (2021): the level of internal structure and the level of system. After introducing progressivity as a subcategory of imperfectivity, and *stare* + gerund as a means of expressing it (§2), its (in)compatibility with *states* is examined (§3). This investigation is based on data elicited in several broad-based acceptability studies (§4). In contrast to common interpretations, different *states* and state types are shown to be compatible with Italian *stare* + gerund to varying degrees and attest to the weakening of one of the strictest semantic restrictions of this construction. The brief concluding remarks (§5) summarise the theoretical implications of the data analysis.

**Keywords:** Progressivity, grammaticalisation, verbal periphrasis, Italian *stare* + gerund, stative verbs

## 1 Introduction

Aspectual content is expressed in the world's languages in different ways: primarily through the opposition between perfective and imperfective (or unboundedness and boundedness), but also through the opposition between the subtypes of these two categories. Not all languages, however, express aspectual content through grammatical means.<sup>1</sup> Italian, like the other Romance languages, has various linguistic means of expressing progressivity, traditionally considered a subcategory of the imperfective

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<sup>1</sup> This revives the classical, though not uncontroversial question of the obligatory nature of grammatical forms (cf. Bybee 1985; Haspelmath/Sims 2010): in a language with grammaticalised aspectual opposition, speakers have to choose between a perfective and an imperfective form. This is the case in the Romance verbal system only on the past temporal level.

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(see, e.g., Bertinetto 1986): synthetic imperfective forms of verbal inflection (particularly the present and imperfect indicative, as in (1)); and several analytic constructions, the so-called verbal periphrases (including the *stare* + gerund construction, as in (2)), which, as is well known, involve both grammar and lexicon, hence, both obligatoriness and optionality (see Squartini 1998; Dessi Schmid 2014; 2019):<sup>2</sup>

(1) It. *Che fa/faceva Leo?*  
 What [do.PRES/IMP.3.SG]PROG Leo  
 ‘What is/was Leo doing?’

(2) It. *Che sta/stava facendo Leo?*  
 What [stay.AUX.PRES/IMP.3.SG do.GER]prog Leo  
 ‘What is/was Leo doing?’

This paper focusses on an analysis of the construction *stare* + gerund and investigates its different functions, its semantic and morpho-syntactic restrictions and its temporal-aspectual status in the verbal system of contemporary Italian; in other words, the degree of grammaticality it has reached and speakers’ preferences for using this construction in increasingly wider communicative contexts.

After briefly presenting the semantic-functional category that is progressivity (§2), we will discuss in detail the question of the degree of grammaticality reached by the verbal periphrasis *stare* + gerund in Italian (§3). In fact, although scholars are largely in agreement in considering it to be highly grammaticalised<sup>3</sup> and increasingly used in neo-standard Italian (cf., e.g., Berruto 2017, 41), the fact that it competes with imperfective-progressive inflectional forms of the Italian verbal

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<sup>2</sup> Traditionally a main distinction is assumed between grammatical and lexical units: inflection expresses certain values of grammatical categories that are obligatory in the grammar of individual languages. In contrast, the use of simple or complex lexemes is not obligatory (i.e. it is optional) in a syntactic context. However, the definition of obligatoriness is fraught with many problems, primarily because inflection can be required by syntax in different ways (inherently or contextually obligatorily; see, e.g., Haspelmath/Sims 2010, 81–109). Since not all verbal periphrases have the same degree of grammaticality (on the contrary, in some cases they retain clear lexical features), they exemplarily show how problematic the traditional distinction between grammatical and lexical units is when taken in the strict sense (see Dessi Schmid 2014; 2019).

<sup>3</sup> Regarding the stage of grammaticalisation of the progressive periphrasis in Italian, various positions between two extremes are held: on the one hand, Marchand (1955) does not assign any level of grammaticality to the construction and relegates it to the level of style; on the other hand, Blücher (1973) equates *stare* + gerund with English continuous forms. Squartini (1998), Natale (2009; 2012) and Dessi Schmid (2011) consider the construction to be highly grammaticalised, but not comparable to the English construction, which is obligatory.

system shows that its use is (still) optional and non-obligatory (i.e. not grammatical in the strict sense).

Based on data obtained from corpus analyses and offline experiments (acceptability tests) conducted as part of a large research project,<sup>4</sup> and contrary to a well-known thesis, we will show that the progressive verbal periphrasis is losing one of its most characteristic restrictions: incompatibility with stative verbs. Analysis of the interaction between the aspectual and actional characteristics of the various components of *stare* + gerund and other elements in the utterance (temporal adverbials, intensifiers, . . .) and in the communicative context in general, will allow us, on the one hand, to draw attention to the fact that it is precisely the investigation of the semantic and morpho-syntactic restrictions of verbal periphrases that proves particularly useful for analysing grammaticalisation processes, and on the other hand, to clarify the sense in which the relaxation of semantic restrictions can be correlated with an increase in the degree of grammaticality of a construction (and therefore with its progress in the process of grammaticalisation).

It will also allow us to clarify how and why progress in the grammaticalisation of a construction and its increased use are closely connected with each other. To this end, two levels will be distinguished in the analysis of the processes of grammaticalisation of verbal periphrases in general and *stare* + gerund in particular (cf. Dessi Schmid 2021): 1) the level of the internal structure, of the components of the construction; 2) the level of the system, of the integration of the construction as a whole into the verbal system of the language in question. The research presented here therefore contributes, not least, to the empirical verification of certain hypotheses formulated within theories of the grammaticalisation of verbal periphrases.

## 2 Progressivity and its means of expression in Italian

The Italian verbal system is typically defined as “temporal-aspectual”,<sup>5</sup> that is, the synthetic and analytic forms of verb tenses express both temporal and aspectual

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4 The results reported in this article form part of the research project C7 “Verbal and Nominal Aspectuality between Lexicon and Grammar” led by Wiltrud Mihatsch (nominal domain) and Sarah Dessi Schmid (verbal domain) within the framework of the Tübingen SFB 833 “The Construction of Meaning – The Dynamics and Adaptivity of Linguistic Structures” (funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) – SFB 833, 2017–2021 – project ID 75650358).

5 See, e.g., Bertinetto (1986; 1997), but also various publications in Romance studies, such as Coseriu (1976).

contents. “Imperfectivity” and “perfectivity” (e.g. Comrie 1976; Bertinetto 1986) – or *unboundedness* and *boundedness* as they are called in the more recent cognitivist approaches (e.g. Bickel 1997; Langacker 1987; 2008; Smith 1991; Talmy 1996; 2000)<sup>6</sup> – are considered subparts of the functional category *aspectuality*, defined as the universal content category by means of which speakers linguistically structure the manner of the development and the distribution of a state of affairs in time. It contains that multifaceted information which relates to the temporal structuring of a given state of affairs, independently of any reference to the point of speech (cf. Dessi Schmid 2014, 79; 2019, 81).

We usually speak of imperfectivity (*unboundedness*) when a state of affairs is presented in its constitutive phase (i.e. in progress, without focussing on the start or end point, as in Figure 1); perfectivity (*boundedness*), instead, is when the state of affairs is presented in its entirety and as concluded (i.e. focussing on its initial and final delimitation, as in Figure 2):



Figure 1: *Imperfectivity*.



Figure 2: *Perfectivity*.

In the case of *progressivity* – generally considered, along with *habituality* and *continuity*, as a subcategory of imperfectivity (cf. Bertinetto 1986, 120–127) – the focus within the ongoing state of affairs is on one (Figure 3) or several constitutive moments (hence an interval, Figure 4):



Figure 3: *Progressivity I*.



Figure 4: *Progressivity II*.

Bertinetto (1995, but see also Bertinetto/Ebert/De Groot 2000) distinguishes three main types of progressivity: 1) the focalised type – Foc-PROG, whereby an event is

<sup>6</sup> “The terms [perfective and imperfective – SDS/LM] reflect the conceptual characterization of perfectives as being bounded in time, whereas imperfectives are not specifically bounded. Moreover, perfectives construe the profiled relationship as internally heterogeneous, involving some kind of change through time, while imperfectives construe it as homogeneous, the continuation through time of a stable situation” (Langacker 2008, 147).

viewed as ongoing at a single point in time, a “focalisation point”, as in (3); the durative type – Dur-PROG, whereby an ongoing event is evaluated relative to a larger interval of time, as in (4); the absentive type – ABSV, whereby an event is occurring in a place displaced from the deictic centre, as in (5).<sup>7</sup>

(3) It. *Leo sta giocando*

Leo [stay.AUX.PRES.3.SG play.GER]IMP/FOC-PROG

*con Achille nel giardino di Anna.*

with Achilles in-the garden of Anna

‘Leo is playing with Achilles in Anna’s garden.’

(4) It. *Non sai con quel monello! quello che*

Not know.3.SG with that rascal that which

*sto sopportando*

[stay.AUX.PRES.1.SG put up with.GER]IMP/DUR-PROG

‘You don’t know what I’m putting up with, with that little rascal!’

(5) It. *Leo non c’è, è a giocare*

Leo not there-is [be.AUX.PRES.3.SG play.INF]IMP/ABSV

*con Anna e Achille.*

with Anna and Achilles.

‘Leo is not here, he is playing with Anna and Achilles.’

If we take a closer look at these progressive markers – i.e. the formal means by which progressive aspectual content is expressed in examples (3)–(5) – a number of questions arise. First of all: a) Are there specific markers for expressing progressivity in Italian? If so, are they mono- or polyfunctional? b) Do they coexist with other – (generally imperfective) polyfunctional – means of expression? c) In which contexts and for what reasons do speakers prefer one or another means of expression?

Even within closely related languages, in fact, there are notable differences in the ways progressivity is expressed. These may concern, for example, the existence (or absence) of specific progressive markers or general imperfective markers and the use of (or preference for) them, or, in addition, the monofunctionality or polyfunctionality of a progressive marker (i.e. whether it can express only one or several of the functions mentioned).

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<sup>7</sup> In this article, we will not deal with the absentive type.



Examples (3) and (4) illustrate the multifunctionality of the *stare* + gerund periphrasis, with which the first two types of progressivity (Foc-PROG and Dur-PROG) can be expressed:<sup>8</sup> the periphrasis represents the specific, or rather “specialised” form for expressing progressivity. Example (5) also shows that with *essere* + *a* + infinitive Italian also has a construction to express the absensive – a type for which specialised forms are only rarely found in the world’s languages (cf. De Groot 2000, 695). Finally, all the examples (3)–(5) contain alternative, non-obligatory forms of expressing progressiveness: we said at the beginning of this article that in Italian progressive verbal periphrases coexist and compete with the imperfective forms of verbal inflection. The latter are, however, remarkably multifunctional – not only because they are used to express different types of progressivity, but also because they realise two other subcategories of imperfectivity: habituality and continuity.

A further look at examples (1)–(2) prompts discussion of the problem of economy and/or redundancy with respect to the existence of alternative forms; in other words it allows us to question whether they are advantageous. If multifunctional forms such as the present and the imperfect indicative are apparently very economical in terms of learning and, therefore, in their use, they require a broader context to disambiguate their interpretation. Example (1) (repeated below as (6)) illustrates that it is only the presence of further context (e.g. respectively, “when Anna rang the doorbell”, “every Friday” and “while you were explaining to him the use of the imperfective aspect non-stop for three hours”) that allows us to determine unequivocally whether the meaning is progressive imperfectivity or another type of imperfectivity:

- (6) It. *Che fa / faceva Leo?* [context: *quando Anna ha suonato alla porta /*  
 [do.PRES/IMP.3.SG]PROG *when Anna rang the doorbell. . .*]  
 It. *Che fa / faceva Leo?* [context: *tutti i venerdì / every Friday*]  
 [do.PRES/IMP.3.SG]HABIT  
 It. *Che fa / faceva Leo?* [context: *mentre gli spiegavi l’uso*  
 [do.PRES/IMP.3.SG]CONT *dell’imperfetto per tre ore senza pausa / while*  
*you were explaining to him the use of the*  
*imperfective aspect non-stop for three hours]*

Analytic constructions, in contrast, are specialised for expressing progressivity and do not require further context to resolve functional ambiguities, as shown in example (2) (repeated below as (7)), which contains *stare* + gerund in Foc-PROG function:

<sup>8</sup> Note, however, that it is mainly used to express the first type of progressivity (Foc-PROG).

(7) It. *Che sta / stava facendo Leo?*

[stay.AUX.PRES/IMP.3.SG do.GER]PROG

The use of this analytic construction – although not structurally obligatory and materially somewhat long-winded – therefore only apparently violates the principle of linguistic economy, because it is economical at another level.

### 3 Progressive verbal periphrasis: Frequency, degree of grammaticalisation and (non) obligatoriness

The following Romance constructions

Fr. *être en train de* + infinitive

It. *stare* + gerund

Sp. *estar* + gerund

are all verbal periphrases expressing progressivity, but with significant synchronic differences in usage and frequency of occurrence in their respective languages and in their relative degree of grammaticalisation.<sup>9</sup> This translates into differences in their morphosyntactic and semantic restrictions, the extent of their integration into their respective verbal systems and their obligatoriness or optionality in their respective languages.

Furthermore, these constructions have followed different diachronic paths of grammaticalisation (see, e.g., Squartini 1998, 73–90) and their absolute frequency of use has increased significantly.

With regard to the frequency of use of *stare* + gerund in Italian, several studies (including some of our own pilot studies conducted on a broad corpus basis) clearly attest to an absolute and relative increase in both the written (literature and journalism) and oral domains. This is also the case for the Spanish and, albeit to a slightly lesser extent, the French construction (see, e.g., Berretta 2000 [1993]; Bertinetto 1986; 1990a; Cortelazzo 2007; D’Achille 2003, 123; Dessì Schmid 2011; Heinemann 2003; Laca 1998; Mitko 1999; 2000; Momma 2023; Natale 2009; Squartini 1990; 1998; Strudsholm 2004; Torres Cacoullos 2000; 2012).

With regard to the degree of grammaticalisation of the Romance progressive verbal periphrases (PVPs), the view taken in these studies is that the Italian, Catalan, Brazilian Portuguese and Spanish constructions derived from Latin *stare* +

<sup>9</sup> On the relationship between frequency and degree of grammaticality cf. Dessì Schmid (2021).

gerund and the European Portuguese construction *estar a* + infinitive are (more or less) strongly grammaticalised, the French *être en train de* + infinitive more weakly so. However, they are usually referring to the optionality or obligatoriness of these constructions as system units, i.e. the varying degrees to which they are integrated into the system, and not to all the aspects of the grammaticalisation of a verbal periphrasis (see Dessì Schmid 2021).

Established studies on the grammaticalisation of Romance verbal periphrases do not typically undertake more precise analyses of the degree of grammaticality the constructions have reached. This has partly to do with auxiliarisation and partly with the obligatoriness of these constructions as system units. Although these factors are key elements in the discussion, how these levels on which the process of grammaticalisation takes place are related to one another or differ from each other is rarely considered. Yet the distinction is crucial, because the degree of grammaticality a construction has reached is connected in complex ways with its obligatoriness and its optionality. A verbal periphrasis can be considered strongly or weakly grammaticalised on the following two levels (see Dessì Schmid 2021):

- 1) The level of the construction's constituents, i.e. the focus is on the grammaticalisation or the degree of grammaticality of the internal structure, of the individual components of the construction (i.e. morphosyntactic and semantic restriction, auxiliarisation, etc., see e.g. Heine 1993; Squartini 1998);
- 2) The level of the system, i.e. the degree to which the construction as a whole is integrated into the verbal system of the respective language, hence the extent to which its obligatoriness is more or less pronounced.

It goes without saying that the two levels are intimately connected with each other: the greater the degree of grammaticalisation on the level of the constituents, the more likely the construction is to be highly integrated into the verbal system of a language. It is important, however, to distinguish between them, as only then can we gain a more accurate understanding of the effects of the forces, principles and communication strategies that interact with them (such as salience, frequency, economy and expressivity) and that are indicators of speakers' preferences.

With reference to the grammaticalisation of the internal structure of the construction (level 1), our first consideration is the grammaticalisation of the auxiliary verb in the periphrasis, which may have lost to a greater or lesser extent its (original) lexical meaning (*desemanticisation*; see Heine 1993). When a main verb is transformed into an auxiliary verb (*auxiliarisation*), certain basic stages of the lexical-grammatical continuum along which this process takes place can be identified. According to Heine (1993, esp. 54–58), these stages can then serve as the framework with which to measure the degree of grammaticalisation the auxiliary has attained. Depending on the perspective taken – semantic, morphophonological or phonolog-

ical – the following continua can be distinguished: (a) desemanticisation, whereby the auxiliary loses its original lexical meaning; (b) decategorisation, whereby the auxiliary loses its morphosyntactic status as a verb; (c) cliticisation, whereby the auxiliary loses its status as an autonomous word; (d) phonological erosion.<sup>10</sup>

The verb *cominciare*<sup>11</sup> ‘to begin’ which serves as an auxiliary in the construction *comincio a mangiare* ‘I begin to eat’, for example, has greater lexical meaning than *avere* and *stare* in the periphrases *ho mangiato* ‘I have eaten’ and *sto mangiando* ‘I am eating’. *Avere* and *stare* used in these constructions as auxiliaries are, therefore, more strongly grammaticalised than *cominciare*.

In analysing level 1, we also take into account restrictions on the morphosyntactic level (combinability with (im)perfect forms) and the semantic level (combinability with different *Aktionsarten*; cf. Vendler 1957; 1967). Example (8) is grammatical, but not so example (9) because the auxiliary cannot appear in a perfective form in the construction *stare* + gerund:

(8) It. *Leo sta / stava mangiando una mela.*  
 Leo [stay.AUX.PRES/IMP.3.SG eat.GER]PROG an apple  
 ‘Leo is/was eating an apple’

(9) It. \**Leo è stato / stette mangiando una mela.*  
 Leo [stay.AUX.PERF.COMP/SIMP.PERF.3.SG eat.GER]PROG an apple

It would be equally impossible to use a stative verb in this construction (Bertinetto 1986), so a sentence such as (10) is also ungrammatical:

(10) It. \**Leo sta / stava essendo biondo.*  
 Leo [stay.AUX.PRES/IMP.3.SG be.GER]PROG blond  
 ‘Leo is/was being blond’

Dynamic states of affairs are constituted by qualitatively different phases (or moments), but this is not the case for static, non-dynamic states of affairs (*states*), which are monophasic and have a homogeneous internal temporal structure that cannot be further subdivided: where there are no discrete, qualitatively distinct temporal subdivisions there can be no change in time either. Given that in temporally homogeneous states of affairs it is not possible to focalise a particular (or alter-

<sup>10</sup> For additional proposals to measure the degree of grammaticalization of a construction see Lehmann (1995 [1982]; 2002) and Himmelmann (2004).

<sup>11</sup> Verbs such as *cominciare*, *continuare*, *finire* are traditionally known as “phasal verbs” or as *verba adjecta* (cf. Coseriu 1972; Dietrich 1973; Bertinetto 1990b).

natively, several) moments, it comes as no surprise that *states* are generally incompatible with progressive constructions, which directly focalise moments from an ongoing state of affairs, in Italian as in all languages, as example (10) demonstrates (cf. Comrie 1976, 35; also Bertinetto 1986, 95; 1994, 403s.; Squartini 1998, 103s.). We will come back to this incompatibility between progressivity and *states* and examine it in greater detail, showing how difficult it is to talk about stative verbs in general and how the well-known classification of *states* (e.g. Carlson 1977) is inadequate to the task of focussing and ordering the problems regarding their combinability with *stare* + *gerund*. In this context, it is also very important to stress that both morphosyntactic and semantic restrictions are subject to diachronic change. As far as grammaticalisation of the internal structure of the construction is concerned, it is generally the case that the greater the grammaticality, the more generalisable and less restricted the combination of constituents.

The grammaticalisation of a construction as a unit (level 2), on the other hand, concerns the integration of the entire construction into the verbal system of a given language: (progressive) verbal periphrases, in particular, can be regarded as more or less part of the grammar of a language, as either obligatory or optional elements in the system. Various criteria come into play in determining the degree of grammaticality of these constructions, which are not always easy to measure quantitatively. For example, as indicated above, whether they are the only forms in a given language or are alternative markers, i.e. so-called marked forms existing alongside unmarked forms of inflection,<sup>12</sup> their frequency of occurrence (and the type of frequency); and whether speakers can spontaneously retrieve them. Two further related questions need to be addressed: Why do speakers use one progressive marker rather than another, or use more than one form, and in what contexts?

Returning to the progressive verbal periphrasis *stare* + *gerund*, examples can certainly be found that can be interpreted as indicating a gradual increase in the degree of grammaticalisation at both levels: we note, for example, that the construction is becoming increasingly integrated into the Italian verbal system (level 2) as manifested by the increase in its use in general and, in particular, also in its durative-PROG meaning and not just its focalised-PROG meaning (its specialised meaning in the last phase identified in its grammaticalisation path, see, e.g., Squartini 1998). But, even more radically, we are seeing the grammaticalisation process advancing at the level of the internal structure of the construction (level 1), man-

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<sup>12</sup> We understand “marked forms” here formally (containing more linguistic material) and semantically (more specific meaning), while being aware of the problematic nature of the concept of markedness (cf. Haspelmath 2006).

ifested in the relaxation of certain semantic restrictions that seemed to be rather stable, e.g. the combinability with *states* (cf. Natale 2009).

If utterances such as (11) are, in fact, still judged to be ungrammatical, speakers accept and use statives such as *amare* ‘to love’, *odiare* ‘to hate’, *abitare* ‘to live’ in the progressive periphrases – more and more frequently and in more and more contexts –, as example (12) clearly illustrates (note also the presence here of a modifier, *da morire*, functioning as an intensifier, which will be discussed later):

(11) It. \**Leo sta / stava*                      *essendo*      *biondo*.  
 Leo [stay.AUX.PRES/IMP.3.SG be.GER]PROG blond  
 ‘Leo is/was being blond’

(12) It. *Non mi parlare più di Carlo! Lo*      *sto*                      *odiando*  
 Not me speak more of Carlo! Him [stay.AUX.PRES.1.SG hate.GER]PROG  
*da morire*.  
 by to-die  
 ‘Don’t talk to me about Carlo anymore! I hate him to death’

## 4 Data/acceptability study

The increased frequency of use of a construction can, as has previously been pointed out (cf. Hopper/Traugott 2003), reflect its degree of grammaticalisation at the system level and can also lead to contextual generalisations, in turn providing the condition for a relaxation of semantic restrictions at the level of the construction’s constituents. It is therefore worth focussing greater attention on one of the strictest synchronic restrictions on Romance PVPs – and *stare* + gerund in particular –, namely their (in)compatibility with *states*, as we can use this issue of combinability to assess whether and, if so, how this relaxation takes place, and hence consider the possibility of an increase in the degree of grammaticalisation being registered at level 1.

The data presented here are drawn from two acceptability studies with speakers of Romance languages: a pilot study conducted in 2017 (on French, Italian and Spanish) and the main study conducted in 2019 (on French, Italian, European and Brazilian Portuguese, and European and Latin American Spanish).<sup>13</sup> Our focus here

<sup>13</sup> Both the 2017 pilot study and the 2019 main study included *Mauritian Creole*; analyses of the results are reported elsewhere.

is on the Italian data, in particular from the main study on the verbal domain, with the other Romance languages serving for further comparison.<sup>14</sup>

#### 4.1 Pilot study (2017)

The pilot study conducted for French, Italian, Spanish and Mauritian Creole was conceived with the aim of recording and studying any new developments in the restrictions on Romance progressive periphrases and hence verifying or refuting the classic thesis that *states* are incompatible with constructions expressing progressivity (cf. Comrie 1976, 35; cf. also Bertinetto 1986, 95; 1994, 403s.; Squartini 1998, 103s.). Hence the main hypothesis of the study was:

- PS/H1: stative verbs are compatible with progressive markers (> they appear in the progressive periphrasis *stare* + *gerund*).

Depending on the language, 7 to 32 participants took part in the experiments (17 for Italian). They were presented with 50 sentences – 25 fillers and 25 sentences containing progressive verbal periphrases in combination with verbal lexemes expressing different *Aktionsarten*: *activities*, *accomplishments*, *achievements* and *states*. Among the states, particular emphasis was paid to the verbs *amare* ‘to love’ and *odiare* ‘to hate’ (illustrated in examples (13)–(16)), which were presented in the present tense and the imperfect. Acceptability judgements were elicited on a scale from 1 (totally unacceptable) to 6 (totally acceptable):

(13) Sp. *Leo está queriendo a Anna*  
 Leo [AUX.PRES.3.SG love.GER]PROG to Anna

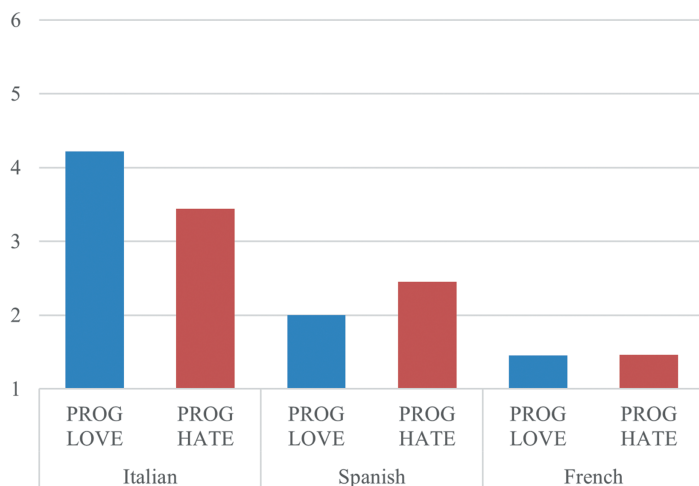
(14) It. *Leo sta amando Anna*  
 Leo [AUX.PRES.3.SG love.GER]PROG Anna

(15) Fr. *Léo est en train d'aimer Anna*  
 Leo [AUX.PRES.3.SG in course of love.INF]PROG Anna

(16) MK. *Léo pe kontan Anna*  
 Leo PROG-M love Anna  
 ‘Leo is loving Anna’

<sup>14</sup> For a comparative analysis of the data from the other languages see Dessì Schmid (2021).

It isn't possible to present the results of the pilot study in greater detail here; it is important, however, to bear in mind that they provide important empirical confirmation of the fact that actional restrictions a) are variable diachronically, b) not valid for all states in the same way synchronically, and c) are not equally distributed in the various languages (not even in those belonging to the same family). In other words, our pilot study provides the first evidence that the grammars of individual languages and context influence the ability of PROG markers to combine with *states*. There are large cross-linguistic differences regarding this combinability, e.g. speakers of Italian find the use of certain states in the progressive construction much more acceptable than French speakers do. These observations are summed up in Diagram (1), which compares the results of the study for the verbs *amare* 'love' and *odiare* 'hate':



**Diagram 1:** Language comparison: mean ratings for PROG LOVE vs. PROG HATE – all languages tested.

Now, when speakers judge a sentence in which the PROG indicator is combined with a *state* as (more or less) acceptable, it is a clear indication of the relaxation of this restriction and, therefore, of a change in the degree of grammaticality of the progressive construction. These initial results prompted us to take the next step and design a broader-based acceptability study.



## 4.2 Main study (2019)

Building on the results of the pilot study, the main study focusses exclusively on *states* and aims to determine a) the language-specific variation within Romance languages in the acceptability of combining *states* and PVPs (see H1), and b) the differences in the combinability of various stative verbal lexemes and types with their respective progressive constructions (H2). The study also investigated the possible influence of modifiers (e.g. intensifying, incremental, temporal) on the acceptability of combining *states* and PVPs (H3). The experiments tested the following hypotheses:

- MS/H1: The Romance languages differ from each other in the acceptability of combining states and PVPs, as well as in the degree to which imperfective inflection is preferred over a PVP.
- MS/H2: Various *states* and *state* types are compatible to different extents with the respective PVPs of each individual language.
- MS/H3: The presence of a modifier influences the speaker’s judgement of the acceptability of sentences in which progressive periphrases and stative verbs are combined.

The study included 147 Italian participants, mostly female and under 50 years of age (see Table 1).<sup>15</sup>

**Table 1:** Demographic data of participants in the main study, 2019 (all languages).

	French	Italian	European Portuguese	Brazilian Portuguese	Spanish
Age					
≤ 19–29	85	80	66	46	60
30–49	13	50	29	37	78
≥ 50	4	17	16	7	19
Gender					
female	66	92	77	49	108
male	36	53	34	40	49
other	–	2	–	1	–

<sup>15</sup> The acceptability study included 147 Italian, 102 French, 157 Spanish-speaking, 111 European Portuguese-speaking and 90 Brazilian Portuguese-speaking participants (65% female, 35% male; 90% aged 19 to 49 years; 73% with a university background, with or without a degree).

Each participant rated 54 sentences on a scale from 1 (totally unacceptable) to 7 (totally acceptable), 24 of which were on the topic in question, while the rest comprised fillers and test sentences on another topic (nominal aspect, the other part of the research project). We used a Latin square design with 4 conditions, i.e. with and without a progressive marker, with and without a modifier (see Table 2), as exemplified in Tables 3–5 with the verb *amare* ‘to love’ and different modifiers (respectively, intensifying, incremental and temporal).

**Table 2:** Design of the main study, 2019.

	[- MOD]	[+ MOD]
[- PROG]	Cond. A	Cond. C
[+ PROG]	Cond. B	Cond. D

**Table 3:** Item 1; context: Sofia is talking about her relationship with Lorenzo.

<i>Lo amo.</i>	<i>Lo amo da morire.</i>
‘I love him’	‘I love him to death’
<i>Lo sto amando.</i>	<i>Lo sto amando da morire.</i>
‘I am loving him’	‘I am loving him to death’

**Table 4:** Item 2; context: Rosanna is talking about her relationship with her husband in a talk show.

<i>Lo amo.</i>	<i>Lo amo ogni giorno di più.</i>
‘I love him’	‘I love him more every day’
<i>Lo sto amando.</i>	<i>Lo sto amando ogni giorno di più.</i>
‘I am loving him’	‘I am loving him more every day’

**Table 5:** Item 3; context: Little Simone is telling his mum that he wants to marry Lucia when he grows up.

<i>La amo.</i>	<i>Ultimamente la amo.</i>
‘I love her’	‘Lately, I love her’
<i>La sto amando.</i>	<i>Ultimamente la sto amando.</i>
‘I am loving her’	‘Lately, I am loving her’

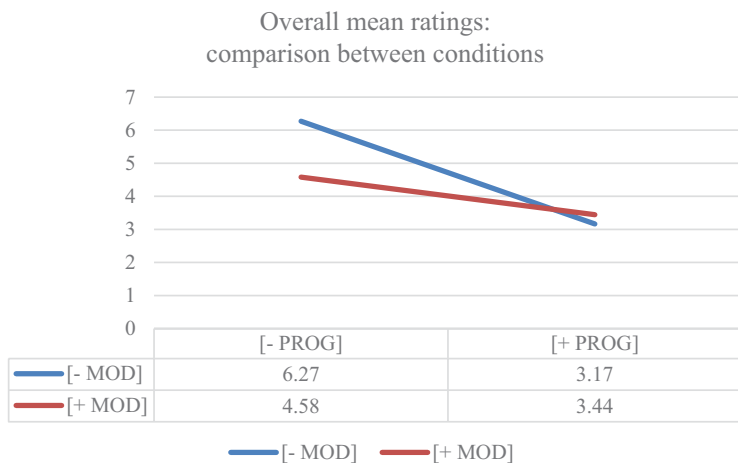
The set of test sentences for each of the languages examined contained 20 *states* of various *state* types combined with either synthetic inflectional forms (generally imperfective) or analytic progressive verbal periphrases [+/- PROG], with and

without the various modifiers [+/- MOD]. We selected verbal lexemes that differed from each other with respect to the criteria used in various classical classifications of *states*, such as Carlson's (1977), which distinguishes between *individual-level predicates* and *stage-level predicates*, but also with respect to more general verbal classifications, such as Halliday/Matthiessen's (2014), which distinguishes between stative *mental verbs* (*emotive, desiderative, cognitive*) and stative *relational verbs* (*attributive, identifying*).

The Italian verbs were the following:

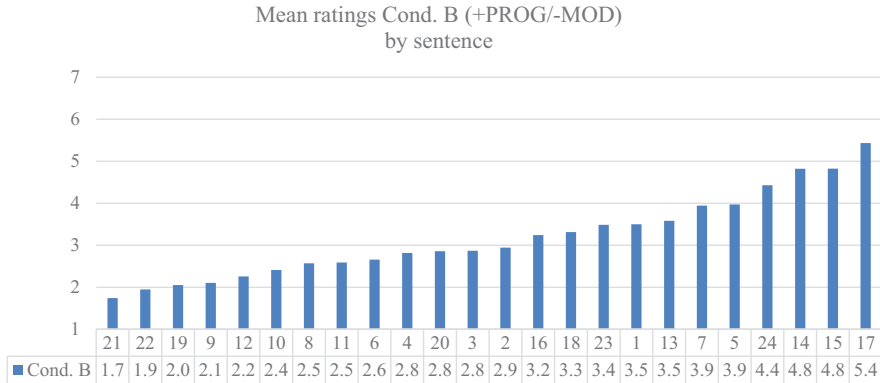
*amare* 'to love', *abitare* 'to live', *fare l'avvocato* 'to be a lawyer', *appartenere* 'to belong', *preferire* 'to prefer', *pesare* 'to weigh', *avere 15 anni* 'to be 15 years old', *misurare 90 cm* 'to be 90 cm tall', *credere* 'to believe', *bastare* 'to suffice', *pendere* 'to hang', *rappresentare* 'to represent', *avere voti buoni* 'to have good grades', *assomigliare* 'to resemble', *sapere, conoscere* 'to know', *avere gli occhi blu* 'to have blue eyes', *avere i capelli biondi* 'to have fair hair', *avere fame* 'to be hungry', *desiderare* 'to wish'

The following Diagram (2) shows the results of the test on the 24 items:



**Diagram 2:** Overall mean ratings: comparison between conditions – Italian.

Overall, the results show that the condition without the progressive periphrasis is, as expected, rated higher than the condition with the periphrasis (see conditions A and B – MS/H1). Nonetheless, it should be noted that the ratings for condition B do not entirely rule out the possibility of combining the progressive verbal periphrasis with *states*. In other words, these data do not confirm the assumption of the previous study that the progressive verbal periphrasis is incompatible with *states* (see PS/H1 and MS/H2). A certain relaxation of the restriction is clear, as Diagram 3 shows.



**Diagram 3:** Mean ratings for all test items condition B (+PROG/-MOD) – Italian.

However, Diagram 3 also reveals a wide variation in the use of the different stative verbs in combination with the periphrasis. *Amare* ‘to love’ is not one of the most surprising examples; speakers of Italian seem to accept the progressive periphrasis in combination with many other *states*:

ITEM1: (C: Sofia is talking about her relationship with Lorenzo) *Lo sto amando* ‘I am loving him’ (3.50)

ITEM 7: (Edoardo and Aurora meet. Edoardo says:) *Sto facendo l’avvocato* ‘I am being a lawyer’ (3.94)

ITEM 17: (Wan Wei arrived in Italy a year ago) *A scuola sta avendo buoni voti in italiano* ‘He is having good grades in Italian at school’ (5.43)

ITEM 14: (Giovanni is a mechanic and his wife is unemployed,) *però il suo stipendio gli sta bastando per vivere* ‘nonetheless his wages are being enough to live on’ (4.82)

ITEM 24: *sta desiderando un fine settimana di pace* ‘s/he is wanting a peaceful weekend’ (4.43)

ITEM 13: *sta credendo nel destino* ‘s/he is believing in fate’ (3.58)

ITEM 23: *sta avendo fame* ‘s/he is being hungry’ (3.49)

ITEM 16: *il nero sta rappresentando la tristezza* ‘black is representing sadness’ (3.24)

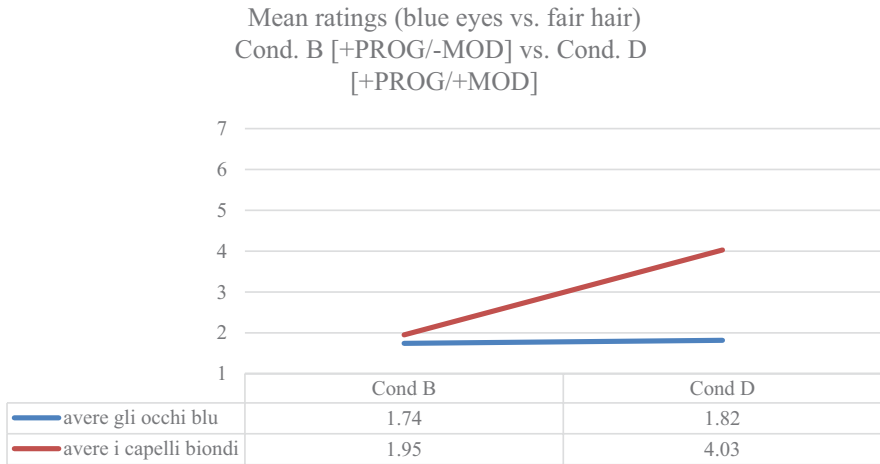
We also find, albeit with very low ratings, a certain tolerance for extreme cases, such as some *individual stage predicates*:

ITEM 19: *sta sapendo la risposta* ‘s/he is knowing the answer’ (2.05)

ITEM 21: *sta avendo gli occhi blu* ‘s/he is having blue eyes’ (1.74)

ITEM 22: *sta avendo i capelli biondi* ‘s/he is having fair hair’ (1.95)

There is no statistically significant difference in the degree of acceptability between these last two Italian examples; however, while the acceptability of *sta avendo i capelli biondi* ‘is having fair hair’ increases greatly in the presence of a modifier (4.03), this is not in the case with *sta avendo gli occhi blu* ‘is having blue eyes’, as Diagram 4 shows.<sup>16</sup>

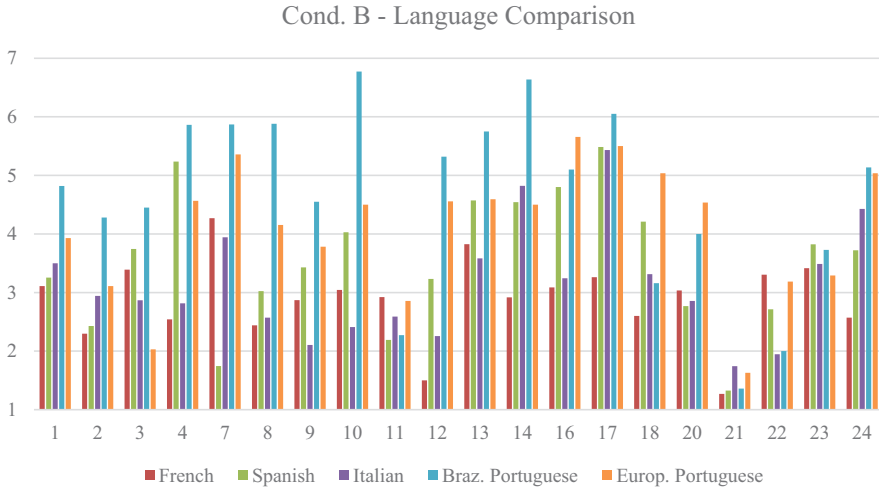


**Diagram 4:** Mean ratings for *avere gli occhi blu* ‘to have blue eyes’ vs. *avere i capelli biondi* ‘to have fair hair’ – Cond. B vs. Cond. D.

To sum up, comparison of the results of the interpretation of the Italian data with those of the other languages, shows that, firstly, **Hypothesis 1 (MS/H1)** – the Romance languages and their varieties differ from each other in the degree of acceptability of combining *states* and PVPs – is confirmed. Diagram 5 illustrates this for all the languages tested.

Hypothesis 2 (MS/H2) also appears to be confirmed, although with the necessary caution and further clarification: we can definitely confirm that various *states* are compatible to varying degrees with the progressive verbal periphrasis *stare + gerund*, but the ratings of the individual sentences are highly varied. The data do not, therefore, allow a reliable statement to be made with regard to the type of *state*: for example, it cannot be said that *relational verbs* were rated better than *mental verbs*, nor that there was any homogeneity within the distinct groups of *individual-level predicates* and *stage-level predicates*.

<sup>16</sup> On the different behaviours of states in the same class and for arguments against the established classifications based only on semantic criteria, see Dessì Schmid (2014; 2019)



**Diagram 5:** All test sentences/condition B (+PROG/-MOD) – all tested languages.

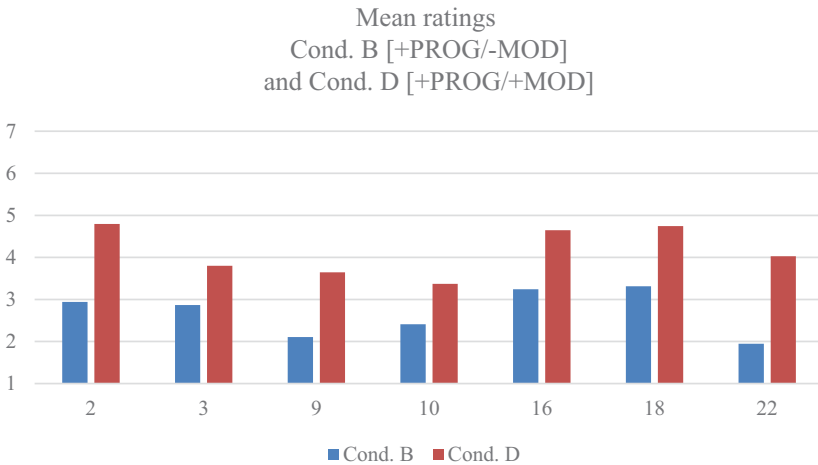
Greater difficulties arise with regard to verification of hypothesis 3, which therefore needs further investigation.

The decision to test how the problematic combination of *states* and the progressive periphrasis interacts with the presence of modifiers (in particular, with intensifiers such as *da morire* ‘to die for’, incrementals such as *sempre di più* ‘more and more’ and actualisers such as *ultimamente* ‘lately’) that increase the communicative effectiveness of an utterance by strengthening – including materially – its expressiveness, was based on the hypothesis that their presence in marked utterances supports speakers’ communication strategies and thus helps increase the acceptability of an utterance. Speakers should, in fact, find it particularly credible that what is hypothesised should reproduce their communicative behaviour, which anticipates the use of expressive strategies in particularly salient situations.

The results of the 2019 study do not, however, allow us to make any general or generalized statement regarding the influence of modifiers on the degree of acceptability of a sentence, verification of which requires further studies.<sup>17</sup> In any case, what we can say is that the tendencies reported go clearly in this direction, even though, once again, the increase in acceptability depends on the type of stative

<sup>17</sup> For the results of a follow-up study (2020) focussing on the role of modifiers in contexts in which *states* (in particular *mental verbs*) are used in constructions expressing progressivity, see Dessi Schmid (2021).

verb and the type of modifier (the results differ according to whether the latter is an intensifier, an incremental or an actualiser).



**Diagram 6:** Mean ratings for selected test items – Cond. B [+PROG/-MOD] vs. Cond D [+PROG/+MOD].

Diagram 6 illustrates the comparison between the ratings for the sentences without modifiers (cond. B) and with different modifiers (cond. D) for the test items where the difference between the two conditions was statistically significant. These items were:

ITEM 2: *amare (ogni giorno di più)* ‘to love (more every day)’  $p < 0.001^{***}$

ITEM 3: *amare (ultimamente)* ‘to love (lately)’  $p < 0.05^*$

ITEM 9: *preferire andare a Monaco (sempre di più)* ‘to prefer to go to Munich (more and more)’  $p < 0.001^{***}$

ITEM 10: *pesare 80 chili (ultimamente)* ‘weigh 80 kilos (lately)’  $p < 0.05^*$

ITEM 16: *rappresentare (sempre di più) la tristezza* ‘to represent (more and more) sadness’  $p < 0.01^{**}$

ITEM 18: *assomigliare (sempre di più) a suo padre* ‘to resemble (more and more) her/his father’  $p < 0.001^{***}$

ITEM 22: *avere (sempre di più) i capelli biondi* ‘to have (more and more) fair hair’  $p < 0.001^{***}$

These considerations oblige us to attempt to provide some answers to the various questions that arise when dealing with the problem of the combinability of *states* and *progressivity*, and consequently to discuss by way of conclusion why speakers are increasingly using *stare* + gerund and in more and more contexts and judging

use of the marked form of progressivity to be acceptable even at the cost of contravening some of its central semantic restrictions.

## 5 Closing remarks

The rising relative and absolute frequency of a construction is an indication of increased speaker preference for it in order to satisfy expressive communicative needs or for reasons of economy. Where a language has alternative forms for expressing a given content, the speakers may prefer to make routinised decisions in favour of less costly forms in communications in neutral contexts. However, in expressive contexts or where the content is especially salient, for example, they may prefer to use more costly, marked forms – even at the expense of violating restrictions.

The choice of a specialised progressive marker, which requires less context to disambiguate its reading (and is thus in a certain way economical) confirms the central principle of salience in communication: ongoing states of affairs that are emphasised as taking place right in the moment are highly salient for speakers, who tend to reinforce them expressively. And they can do so precisely by using more costly, marked constructions, which are then also accepted by the communication partner because they are part of a successful, well-known, shared communicative strategy (i.e., emphatic use, expressive reinforcement).

For the communication to be more successful, the semantic and morphosyntactic properties of a construction can then also be stretched, often aided by additional supporting linguistic elements (for example, modifiers). With respect to the restrictions investigated here, the possibility of combining PVPs with *states* is taken to extremes on the semantic level with obvious acceptance by speakers, albeit with differences between the various *states* investigated and between the various Romance languages.

Once the use of more costly, marked constructions becomes routinised, leading to contextual generalisations and the loss of expressivity, further and deeper modifications and relaxations of those semantic restrictions that could originally only be justified and accepted for a particular reason can, as a result, be made.<sup>18</sup> Our

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<sup>18</sup> The development of *stare* + gerund in Italian seems to be already going in this direction: there are, in fact, several examples of its use which even now indicate a gradual loss of expressiveness and that can be interpreted as signs of routinisation. In addition to the results relating to the relaxation of restrictions on combinability with *states* presented here, the development of certain progressivity markers, in particular, comes to mind: these seem to be losing their “specificity” and already have other imperfective functions (e.g. habitual), as, for example, is taking place in the regional Italian of Sardinia: *Sta sempre partendo in treno* ‘S/he is always leaving by train’ (cf. Telmon 2016, 314).



study has been able to show there has been a shift and a relaxation of a central restriction in the combinability of *stare* + gerund with *states*, and hence progress in the grammaticalisation process of this periphrasis. As a result, we can also confirm once more that it is precisely closer examination of semantic and morphological restrictions that proves to be particularly fruitful in the analysis of grammaticalisation processes and that it is also important to consider both levels of grammaticalisation (the level of the constituents and the level of the system) separately as well as in their interaction.

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Victoria Escandell-Vidal

# Understanding the Spanish *imperfecto*. Temporal dimensions and evidential effects

**Abstract:** The Spanish *imperfecto* can receive different interpretations according to context. This raises several questions: 1) Is it possible to provide a restrictive and motivated account of the apparent diversity of readings? 2) What kind of semantic representation is needed to account for how semantic features operate? 3) How do the interpretations relate to each other? 4) Where do the additional effects come from?

In this paper, I put forward a proposal that provides motivated answers to these questions. I argue that all the interpretations share the same semantics, which on the temporal side can be modelled in terms of a restricted set of three situations (DS, ES, RS) and two relations holding between them (accessibility and precedence). To this end, I use a three-dimensional space of binary relations between situations to show that only three categories result, each with its own consistent set of referential and illocutionary properties without further stipulation.

My proposal intends to clarify why such a variety of interpretations can be obtained from a single semantics and why the interpretations can only go in three directions, with different interpretive properties.

**Keywords:** Spanish *imperfecto*, procedural semantics, situations, accessibility, precedence

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**Funding:** This work was supported by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation, grant PID-104405GB-I00, project EPSILone (Evidentiality, Perspectivization and Subjectification at the Interfaces of Language).

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**Acknowledgements:** Previous versions of this paper were presented at various international conferences: Romanistentag Kassel, Sektion 12: “Tempus, Aspekt und Diskursstruktur” (Kassel Universität, 2019); the workshop “Nominal and Verbal Aspect: Parallels, Interfaces, Complementarity” (Universität Tübingen, 2020); II Congreso Internacional “Relaciones y límites entre la morfología, la sintaxis, la semántica y la pragmática del español” (Universidad de Córdoba, 2020). I thank the audiences for their feedback and stimulating discussion. My thanks also to the editors of the volume for their invitation and their help throughout the editorial process. I am also very grateful to three anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments and suggestions, and to José Amenós, Pier Marco Bertinetto, Ángeles Carrasco and Manuel Leonetti, who read the paper at different stages, for their detailed comments. The generosity and expertise of one and all have improved this study in innumerable ways. If errors still remain, they are entirely my own responsibility.

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# 1 Introduction

One of the most challenging questions in the description of the Romance verbal systems is how to reconcile the advantages of a monosemous approach to the semantics of a given tense with the obvious fact that the very same form can receive different interpretations in context.<sup>1</sup> In this paper I will address the above question by focusing on a representative member of the category of Romance imperfective pasts, the Spanish *imperfecto*.

The semantic contribution of *imperfecto* inflectional morphology can be characterised as involving both an aspectual and a temporal feature.<sup>2</sup>

- a) *Presenta las situaciones en su curso, enfocando su desarrollo interno sin aludir a su comienzo ni a su final.*
- b) *Requiere que se vincule su denotación temporal con otra situación pasada.*  
(RAE/ASALE 2009, §23.10)
- a) ‘It presents an eventuality in progress, framing its internal development without considering its beginning or its end.’
- b) ‘It requires that the eventuality’s temporal denotation be linked to a past situation.’

Clause a) characterises the contribution of the aspectual, imperfective feature; clause b) expresses the temporal feature.

On the basis of this, Spanish grammarians distinguish an average of 12–14 different readings of the *imperfecto*.<sup>3</sup> Consider the examples in (1)–(12) (from RAE/ASALE 2009, §§23.10–23.11).

- (1) *Cuando sonó el teléfono, el mayordomo bajaba la escalera.* (Progressive)  
‘When the phone rang, the butler *was going down* the stairs.’ (Ongoing event in the past)

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1 For Spanish, see Bello (1847); Rojo (1974); Porto Dapena (1989); Gutiérrez Araus (1995); García Fernández (1996; 1999; 2004); Rojo/Veiga (1999); Cipria/Roberts (2000); Brucart (2003); Amenós (2010); Martínez Atienza (2012); Arche (2014); Fábregas (2015); Hassler (2017); Richter/van Hout (2018). For Italian, see Bertinetto (1986; 2004); Bazzanella (1990); Dessi Schmid (2014). For French, see Berthonneau/Kleiber (1993); Saussure/Sthioul (1999); Bres (2005); Labeau/Larrivière (2005). For Catalan, see Pérez Saldanya (1990; 2003); GEIEC (2018).

2 See Bertinetto (1986; 2004); Klein (1994); Cipria/Roberts (2000); RAE/ASALE (2009, §23.10); Lenci/Bertinetto (2000); Bertinetto/Lenci (2011); Arche (2014); Fábregas (2015).

3 For references, see footnote 1.

- (2) *Era un hombre negro que sudaba copiosamente; tenía un bigote castaño.* (Continuous)  
 ‘He was a black man who *sweated*<sub>IMP</sub> profusely; he *had*<sub>IMP</sub> a brown moustache.’  
 (Past eventuality)
- (3) *Los mayas poseían conocimientos muy amplios de matemáticas.* (Absolute beginning)  
 ‘The Mayans *had*<sub>IMP</sub> extensive knowledge of mathematics.’ (Past eventuality)
- (4) *Todos los días se acostaba temprano.* (Habitual)  
 ‘Every day s/he *would go to bed* early.’ (Generic past interpretation)
- (5) *Salía de su casa hacia el trabajo, cuando sonó el teléfono.* (Inchoative)  
 ‘S/he *was about to leave* home for work when the phone rang.’ (Unaccomplished event)
- (6) *Resbaló y cayó al pavimento. Instantes después, moría.* (Narrative)  
 ‘S/he *slipped*<sub>PFT</sub> and *fell*<sub>PFT</sub> on the pavement. A few seconds later, s/he *died*<sub>IMP</sub>.’  
 (Accomplished event)
- (7) *Yo . . . venía a pedirle un favor.* (Polite)  
 ‘I *came*<sub>IMP</sub> here to ask you a favour.’ (Present event)
- (8) *Tú jugabas al fútbol, ¿no es cierto?* (Quotative)  
 ‘You *play*<sub>IMP</sub> football (someone told me), right?’ (Present or past)
- (9) *Mi avión salía mañana a las 23:50.* (Prospective)  
 ‘My plane is *expected*<sub>IMP</sub> to depart tomorrow at 23:50.’ (Future interpretation)
- (10) *Como se retrasara un día más, no la admitían.* (Conditional)  
 ‘If she were late another day, they *wouldn’t admit*<sub>IMP</sub> her.’ (Modal interpretation)
- (11) *Tuve un sueño muy extraño. [ . . . ] Yo estaba en un hospital y usted venía a verme.* (Oneiric)  
 ‘I had a very strange dream. I *was*<sub>IMP</sub> in hospital and you *came*<sub>IMP</sub> to visit me.’  
 (*Irrealis* past event)
- (12) *Tú hazte cuenta que vamos los dos en una barca. Tú eras el que iba remando* (Pre-ludic)  
 ‘Imagine we are in a boat. You *are*<sub>IMP</sub> the one who is rowing.’ (*Irrealis* future event)

Many factors have been invoked to account for the variety of readings, including *Aktionsart* and the eventive structure of the lexical predicate, the referential properties of the complements and the temporal properties of the adjuncts with which the predicate is combined, and also, from a wider perspective, discourse relations, textual properties and genres.<sup>4</sup> Most research therefore tends to place the emphasis on the external set of conditions that surround the *imperfecto*.

On closer examination, several noteworthy facts emerge from the above examples that defy a convincing explanation in contextual terms only. Firstly, the list does not seem to have a logic of its own that can reveal what general categories are instantiated by the various interpretations. Secondly, it is unclear whether and how the different readings can be related to each other. In fact, the contextual account cannot always explain why there are cases of ambiguity, where the very same context can give rise to different interpretations. Consider the example in (13), adapted from Saussure (2013, 51).

(13) *El jefe de estación activó la señal. Un minuto más tarde el tren salía.*

Like the French original (*Le chef de gare actionna le signal. Une minute plus tard, le train partait*), the Spanish sentence in (13) is ambiguous among three readings:

- a) ‘the train actually left’ – narrative reading;
- b) ‘the train was due to leave in a minute, so it was the right moment to switch on the signal’ - free indirect speech;
- c) ‘the train was due to leave in a minute and luckily the attendant switched off the signal so that it did not leave’ - counterfactual reading, probably best rendered in English with a conditional. (Saussure 2013, 51).<sup>5</sup>

4 For Spanish and other Romance languages, see Bertinetto (1986); Bazzanella (1990); Pérez Saldanya (1990; 2003); Berthonneau/Kleiber (1993); Saussure/Sthioul (1999; 2005); Saussure (2003; 2013); Bres (2005); Labeau/Larrivière (2005); Dessì Schmid (2014); Azzopardi/Bres (2017); Hassler (2017); Richter/van Hout (2018); Becker/Egetenmeyer (2018); GEIEC (2018).

5 An anonymous reviewer suggests that a sentence like *Une minute de plus, et le train partait* no longer allows for the same range of interpretations. This is due to a crucial difference between this example and (13), namely the difference between a comparative measurement NP and a temporal adverbial, on the one hand, and the occurrence of the coordination, on the other (see Van Raemdonck/Roig 2016 for details). In Spanish, we find the same construction with similar effects on the interpretation. My claim is not, however, that all sentences will be three-way ambiguous—in fact, it is difficult to find examples of this sort, and this is due to other contextual factors (see also Berthonneau/Kleiber 1993; Bres 2005; Azzopardi/Bres 2017). Rather, it is the fact that some of them actually are three-way ambiguous that calls for explanation.

Thirdly, the various interpretations in (1)–(12) are so totally at odds with each other (from both a referential and an illocutionary point of view) that it is difficult to figure out how a single tense can give rise to such diversity. Fourthly, two of the above interpretations, namely the narrative reading in (6) and the quotative reading in (8), seem to convey an extra layer of meaning: whereas the narrative adds the “camera effect”, the impression that the speaker is reporting a witnessed event, the quotative, for its part, evokes the idea of a previously received piece of information. All these facts, then, call for a principled explanation.

The questions I wish to address, then, are the following:

- i) Is it possible to provide a restrictive and motivated account of the apparent diversity of readings?
- ii) What kind of semantic representation is needed to account for the way in which these semantic features operate?
- iii) How do the interpretations relate to each other?
- iv) Where do the additional effects come from?

To answer them, I will turn to an internal approach, based on the ways in which the semantic features encoded by the *imperfecto* operate and constrain the interpretation. If the *imperfecto* can offer such disparate readings, I argue, this is due not only to the context, but also – and mainly – to its own semantic features and, more specifically, to the temporal feature and its representational properties. These, as I will argue, play a major role in the explanation.

The issue I seek to address is not how the various interpretations arise, but why they are possible at all. Of course, I do not deny the central role of *Aktion-sart*, aspectual composition, compatibility of adjuncts, aspectual mismatches and textual perspectives, though I will not consider them here. As for the aspectual feature, I assume that the *imperfecto* operator IMP imposes the subinterval property on the predicate. Therefore,  $IMP(p)$  has the subinterval property (i.e., the truth of the predicate  $p$  at a given interval entails its truth at any relevant part of that interval; see Dowty 1977; Bennett/Partee 1978; Deo 2021), regardless of whether the predicate itself has the subinterval property. Progressive and habitual interpretations are the result of this requirement being satisfied when the predicate is telic.<sup>6</sup>

The rest of this paper is organised as follows. In section 2 I briefly review the standard approach to the *imperfecto* and its major drawbacks. Section 3 intro-

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<sup>6</sup> Note that I see aspect not in Kleinian terms, i.e., as a relation between the event and the reference time, but as an independent notion. The reasons for this will become clear later.



duces the basic distinctions needed to adequately account for the apparent variability in the meaning of the *imperfecto*. In section 4 I show how my proposal works for the analysis of all attested interpretations. Section 5 presents my main conclusions.

## 2 The standard view: The *imperfecto* as a past tense

Compared with the aspectual feature, the temporal feature has received relatively little attention. It has been taken for granted that the *imperfecto* links an eventuality to a past situation without considering how this linkage is established. Yet, I will argue, the temporal requirement, and the ways in which it is satisfied, are key to understanding the logic governing the different readings. In this section I briefly review the standard approach and its shortcomings.

### 2.1 The Reichenbachian account: $R \subset E$ ; $R-S$

The condition expressed by the temporal feature requires the temporal denotation of the eventuality to be linked to a past situation.<sup>7</sup> This requirement is frequently understood in terms of Reichenbach's (1947) system, which is built on three temporal points (the Speech Point S, the Event Point E and the Reference Point R) and two relations (namely, precedence (-) and coincidence (,)), which hold between pairs of these points. According to this view, the *imperfecto* is an instance of  $E,R-S$  (i.e., E and R coincide and both precede S). The coincidence between E and R is thus a significant part of what the temporal feature of the *imperfecto* encodes. The *imperfecto* and the perfective past (the Spanish *indefinido*) pattern together with respect to the temporal relation  $E,R-S$ ; the dif-

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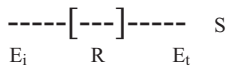
7 This temporal requirement can be formalised in terms of truth conditions, as in Cipria/Roberts's (2000, 323) formula:

$$[[\text{IMPERF}\phi]]^s, \text{ST} = 1 \text{ iff } \exists s' \leq w_s [s' <_t \text{ST}]$$

According to the formula, a sentence with an *imperfecto* is true in a situation  $s$  if, and only if, there is some situation  $s'$  (in the same world history as  $s$ ) which is past with respect to the Speech Time. (Note that in this formula "s" stands for 'situation', while in Section 3.3 below it stands for 'speaker'.)

ference between them lies in their aspectual feature, which is usually captured in terms of the extension of E.<sup>8</sup>

This approach straightforwardly accounts for examples like (1), where the reference interval R, *Cuando sonó el teléfono* ‘When the phone rang’, is included within the interval E of the eventuality marked by the *imperfecto*, *bajaba la escalera* ‘he was going down the stairs’. The coincidence between E and R is thus partial, so the two intervals need not be coextensive. In addition, R precedes S. This relation is standardly represented as in Figure 1, where the dashes (---) correspond to the extended event ( $E_i - E_t$ ) of going down the stairs, and the brackets ([ ]) identify the interval R of the phone beginning to ring. The formula in (13), from Azzopardi/Bres (2017, 78), represents this set of relations.



**Figure 1:** Linear representation of the semantics of the *imperfecto*.

$$(14) \quad R \subset E_i - E_t; R < S$$

The interval R is usually understood as Klein’s (1994; 2009) notion of topic time, i.e., the time talked about or the assertion time. In this view, only the processual part of the event *bajar la escalera* ‘go down the stairs’ falls within the topic time R. The culminating phase of the event (if any) is left out of the reference interval. The eventuality is presented in progress, thus fulfilling the imperfective aspect requirement of the *imperfecto* (clause a)).

The same idea can be applied to examples (2)–(6), though here the location and extension of R is not explicitly indicated in the sentence, so a plausible past timespan must be inferentially added. The examples in (2)–(3) illustrate the way in which states comply with the aspectual requirement: a single eventuality, whose boundaries are not considered, includes R. The example in (4) shows a different way of satisfying the aspectual requirement of imperfectivity, by creating an interval consisting of multiple instances of the same eventuality. The set of readings exemplified in (1)–(4) are usually labelled *temporal* or *primary* interpretations.

<sup>8</sup> Reichenbach (1947); Carrasco (1994); Fábregas (2015). Recent approaches, such as Demirdache/Uribe-Etxebarria (2000; 2007), treat all temporal arguments as intervals, thereby allowing for a more complex set of relations among them.

Examples (5)–(6) also refer to past eventualities but pose some extra difficulties for the aspectual component: (5) focuses on the preliminary, pre-processual phase of the event of leaving, whereas (6) apparently focuses on the results. I will not deal with these issues now, though I will suggest a possible explanation later.

## 2.2 Problems with the standard approach

The standard approach to the temporal component of the *imperfecto*, in which a past interval R is included within the denoted event E, does not, however, adequately account for the properties of all cases. In fact, the above characterisation cannot apply to examples (7)–(12), usually called *modal* or *secondary* uses.

Consider first the examples in (7)–(8). In both cases, the eventualities are interpreted as present, which means that they hold at speech time S. If so, it is hard to see how the requirement to link E with a past interval R is fulfilled. It could be argued that the interval E is wide enough to include both R and S, so the eventuality would hold in both the past and the present, though it is asserted only for the past. However, if this is the case, it is hard to see why the reference of E is understood as present, and why the interpretation of (7) should involve politeness (see Caudal, this volume, for an account along similar lines). As for (8), it seems even more difficult to accept the inclusion of a past R within the eventuality E of playing football. Since playing football is an activity that cannot last forever, a habitual reading (as in (4)) is obtained, with an indeterminate number of individual events of playing football, some of them containing the interval R. Again, it could be argued that what is asserted (or questioned) is the eventuality E in the past, irrespective of the fact that the eventuality holds in the present as well. However, this is not the way in which (8) is interpreted by native speakers, who consistently understand that the information that the subject habitually plays football has been obtained prior to S.

Examples (9)–(12) pose an even greater problem. Here there is no event E whatsoever that can include or contain the interval R, because E is not an event in the actual world. Thus, while R unequivocally belongs to the same world as S, the eventuality marked with the *imperfecto* is not located in the same world as the other two intervals. In (9) the eventuality E is scheduled for the future, so it cannot contain R in the past. In (10), the imperfect marks an eventuality in the apodosis of a predictive conditional structure, so the truth of the consequent is dependent on a hypothetical future event; here, it is difficult to see how the eventuality in the consequent could include an interval R located in the past. Similar considerations can be made for examples (11) and (12), in which it is obvious that *irrealis* events cannot contain *realis* past intervals.

The standard approach has, therefore, several shortcomings.<sup>9</sup> The next section presents an explanatory proposal that overcomes these inadequacies.

### 3 A new proposal for the temporal feature:

#### $RS \nearrow ES; RS < DS$

In this section I develop the idea that the temporal relation between the eventuality described by the predicate and the past situation to which it must be linked contains the key to understanding the logic governing the different readings. In a nutshell, the idea is that the temporal requirement cannot be modelled in terms of temporal points and intervals related by precedence and inclusion only. I argue that a more complex model is needed, based on situations and a more abstract set of relations among them.

#### 3.1 Situations and accessibility

The limitations of the standard approach all stem from a single root: the fact that the temporal feature is formulated in denotational terms. As stated, this condition is too strong, since it cannot apply to a significant number of uses. If the monosemic hypothesis (i.e., the idea that the *imperfecto* always has the same meaning) is to be maintained, certain adjustments are required.

The proposal I want to put forward here can be summarised as follows:

- i) The relevant relations hold among situations (Reference Situation (RS), Eventuality Situation (ES) and Discourse Situation (DS)), not among temporal points or intervals.
- ii) The relation between RS and ES is one of accessibility ( $\nearrow$ ), not inclusion ( $\subseteq$ ).
- iii) The appropriate formula for the *imperfecto* is  $RS \nearrow ES; RS < DS$ .

My first claim is that the primitives involved in the temporal requirement of the *imperfecto* are better captured as situations (Barwise/Perry 1983; Kratzer 2002; 2020). Situations can be conceived as sets of assumptions. The RS is the situation on which the speaker's truth judgement of the proposition  $p$  is based. The ES is the sit-

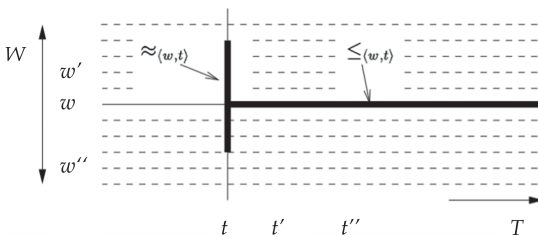
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<sup>9</sup> Various attempts have been made in the literature to explain the offending cases while maintaining the standard view. This is done by resorting to different perspectives or subjects of consciousness. See Azzopardi/Bres (2017). I will not pursue this approach here.

uation that exemplifies the proposition  $p$ , i.e., a minimal situation in which  $p$  is true. The ES can be a *worldly fact* (a state of affairs in the real world  $w$ ), but it can also be a *propositional fact* (a situation in a possible world  $w'$  exemplifying the proposition  $p$ ; see Kratzer 2002). This distinction is needed in order to account for, among other things, reports of assertions and hypothetical and counterfactual reasoning, which are indeed better accounted for in terms of possible worlds. Thus, in information reports like, for instance, *John said that the Earth is flat*, the speaker is committed not to the truth of the proposition ‘the Earth is flat’ in the actual world (i.e., to the existence of the state of affairs corresponding to the Earth being flat), but rather to accessing a situation in a possible world in which the proposition  $p$  is true.

### 3.2 Accessibility in a two-dimensional space

This leads to my second claim, namely, that the relevant relation between RS and ES is one of accessibility ( $\nearrow$ ),<sup>10</sup> not inclusion ( $\subset$ ). In modal logic, accessibility is a binary relation between worlds (Kaufmann et al. 2008; van Benthem 2010; Kratzer 2020). The most common model in linguistic research is one in which possible worlds are aligned with respect to the temporal flow. This defines a two-dimensional space, as shown in Figure 2, where temporal and modal accessibility relations can be defined.



**Figure 2:** A two-dimensional modal logic (adapted from Kaufmann et al. 2008, 95).

In Figure 2 the solid line  $w$  represents the actual world and the dashed lines  $w'$ ,  $w''$  represent possible worlds.<sup>11</sup> All possible worlds are aligned along the dimension defined by the temporal flow. As indicated, at time  $t$  some parts of the possible

<sup>10</sup> Accessibility is typically represented as  $R$ , but here I will use the symbol  $\nearrow$  instead to avoid confusing the accessibility relation  $R$  with the reference situation  $RS$ .

<sup>11</sup> As an anonymous reviewer notes, the term ‘real world’ is understood in opposition to possible worlds and is not to be understood in terms of (non-)fictionality.

worlds  $w'$  and  $w''$  are accessible from  $w$ . This relation, shown by the thick vertical line and represented as  $\approx$  in the formula, is a modal accessibility relation, connecting parallel worlds  $w$  and  $w'$  at time  $t$ . The relation represented by the thick horizontal line connects different temporal eventualities occurring at  $t, t', t''$ , all belonging to the same world  $w$ . This corresponds to the usual temporal relation of simultaneity and precedence ( $\leq$ ). Temporal relations are therefore a sub-type of accessibility relation in which the relata are located in the same world.

Going back to the *imperfecto*, my proposal is that the relation between RS and ES is one of accessibility. This is a necessary step to avoid the undesired effect that the inclusion requirement  $RS \subset ES$  can only be satisfied when the ES belongs to the actual world, which is descriptively inadequate. In fact, conceiving the relation between RS and ES as one of inclusion forces an interpretation of the two situations exclusively in denotational terms. Since the DS is a situation in the real world and the RS situation must precede it, the corollary is that any ES that includes the RS must be factual as well. Put in more technical terms, a temporal relation of inclusion can only relate situations whose world coordinates are the same. This requirement, however, as mentioned above, happens to be too strong and does not adequately account for the facts.

In the two-dimensional model, by contrast, the accessibility relation can hold between possible worlds aligned with respect to the temporal flow. Therefore, accessibility does not require that the related worlds share the same world/time coordinates: if they belong to different worlds  $w$  and  $w'$  connected by  $t$ , the accessibility relation is modal ( $\approx$ ), which entails that accessibility can be defined between a worldly fact and a propositional fact.

The formula for the *imperfecto* is therefore that given in (15).

$$(15) \quad RS \nearrow ES; RS < DS$$

The formula indicates that the accessibility relation between RS and ES is open and not necessarily constrained to operating in the same world. The relation between RS and DS, in contrast, is restricted to an ordering relation  $<$  between two situations belonging to the same world.

The relation of accessibility between RS and ES encoded by the Spanish *imperfecto* is therefore underspecified, i.e., not explicitly constrained with respect to the direction in which it must be satisfied. The formula in (15) thus allows the accessibility relation  $RS \nearrow ES$  to be obtained in two different ways: either as a standard temporal relation, with RS and ES belonging to the same world or, alternatively, as a modal relation, with RS belonging to  $w$  and ES belonging to  $w'$ , both aligned in the temporal dimension at  $t$ . The accessibility relation  $\nearrow$  ranges, therefore, over two variables: an inclusion relation operating on parts of a single world ( $\subseteq$ ), and a

modal relation ( $\approx$ ) connecting parallel worlds. This allows for two families of interpretations. However, this is not yet enough to explain the whole array of interpretations. A further dimension must be added to the picture.

### 3.3 Accessibility in a three-dimensional space

In the two-dimensional approach, the actual world is assumed to behave like a single line, encompassing all the actually existing states of affairs. Other lines representing possible worlds are then added above and below this line. However, this view does not fully capture the ways in which speakers deal with eventualities. This is the point where evidentiality comes into play.

Evidentiality is a grammatical category present in several languages, which refers to the speaker's indication of the type of evidence s/he has for a statement: whether directly seen or heard, or indirectly obtained, i.e., either inferred from indirect evidence or learnt from someone else (Aikhenvald 2004; 2018).<sup>12</sup> The basic division between direct and indirect evidence can be cast in terms of the speaker's spatiotemporal coordinates. For a given speaker at a given time not all eventualities have the same status: only a subset of eventualities in the real world are coincident with her/his current coordinates, while the rest of the world, no matter how real it may be, falls outside her/his experience. The notion of Speaker Perceptual Field (hereinafter, SPF; Nikolaeva 1999; Faller 2004; Chung 2006; De Haan 2006; Speas 2008) can be defined as follows:

The set of locations  $l$  that (s)he has perceptual access to at the time  $t$ , where perception may involve any sense, not just sight. The perceptual field is a sub-space of the physical space surrounding, and including, the speaker. (Faller 2004, 69–70)

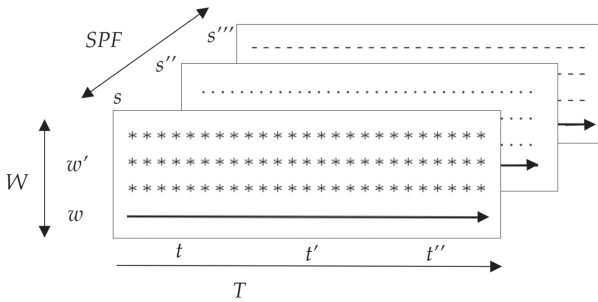
The SPF is relevant to the calculation of all forms of deixis, including personal, spatial and, crucially, temporal and evidential distinctions. The SPF “moves” with the timeline, leaving behind the set of locations to which the speaker had perceptual access in the past, thus forming the Speaker Perceptual Trace (SPT; Matthewson et al. 2003; Faller 2004).

What we call the ‘real world’, then, is the set of all perceptual fields and all perceptual traces of all speakers, aligned with respect to the time flow (*gen w*). If we return to the two-dimensional model in Figure 2, a more adequate way of con-

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<sup>12</sup> As an anonymous reviewer rightly notes, evidentiality is not (yet) a grammatical category in Spanish. Evidential uses of tenses can be regarded as evidential strategies, i.e., interpretations associated with non-evidential categories such as tense and aspect. See Aikhenvald (2004; 2007) for details.

ceiving the real world would be to split it into a set of parallel fields corresponding to the lifetimes of different speakers unfolding along the horizontal dimension in roughly the same way as possible worlds are built along the vertical dimension.



**Figure 3:** A three-dimensional model including temporal, modal and evidential dimensions.

Figure 3 represents the third dimension as a set of parallel vertical fields, labelled SPF, containing the worlds of different speakers ( $s$ ,  $s'$ ,  $s''$ ), all of them aligned with respect to the temporal flow. What we call “the real world” is thus the set of all perceptual fields of all speakers. In the field of each speaker, the solid arrow represents the spatiotemporal coordinates, i.e., the subset of the actual world falling within her/his perceptual space (either past or present). For each speaker, a set of accessible possible worlds is also defined, represented by the starred, dotted and dashed lines.

The result is a three-dimensional model where accessibility relations can be defined not only between the real world and possible worlds, but also between the world of an individual and that of other individuals. The three dimensions are aligned to each other. In this way, in addition to the regular temporal and modal relations, new forms of relations can be established along the new axis created at the SPF. For instance, at time  $t'$  the individual  $s$  can come to know about an eventuality belonging to the SPF of another individual. This can be done in various ways. The two individuals can share the same spatiotemporal coordinates (i.e., there is a partial coincidence in their respective SPFs for a certain time). In this situation,  $s$  can either have direct access to some eventualities involving  $s''$  as a participant, or learn something from  $s''$  about an eventuality outside their common SPF; alternatively,  $s''$  can provide  $s$  with information about a different individual  $s'$ . A crucial prediction of this model is that, for a given speaker, eventualities falling outside her/his SPF can be treated along the same lines as possibilities, i.e., as belonging to parallel worlds.

The three-dimensional model provides a more complex geometry to account for the relations among situations. If situations are conceived as planes (and not only points or intervals), besides the temporal relation of inclusion and precedence



and the modal relation of accessibility between parallel worlds, a third relation can be added to the picture: that obtaining between situations belonging to different planes that cross at a given line. These are in fact the only three relations possible between any two planes in a Cartesian space (see Figures 4–6):

- Coplanar planes ( $r \leftrightarrow e$ ): two planes are coplanar when they are the same plane.
- Parallel planes ( $r \parallel e$ ): parallel planes are planes that never intersect, like those corresponding to the top and bottom of a cube.
- Intersecting planes ( $r \perp e$ ): these planes are not parallel and therefore intersect at some point. The point of intersection forms a line. The bottom and side of a cube exemplify intersecting planes.

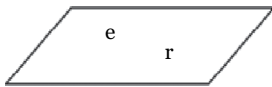


Figure 4: Coplanar areas.

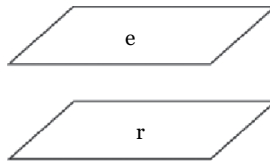


Figure 5: Parallel planes.

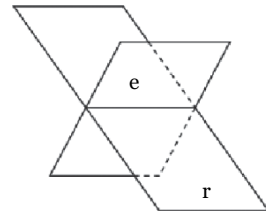


Figure 6: Intersecting planes.

All relations must fall into one of these three categories. This reduces the possible ways in which the accessibility relation can be obtained to three options, thus providing a principled and restrictive model for the inferential development of interpretations. In section 4, I will show that these three relations and their properties are, in fact, all we need to account for all the different values and readings of the *imperfecto*, their referential properties and their illocutionary commitments. But before that, some considerations about evidentiality are in order.

### 3.4 Accessibility and evidentiality

One of the striking properties of the *imperfecto* is that some of its attested interpretations have an unequivocally evidential flavour (see ex. (8)). An adequate model of the *imperfecto* must therefore explain how temporal features and evidential meanings are related to each other, and where evidential interpretations come from. The approach outlined above in terms of situations and accessibility, plus the three-dimensional model, offer the necessary conceptual tools to account for the connection between the semantics of tenses and that of evidential markers in a straightforward way.

The interactions and similarities between tense and evidentiality are well known in the literature (for an overview, see Woodbury 1986; Aikhenvald 2004; 2018). Recent approaches to evidentiality, such as those in Nikolaeva (1999), Speas (2004; 2008; 2010), Davis et al. (2006) and Kalsang et al. (2013), have gone a step further and explored this relation in a more abstract way: it is argued that evidentials do not directly encode distinctions regarding the information source; rather they convey more abstract relations among situations, from which the source of the evidence for the assertion can be inferred. The proposal is cast in neo-Reichenbachian terms: “evidential morphemes encode relations among three situations: the situation of which a proposition is true, a reference situation and the discourse situation” (Speas 2010, 128). The only relations involved are precedence and accessibility, so the combinatorial possibilities strictly constrain the existing paradigms. A “direct evidence” interpretation is obtained whenever the reference situation (where information has been acquired) is contained in the situation of which the proposition is true; otherwise, an “indirect evidence” interpretation (hearsay or inferential) is obtained. Other kinds of evidential interpretation can be derived along these lines.

The parallelism between temporal and evidential systems is therefore clear and comes with a number of desirable consequences: i) it offers a plausible explanation for the frequent fusion of the two systems cross-linguistically and accounts for the equally frequent extensions from temporal to evidential readings; ii) it provides a restrictive model for the paradigms of possible evidential systems; and iii) it points towards the existence of deeper cognitive motivations.

The connection between temporal and evidential readings provides the final key to understanding how the various readings of the *imperfecto* relate to each other and why evidential interpretations arise for some of them. If evidential values obtain for examples like (6) *Resbaló y cayó al pavimento. Instantes después, moría* and (8) *Tú jugabas al fútbol, ¿no es cierto?* this is due not only to the context, but also to the way in which the relations among the various situations involved in the semantics of the *imperfecto* are linked. The deep similarities between temporal and evidential distinctions favour the emergence of evidential readings.

## 4 Interpreting the *imperfecto*

The ideas presented so far establish the basis for my proposal regarding the semantics of the temporal feature of the *imperfecto* and lead to a number of explanatory generalisations that can be formulated as follows:

- The relata are situations (DS, RS, ES), not time points or intervals.
- The formula for the *imperfecto* is always the same:  $RS \not\supset ES$ ;  $RS < DS$ .

- The relevant relation is accessibility, not inclusion.
- The accessibility relation between RS and ES is underspecified.
- The condition of accessibility is underspecified and can be satisfied in only three ways.
- The accessibility relation can be obtained in three, and only three, different ways: coplanar, parallel and intersecting.
- All the interpretations of the *imperfecto* necessarily fall into one of these three categories.
- All referential and illocutionary properties of the various readings are derived from the geometry of situations.
- The relations among situations parallel those found in evidential distinctions.

The formula in (15) ( $RS \not\supset ES; RS < DS$ ) represents the two relations that make up the temporal feature. The relation between RS and DS is a precedence relation: RS must be located at a time  $t'$  prior to the time  $t''$  corresponding to the DS. Hence, the temporal ordering relation forces a construal in which both situations belong to the same world. Also common to all cases is the accessibility relation between RS and ES. This relation, however, is not specified, so the accessibility requirement can be obtained in the three ways mentioned above.

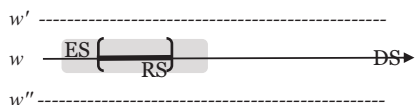
In the following sections I review the attested values of the *imperfecto* in the light of my proposal to show that the above generalisations yield the right predictions regarding the formal, referential and illocutionary properties of sentences with the *imperfecto*.

#### 4.1 Coplanar readings ( $RS \leftrightarrow ES$ )

The first category of interpretations includes all the readings that are obtained by constructing the accessibility relation between RS and ES as a relation between two situations sharing the same world coordinates, i.e., coexisting in the same world at the same time. This world is the real world, so both RS and ES correspond to factual situations and therefore the *imperfecto* is interpreted as a regular Reichenbachian past tense (see Figure 1).

Hence, coplanar interpretations correspond to a particular development of the revised formula (15), which is shown in (16) and Figure 7. The thick line in Figure 7 indicates the two coplanar situations RS and ES.

- (16)  $RS \not\supset ES; RS < DS$
- i.  $RS \leftrightarrow ES$  (Coplanar interpretation)
  - ii. Hence,  $RS \subseteq ES$



**Figure 7:** The geometry of situations: relation of coplanarity.

This formula corresponds to examples (1)–(5). In all such cases, all three situations are in the same world. The ES is thus a past factual eventuality, taking place at a time interval containing RS. The referential properties of ES need not be stipulated but follow from the geometry of situations in a natural way. As for the illocutionary properties, if the proposition is asserted, the speaker is committed to believing the propositional content  $p$  (see DeBrabanter/Dendale 2008; Kissine 2008; Geurts 2019).

Two further considerations are in order here. The first has to do with the extension of the timespan considered; the second with the aspectual nature of the *imperfecto*. The coincidence relation does not determine the length of the interval at which the two situations overlap. The extension is in fact usually specified by the constituent identifying the RS, which acts as a topic frame setter (see Maienborn 2001; Maienborn/Schäfer 2012; Ernst, 2016). This is the role of adjunct constituents (as in (1), *cuando sonó el teléfono* ‘when the phone rang’). The RS can also be implicit (as in (2) and (3)) because the speaker assumes that the context can make clear the temporal situation to which the assertion is restricted.

As for the overlapping relation between RS and ES, it is always one in which the RS is included in the ES, and not the other way round<sup>13</sup>. This is a requirement not of the temporal component, but rather of the aspectual imperfective feature, which requires that the eventuality be presented in progress, framing its internal development without considering its beginning or end. Of course, there is nothing to prevent the eventuality from culminating at a time outside the RS. Predicates with an atelic *Aktionsart* satisfy this requirement straightforwardly, whereas telic predications are subject to further zooming-in and zooming-out interpretive operations to yield progressive and habitual interpretations (see Bertinetto 1986; Berthonneau/Kleiber 1993; García Fernández 1996; 2004; de Swart 1998; Leonetti 2004; Saussure/Sthioul 2005; Bres 2005; Amenós 2010; Dessi Schmid 2010).

When more than one eventuality occurs inside the same RS, as in the case of coordinated or juxtaposed sentences (see (2)), all the situations are assumed to comply with the requirements expressed by the two clauses in (16), namely, that all of them contain the RS and are co-planar with each other.

<sup>13</sup> In order to cover the whole range of cases, the inclusion relation has to be coextensive in some cases, as noted by Pier Marco Bertinetto (p.c.).

## 4.2 Parallel readings ( $RS \approx ES$ )

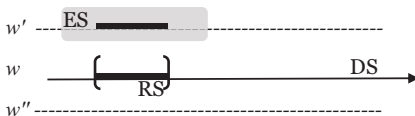
The second category is that in which the accessibility relation between RS and ES is satisfied by the two situations belonging to two different world coordinates. As in the previous case, the precedence relation holding between RS and DS entails that RS must be part of the real world  $w$ . ES, in contrast, is construed here as a situation belonging to a different, parallel world, temporally aligned with the real world at  $t$ , but different from it.

In parallel interpretations, then, two different worlds are related; hence the relation between RS and ES can never be one of inclusion. These properties are represented in (16).

- (17)  $RS \not\supset ES$ ;  $RS < DS$
- i.  $RS \approx ES$  (parallel interpretation)
  - ii. Hence,  $RS \not\subset ES$  &  $ES \not\subset RS$

In a three-dimensional model, such as the one in Figure 3, the relation of parallelism can be obtained in two different ways: either as a modal relation, with accessibility moving along the vertical axis of possible worlds  $W$  (as shown in Figure 2), or as an evidentiality relation, moving along the depth dimensions of different speakers' SPFs. Both possibilities, I argue, are exploited in the interpretation of the *imperfecto*.

Consider the modal interpretation first. The system easily predicts how a modal accessibility relation is construed and what its properties will be. A modal interpretation of the *imperfecto* is one in which a past RS in  $w$  gives access to an eventuality belonging to a parallel possible world  $w'$ , as shown in Figure 8. The two thick lines represent the parallel situations.



**Figure 8:** The geometry of situations: parallelism along the modal dimension.

As the figure shows, the three situations no longer have the same status: DS and RS are part of the same world  $w$  (i.e., are worldly facts), whereas ES belongs to a different world  $w'$  (is a propositional fact). The thick line in Figure 8 represents the modal accessibility relation connecting two parallel worlds  $w$  and  $w'$ . Being part of a possible world, the ES is not a state of affairs in the real world, but the representation of a possible eventuality. Only the past situation is real.

What are the readings of the *imperfecto* that derive from this geometry of situations? When the accessibility relation is obtained in this way, the *imperfecto* is used to present a possible eventuality accessed by the speaker in a past situation. This is exactly what we find in hypothetical or counterfactual interpretations, such as (10) *Como se retrasara un día más, no la admitían* ‘If she were late another day, they wouldn’t admit<sub>IMF</sub> her.’. Here the *imperfecto* refers not to a past situation but rather to a possibility envisaged at a time before the DS. Accessing a possible world in the past is also accessing a counterfactual world; hence the eventuality represented can be counterfactual as well. This is found in the c) reading for (13) *Un minuto más tarde salía el tren* ‘One minute later, the train would have left’. Typically, hypothetical and counterfactual readings occur with a conditional format, pointing to the expected outcome of a non-factual hypothesis.

The same goes for so-called (pre-)ludic uses, in which the speaker assigns different roles for a game, as in (12). The propositional content represents possible eventualities accessed at a time prior to the DS (and this is the past feature); the eventualities themselves, by contrast, look into the future and will only take place if accepted by the rest of the participants involved.

Polite uses of the *imperfecto* like (7) also follow this line of interpretation. Here the speaker has made a decision in the past to ask a favour, and in so doing has accessed a possible world. It is this past access that is represented in the sentence. Therefore, the fact that the propositional content corresponds to a present action does not invalidate the fact that this eventuality has been previously accessed as an intention in the past. The polite effect, then, derives precisely from the contrast between what is asserted by the sentence (an intention at a past RS) and the actual state of affairs (the fulfilment of that intention at DS).

The referential properties of the eventuality represented in both (10) and (13c) are therefore the same: an eventuality that would happen (or would have happened) following the normal course of events as seen from the point of view of a past situation. Only the RS (i.e., the situation in which the speaker accessed the conditional structure) is factual, not the ES. If the antecedent does not come into actual existence, the apodosis does not hold either. Consequently, the speaker is committed not to the truth of the propositional content *p* (*no la admiten; el tren sale*), but to believing the conditional relation (If she were late another day, they wouldn’t admit her; If the signal is switched on, the train will leave). This relation is found in (12) as well: if the other participants in the game do not accept the assigned role, the eventualities will never take place. Polite uses exploit the same schema, with the obvious difference that here the event envisaged in the past is taking place at DS.

Interestingly, this geometry of situations has a strong resemblance to that of inferential evidentials, where the speaker indicates that inference (whether from actual evidence or from general knowledge) is the only source of information.

Thus, by constructing the accessibility relation as a modal, the hypothetical and counterfactual readings of the *imperfecto* can be accounted for in a straightforward way.

In addition to the modal solution, there is still another way to construe a parallel relation between RS and ES. DS and RS always belong to the world  $w$  and are related by precedence (RS < DS). What changes in this second case is that the parallel world to which ES belongs is located along the evidential dimension: ES belongs neither to the actual world  $w$  of  $s$ , nor to a possible world  $w'$  of  $s$ , but to the world of another individual  $s'$ . ES can be a factual eventuality taking place at  $w$  within the perceptual field of  $s'$  (but crucially, out of the perceptual field of  $s$ ), or a memory belonging to the perceptual trace of  $s'$ , or even a mere possibility (an intention, for instance) belonging to a possible world  $w'$  of  $s'$ . There are no conditions placed on the location of the ES represented. The accessibility relation only requires that  $s$  had access to some part of the world of  $s'$  in the past. These properties are represented in Figure 9.



**Figure 9:** The geometry of situations: parallelism along the evidential dimension.

This geometry of situations gives rise to an interpretation with the following two properties: i) the propositional content refers not to a fact, but to the representation of a fact, and ii) the RS is a factual past situation giving access to a non-factual representation ES obtained from a different individual. This relation immediately suggests that the RS is an information acquisition situation and that the information about the ES is second-hand information.

This is indeed what can be found in examples like (8) *Tú jugabas al fútbol, ¿no?* ‘You play/played football, right?’: native speakers and researchers unanimously acknowledge that this sentence does not describe a worldly fact; rather, it reports information received from a third party in the past, with no requirements placed on the coordinates of that situation. Not surprisingly, this interpretation is called quotative (see Reyes 1990; Leonetti/Escandell-Vidal 2003; RAE/ASALE 2009; Böhm 2016).

Here again the connection with evidentiality becomes significant. The geometry of situations represented in Figure 9 is the same as that needed to describe second-hand, reportative evidence (Speas 2010; Kalsang et al. 2013): since the event is not included in the situation RS, where the information is acquired, the speaker can

have only indirect evidence for  $p$ . The relation between temporal and evidential readings need not be stipulated; rather, it follows from the geometry of situations in a natural way. Adopting a model based on situations and relations of accessibility thus shows the close links between temporal and evidential systems.

Further implications can be derived from the proposed account. The first is that there is no need for the eventuality ES itself to be located in the past. What must be in the past is the situation in which the information about the event is obtained. If this is so, then the prediction is that the event may be located anywhere, even in the future. This prediction is in fact borne out, as illustrated by the interpretations called prospective, exemplified in (9), *Mi avión salía mañana a las 23:50* ‘My plane is expected to depart tomorrow at 23:50’. The departure of the plane is a scheduled event, for which information can be obtained beforehand. This is exactly what the *imperfecto* does: what must be accessible from the past situation is the representation of the programmed event (the propositional fact), not the event itself (the worldly fact). Thus, (9) is true in the DS if the speaker has second-hand evidence about the plane schedule. Prospective interpretations are therefore a further subclass of parallel interpretations. This is also the case with the b) interpretation of (13): that of a programmed eventuality.

The referential status of the propositional content follows from the relations among situations. The ES is not a worldly fact in the world of the speaker, but merely a represented eventuality. Therefore, the speaker is committed not to the truth of the propositional content, but to reproducing the information faithfully. In quotative/prospective readings both the referential properties of  $p$  and the illocutionary commitments of uttering  $p$  are the opposite of those of the coplanar readings.

### 4.3 Intersecting readings ( $RS \perp ES$ )

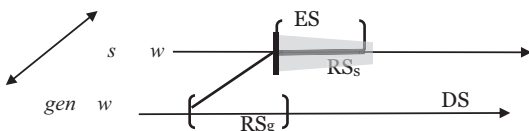
The third and final logical possibility is that which corresponds to the intersecting planes relation. Again, the precedence relation  $RS < DS$  is the same as before, the difference lying only in the way in which the accessibility relation between RS and ES is construed. Intersecting planes cross, i.e., they have a line in common: there must be a line  $l$  that belongs to both RS and ES, but RS and ES are not coincident. This can be represented by the formula in (18).

- (18)  $RS \not\supset ES$ ;  $RS < DS$
- i.  $RS \perp ES$  (intersecting interpretation)
  - ii. Hence,  $[ES \cap RS]$



The prediction of this geometry of relations is that the ES must be an eventuality of the same world as RS, which in turn is in the same world as DS; hence ES must be part of the real world. But if this were the whole story, the result would be the same as coplanar readings (see §4.1). What, then, does intersection contribute to the interpretation?

My proposal is that intersection requires the additional third dimension: the adequate relation is obtained by defining the accessibility relation between the general world (*gen w*) as the sets of all SPFs at a given time, on the one hand, and the speaker's own perceptual space *s*, on the other. The RS in the general world gives access to a twin RS in the speaker's own perceptual space. It is precisely in this specific space that the ES is located. This is represented in Figure 10.



**Figure 10:** The geometry of situations: relation of intersection.

Several considerations are in order here. Firstly, what is unique about interpretations based on a construal of the accessibility relation as involving intersecting planes is that the eventuality is presented as occurring within the perceptual space of the speaker at a past time. Figure 10 expresses the idea that there is a past situation  $RS_g$  that gives access to a past situation  $RS_s$  where ES took place. Secondly, the geometry of situations in Figure 10 corresponds to the pattern found in direct evidentials, where the described eventuality has taken place precisely within the SPF, so the speaker has directly witnessed the ES. The eventuality is anchored to the information acquisition situation, but not coincident with it. The ES is thus both factual and anchored to the information acquisition situation  $RS_s$ , but not coincident with it. This explains why the ES is not subject to the requirements that hold for coplanar situations, namely, that the eventuality must occupy the whole RS interval, thus forcing habitual and iterative events when necessary. Thirdly, there are crucial differences between the relations among situations and those in interpretations exploiting parallelism: in the latter case, the ES is not factual nor is it necessarily anchored to any past situation; in intersecting interpretations, in contrast, the situation is presented as factual, past and directly experienced by the speaker.

What are the uses of the *imperfecto* exemplifying this geometry of situations? Clearly, those in which the described event is factual and has taken place within the SPF. This corresponds to oneiric uses, in which a speaker reports a dream, as in (11). The narrated eventualities belong to the exclusive space of the speaker: even

though they are not part of the objective world, they are nevertheless perceived as directly experienced events in a real past. It is the *imperfecto* that conveys this internal, subjectivised perspective known as the ‘camera effect’ and carries the corresponding experiential commitment. The oneiric use is acquired early and is one of the several spontaneous uses of the *imperfecto*.

Narrative interpretations are tailored to the same pattern. Consider (6) (*Resbaló y cayó al pavimento. Instantes después, moría*). The verbs in the perfective past in the first sentence describe the facts from a neutral point of view ‘S/he slipped and fell’. By switching to the *imperfecto* in the last sentence (*moría* ‘s/he died’), the speaker switches to her/his own perceptual space and presents the event of dying as a witnessed event, giving rise again to the ‘camera effect’. This change of perspective conveys the speaker’s involvement and carries the assumption of direct experience. This is also the case with the a) interpretation of (13).

Finally, the experiential relation can also explain the uses of the *imperfecto* called historical or biographical, as in (19).

(19) *El 3 de marzo de 1680 terminaba su última comedia. Al año siguiente escribía su último auto sacramental. Tras dictar testamento el 20 de mayo, fallecía a las doce y media de la mañana del domingo 25 de mayo de 1681.*

‘On 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1680, he *finished*<sub>IMP</sub> his last comedy. The following year he *wrote*<sub>IMP</sub> his last auto sacramental. After making his will on 20<sup>th</sup> May, he *died*<sub>IMP</sub> at half past twelve in the morning on Sunday, 25<sup>th</sup> May 1681.’

Here, three past events in the life of the Spanish writer Calderón de la Barca are narrated using the *imperfecto* instead of the *pretérito indefinido*. By doing so, the narrator makes it seem as though s/he directly witnessed these events. This is a literary use of a grammatical resource, given that the narrator cannot have been an actual witness. It therefore involves a fictitious transfer of the speaker’s spatiotemporal coordinates to a distant past. The vividness of the narration arises from the experiential effect associated with this geometry of situations.

Narrated uses have sometimes been adduced as a counterexample to the imperfective status of the *imperfecto*. However, it should be noted that the “perfective” interpretation is not a feature of the *imperfecto*, but rather an inference based on the normal course of events. The *imperfecto* in narrations focuses on the homogeneous part of the event without preventing its culmination.

Both the referential properties and the illocutionary commitments of the narrative *imperfecto* can be explained in a principled way based on the relations between RS and ES. ES is presented as factual and the speaker is committed to having had direct experience of the eventualities.

As in coplanar interpretations, the ES here is a real past eventuality. So what is the difference between coplanar and intersecting interpretations? In coplanar readings the RS and the ES are on the same plane and satisfaction of the accessibility condition requires that the RS be included in the ES. This enforces a relation between the interval RS and the aspectual properties of the eventuality: the subinterval property of  $IMP(p)$  must hold for the entire length of the RS; in other words, the RS window must show only a homogeneous image of the eventuality. With atelic predicates, this requirement is satisfied in a straightforward way. With telic predicates, in contrast, some adjustment operations are in order. This is exactly what progressive and habitual interpretations achieve: progressive interpretations of telic predicates focus on the processual, homogeneous phase, leaving out the culmination; habitual interpretations, on the other hand, transform telic events into usual, repeated activities, thus satisfying the subinterval property. It is thus only in coplanar readings that the relation between RS and ES appears to be an aspectual one. This relation, however, as I have sought to show, is not direct, but rather a by-product of the two independent features of the *imperfecto*: the temporal accessibility condition in coplanar geometry imposes inclusion and the aspectual homogeneity condition imposes the subinterval property reading. The two requirements converge here to enforce an interpretation complying with both.

Things are totally different when the relation between RS and ES is one of intersection. Here, satisfaction of the aspectual requirement of the *imperfecto* is not linked to the temporal extension of RS. The two conditions, then, must be fulfilled independently. The temporal accessibility relation is satisfied by locating an RS in the past, identified by an explicit or implicit frame-setter. As for the aspectual condition, the only requirement is to interpret  $IMP(p)$  as having the subinterval property without relating it to the temporal extension of RS. This allows for both the existence of temporal order and the post-focal culmination of telic eventualities.

This proposal makes a significant prediction about the way in which coordinated sentences in the *imperfecto* will behave within a text. In coplanar readings, all the eventualities must be adjusted in their extension to contain the RS. As a consequence, eventualities “pile up” on the same plane, with similar extensions. In intersecting readings, on the other hand, eventualities cannot include the entire RS, only a part of it (the part corresponding to the intersection). The result is that eventualities must satisfy the aspectual condition independently, and they can occur in temporal sequence. By way of illustration, consider the interpretations received by telic predicates like *ir de vacaciones a Canarias* ‘to go to the Canary Islands on holiday’ or *escalar el Teide* ‘to climb Mount Teide’ in the following two scenarios:

- (20) *De pequeña, íbamos de vacaciones a Canarias y escalábamos el Teide.*  
 ‘When I was a child, we used to go to the Canary Islands on holiday and climb Mount Teide.’
- (21) *En el sueño, íbamos de vacaciones a Canarias y escalábamos el Teide.*  
 ‘In my dream, we went<sub>IMP</sub> to the Canary Islands on holiday and climbed<sub>IMP</sub> Mount Teide.’

The *imperfectos* in (20) occur in a context in which accessibility is interpreted as a coplanar relation. The telic eventualities are understood as repeated and habitual to adjust to the temporal interval of the frame-setter *de pequeña*. In (21), by contrast, the same predicates are interpreted as sequentially ordered, single events. There is no requirement that the RS be contained in the ES, so no adjustment operation is carried out to this end. The aspectual requirement is satisfied here by focusing on the eventuality as a static property and not a process. My proposal, then, accounts for this difference in a motivated way.

## 5 Consequences and implications

In the previous sections I have presented a new proposal regarding the semantics of the *imperfecto*. I have argued that all the interpretations share the same semantics, thus making it possible to maintain a strict monosemic approach in procedural terms: the semantics of the *imperfecto* is a procedural instruction that must always be satisfied.

The temporal feature of the *imperfecto* can be modelled in terms of a restricted and independently motivated set of situations (DS, ES, RS) and relations (accessibility and precedence): ES can be accessed from RS, which must precede DS ( $RS \nearrow ES$ ;  $RS < DS$ ). Key to this proposal is the idea that the accessibility relation is underspecified, so it is open to various interpretations. The relevant possibilities cannot be modelled in a two-dimensional space using only relations of precedence and inclusion involving temporal points and intervals; rather, a more complex model is needed based on a three-dimensional space. In this model, there are only three possible ways in which accessibility can be construed.

Consequently, the unrestricted and unmotivated list found in grammatical descriptions of the Spanish *imperfecto* can be captured in a restrictive model of binary relations between situations. As a result, only three categories emerge, each with its own consistent set of referential and illocutionary properties without further stipulation.

The referential properties of the various readings are determined by the way in which the accessibility relation between RS and ES obtains:

- Coplanarity predicts the factuality of the ES and the coincidence with the RS in the past.<sup>14</sup>
- Parallelism predicts that the RS is a past information acquisition situation where the speaker came to know about ES. As for ES, it can be factual or not, and its temporal location is not necessarily in the past, so it may be in the present or even in the future
- Intersection predicts non-coplanar containment. The RS is located in the past and so is the ES, but the eventuality is not coextensive with the RS.

Illocutionary commitments are entailments of the geometry of situations and also follow in a natural way, with no additional stipulations:

- Coplanarity predicts the speaker's commitment to believing the propositional content.
- Parallelism predicts that the speaker is not committed to the truth of the propositional content; rather, having acquired this content indirectly (either by report or by inference), the speaker is committed to the existence of the information acquisition situation and to the faithfulness of her/his rendering of it.
- Intersection predicts that the speaker is committed not only to the truth of the propositional content, but also to having had direct experience of the eventuality.

The interpretations involving non-coplanarity reproduce the same patterns as the corresponding evidential categories, namely, inference and report for parallelism, and direct experience for intersection. In this way, my proposal does not require any special or *ad hoc* machinery; rather, it makes use of an independently motivated and restrictive framework that is explanatory and adequate to account for the distinctions found in evidential paradigms. In addition, the connection between evidential distinctions and temporal features in languages without proper evidential paradigms is made salient, which casts new light on the relation between the two grammatical categories.

The interpretations of the *imperfecto* are summarised in Table 1.

Once the logic underlying this restrictive system is adopted, the derivation of all the attested interpretations comes as a natural result. The interpretation must first and foremost satisfy the semantic requirements encoded by the *imperfecto* on both the aspectual and the temporal sides. Since the condition relating RS and ES

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<sup>14</sup> This does not hold, of course, in opaque contexts.

**Table 1:** The Spanish *imperfecto*: its temporal features and interpretations.

Temporal feature	Accessibility construal	Referential status of ES	Illocutionary commitment	Evidential effect	Traditional labels
RS $\nabla$ ES; RS<DS	Coplanarity	Factual past	Belief		Progressive, continuous, habitual, absolute, inchoative
	Parallelism	Non-factual, Non-past	Existence of an acquisition situation in the past	Inference	Hypothetical, counterfactual, pre-ludic, polite
				Report	Quotative, prospective
Intersection	Factual past	Belief	Direct experience	Narrative, historical, oneiric	

can be satisfied in a number of ways, temporal and aspectual adjuncts will play a major role in further constraining the interpretation, as has been extensively described in the literature.

My aim has not been to explain how and when the various interpretations arise but why they are possible at all. Though it might appear that it is the mere co-occurrence of the *imperfecto* with certain kinds of adjuncts that triggers a particular interpretation, it must be kept in mind that this can only happen if the semantic features encoded by the *imperfecto* allow it. My proposal is meant to clarify why such a variety of interpretations can be obtained from a single semantics and why the interpretations can only go in three directions, each with its own set of interpretive properties. Understanding the way in which the semantic features of the *imperfecto* constrain and determine its various interpretations is a prior and necessary step in explaining how other constituents interact with it.

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# Evidentiality, epistemic modality and temporality in the Spanish verbal system

**Abstract:** In the current literature on TAM categories in European languages, and more specifically in Spanish, the notion of evidentiality has been introduced as a potential new category, more or less linked to modality, in the study of the verbal system. In this paper we challenge the non-modal dimension of evidentiality in Spanish as it appears in the description of some verb forms such as the Future, the Conditional and the Indicative Imperfect. We argue that most of these “evidential” uses can be explained in terms of the traditional categories of tense and epistemic modality with the help of well-established notions in the description of the Spanish verb, such as inactuality, polifunctionality and semantic displacement. We also deal with the study of two compound forms of the Indicative – the Past Perfect and the Present Perfect – which in some American varieties are used in non-standard ways that may coincide with evidential functions. In any case, we recommend a critical approach to all such phenomena based on broader and contextualised data before ruling out their integration into the TAM categories, as described hitherto.

**Keywords:** temporality, evidentiality, epistemic modality, Spanish verb forms, American Spanish

## 1 Introduction

Evidentiality is currently in vogue. Having been widely described as a basic grammatical category in many American indigenous languages, where it can be formally identified, numerous attempts have been made to demonstrate the relevance of this category in other languages around the world that have no explicit marking for it, as in the case of many European languages. Evidentiality has thus shifted from a semasiological to an onomasiological concept, even in languages for which it had never previously been considered as its values often converge with other related categories, such as epistemic modality (Chafe 1986; Plungian 2001). This is also the

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**Funding:** This work is part of research project FFI2017-82249-P funded by the Spanish Ministry of the Economy, Industry and Competitiveness.

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case in the Romance languages, with many authors speaking of “evidentiality strategies” of a lexical or pragmatic nature that fulfil the same functions as the “evidentiality systems” of languages with grammaticalised evidentiality (Aikhenvald 2004, 11). Given their pragmatic nature, these strategies are usually represented by polyfunctional grammatical forms whose evidential values have to be inferred from the overall context (Friedman 1986, 185).

The issue with such strategies in languages that do not grammaticalise evidentiality independently, such as Spanish and other Romance languages, is to decide how far these inferences should go, and to what extent the resulting evidentiality overlaps with the more traditional category of epistemic modality. De Haan (1999) has provided us with a very clear definition of both concepts that should allow us to identify them properly: “Evidentiality asserts the evidence, while epistemic modality evaluates the evidence”. The two categories may therefore be related, but should not overlap in any language (De Haan 1999, 8). Although this might be true, it is not the case in Romance languages, where “asserting the evidence” is often a conversational implicature that derives mostly from the way some lexical items or some verbal categories, such as tense, aspect and mood, appear in the utterance. Moreover, “asserting the evidence” does not seem to be the most significant implicature of all utterances in Romance languages and it is barely distinguishable from “evaluating the evidence”, i.e., the speaker’s subjective positioning on the truthfulness of her/his assertion (Haßler 2010, 232). De Haan contends that assertions expressing epistemic necessity are “based on some kind of evidence the speaker has for the statement” (1999, 8). We find this tantamount to claiming that there is always a source (explicit or otherwise) for every piece of information that speakers provide in their utterances, which is of course a truism and places evidentiality in a secondary functional position with respect to epistemic modality.

The question that should be asked about the existence of evidentiality in languages with systems of verbal forms without specific markers for it, such as Spanish, is whether this is indeed a necessary category for a comprehensive understanding of the meaning of these forms, or whether it is merely a (new) semantic label for explaining things that have already been described in terms of “traditional” grammaticalised verbal categories such as tense and modality. In other works (e.g., Azpiazu 2016; 2019), we have expressed scepticism about many evidential interpretations of the Present Perfect<sup>1</sup> in different varieties of Spanish. The following is an

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<sup>1</sup> I chose to use the English grammatical terminology for the Spanish verbal forms. Although terms such as “Present Perfect” or “Past Perfect” may not seem appropriate to refer to Spanish verb forms (“pretérito perfecto compuesto” and “pluscuamperfecto”, respectively) that are not functionally identical to their English equivalents, I believe they suitably describe the semantic nature of the Spanish tenses and do not give rise to misinterpretation.

attempt to evaluate the extent to which evidentiality is a better way of interpreting the semantics of certain Spanish verbal forms when they seem to diverge from their original temporal use, as has been proposed for the Future, the Conditional and the Imperfect (e.g., Squartini 2001; Escandell Vidal 2010; Haßler 2010; 2016; 2017; Hennemann 2013; 2014; García Negroni 2016; Böhm 2016), as well as the Present Perfect and Past Perfect (e.g., Bustamante 1991; Escobar 1994; 1997; Bermúdez 2005; Dumont 2013; Pfänder/Palacios 2013; Blestel 2014; García Tesoro 2015; García Tesoro/Jang 2018; Palacios 2021).

## 2 Accessing the information source

Any analysis of evidentiality in the Spanish verbal system needs to refer to the standard classification made by Willet (1988), who distinguishes between *direct* evidentiality (sensorily attested by the actual speaker) and *indirect* evidentiality (*inferred* by the speaker or *reported* from another source), and alongside this, Frawley's distinction (1992) between *self* (the speaker) and *other* (elsewhere, outside the speaker) as the source of knowledge. Haßler (2010) calls for a deictic conception of evidentiality that should distinguish between speaker and non-speaker, which is important here, as when the speaker is involved (either directly or indirectly) and because evidentiality is not grammatically marked on the verb form, it becomes very difficult to separate the mere assertion of the evidence from its evaluation. However, evidentiality becomes more salient when it is clear that the source of the information lies outside the speaker, that is, in alien words or interpretations (mostly as reported evidence). On such occasions, it even seems that the speaker refuses to epistemically “evaluate” the information, neither adhering to it nor questioning it. This research sets out to show that the only verbal form that is clearly capable of doing so in Standard Spanish is the so-called “journalistic” or “rumour” Conditional. As for all the other verbal forms with a supposed evidential meaning, evidentiality is entangled with the values of either epistemic modality or the basic category of temporality inherent to them all. Certain caveats to this assertion should be made regarding the use of the Present Perfect and Past Perfect in some varieties of Spanish coexisting with Quechua, a language family with a grammaticalised evidential system.

### 3 Displaced meaning of verbal forms

#### 3.1 Tense, inactuality and evidentiality

The first question that arises when addressing Spanish verbal forms with an alleged evidential interpretation concerns the relationship between tense and evidentiality, or to put it another way, the nature of the verbal forms, whereby some of them develop evidential values.<sup>2</sup>

Firstly, it should be noted that the three forms considered mostly evidential in all Spanish varieties (Conditional, Future, Imperfect) give up part of their basic temporal meaning when used evidentially. This is the same process that Rojo (1974), in his comprehensive study of Spanish verbal temporality, called “*usos dislocados*” (“displaced uses”).<sup>3</sup> These “displaced uses” presuppose the existence of “right or straight uses” (“*usos rectos*”), which under certain discursive or pragmatic circumstances are substituted by the displaced ones (Pérez Saldanya 2004; Rodríguez Rosique 2011). In this process, a modal meaning that was not part of the form’s sense in its straight use usually arises and becomes inherent to the form’s new semantics (Rojo 1974, 112). In general terms, this modal meaning involves „epistemic distance”, which ranges between two extremes, from the minimum positively oriented distance (probability) to the maximum negatively oriented distance<sup>4</sup> (irreality or counterfactuality) (Fleischman 1989; Rodríguez Rosique 2011, 259).

Another concept that might help to explain the connexion between temporality, epistemic modality and evidentiality in the Spanish verb system is “inactuality”. This term, coined by Coseriu (1976, §5.1), designates a secondary temporal plane opposed to a primary “actual” one. The actual plane is organised around the moment of speech, and its core or central form is the present tense. Every tense form referring directly to the moment of speech (e.g., the Simple Past and the Simple Future, as well as the Present) belongs to the actual level. The inactual plane, on the

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<sup>2</sup> We refer here exclusively to the forms of the indicative paradigm, the non-marked mood for asserted information in Spanish, as the subjunctive forms are primarily marked for epistemic modality in this language and their presence in discourse is often conditioned by lexical and syntactic operators that seriously weaken the possibility of them functioning as pure forms of evidentiality. Just like Spanish grammaticography, at least in the last 100 years, all forms of the Conditional are considered part of the indicative paradigm here.

<sup>3</sup> Antecedents of this notion are the “metaphorical uses” of certain verbal forms described by Bello (1847) and the “forward migrations” of Bull (1960). Pérez Saldanya (2004) calls them “derived values”.

<sup>4</sup> For a more extensive explanation of the terms “positive” and “negative” (speaker’s position) in this context, see Rodríguez Rosique (2011, 244), based on Fillmore (1990).

other hand, is parallel to the actual one, as it is not organised around the moment of speech but instead around a state of affairs that precedes that moment of speech and establishes the background of other events. Its central form is the Imperfect. All verbal forms occupy one of these two temporal planes or levels, and refer to the core form retrospectively or prospectively, as can be seen in Table 1:

**Table 1:** Verbal forms on the actual and inactual temporal planes.

	Retrospective	Parallel	Prospective
Actual plane	Simple Past ( <i>canté</i> )	Present ( <i>canto</i> )	Future ( <i>cantaré</i> )
Inactual plane	Past Perfect ( <i>había cantado</i> ) <sup>5</sup>	Imperfect ( <i>cantaba</i> )	Conditional ( <i>cantaría</i> )

The main point here is that an evidential meaning is attributed to all forms of the inactual plane, and that all them designate “original anteriority” in the words of Rojo (1974) and Rojo/Veiga (1999). There is a close relationship between this kind of temporal distancing from the moment of speech and many “displaced” modal values, including the alleged evidential values. There are only two exceptions to this assertion, the Future (simple and compound) being one of them.<sup>6</sup> This is the form with which I launch this description.

### 3.2 “Inferential” Future and Conditional

According to Rojo’s (1974) temporal displacement explanation, in some contexts the **Future**, originally a form for expressing the *posteriority* of an eventuality (E) with regard to the moment of speech (S) (1a), becomes a form for expressing the *simultaneity* of E with respect to S. In using it thus, the speaker provides the expression with a modal meaning of probability or less certainty as to the veracity of the assertion (1b) (Rojo 1974, 113):

<sup>5</sup> The table is a somewhat crude simplification of Coseriu’s original model, which was thought to apply to all Romance languages and which provides a different semantic category for each form by clearly distinguishing between simple (primary temporal perspective) and compound forms (secondary temporal perspective, which includes not only the compound past forms but also the future periphrases *to go to + infinitive*). Table 1 has been adapted for the Spanish verbal system, where the simple Past Perfect (*cantara*) is no longer a functional form of the Indicative (unlike in Portuguese or Galician) and has been superseded by the compound form (*había cantado*).

<sup>6</sup> The second one is the Present Perfect, which also belongs to the actual plane, and has been reported to have evidential uses in some Spanish varieties (see §4.2).



- (1) a. *Mañana no acudiré al trabajo porque me iré de viaje*  
 ‘I will not be going to work tomorrow, because I am going away’  
 Both Es in the Future tense (*acudiré, iré*) are subsequent to S → straight meaning of the Future
- b. *Juan no ha venido hoy a trabajar. Estará de viaje.*  
 ‘Juan has not come to work today. He’ll be away’  
 The Future form (*estará*) refers to an E simultaneous with S (= *está*), which the speaker cannot state with great certainty → displaced meaning of the Future

In (1b) the verbal form is used to talk about a present rather than a future eventuality, and also to express the speaker’s uncertainty about the truthfulness of the assertion. In Romance linguistics this function is named “epistemic Future” and has been largely discussed as a core semantic meaning of the form (Squartini 2001, 312; Aaron 2006; Rodríguez Rosique 2011; 2019; Laca 2017, etc.). It is necessary to consider, as Veiga (1992, 50–51) points out, that this epistemic value does not always imply strict temporal displacement, as it is also possible when the future expresses posteriority (*Supongo que vendrá mañana* - ‘I suppose he will come tomorrow’). Thus, in this case it is not so much a question of one value changing for the other, as of one adding to the other under certain discursive conditions.

The Conditional replicates the behaviour of the Future, but from a past reference: as this form has the temporal structure of a “future in the past” (an E subsequent to a reference point, RP, which precedes S – see 2a), its displaced use is the result of reporting a past event without any great certitude (2b):<sup>7</sup>

- (2) a. *Ya te dije que al día siguiente no acudiría a trabajar porque me iría de viaje*  
 ‘I had already told you I would not be going to work because I was going away’  
 Both Es in the Conditional tense (*acudiría, iría*) are subsequent to an RP (*dije*) preceding S → straight meaning of the Conditional
- b. *Juan no vino a trabajar ayer. Estaría de viaje.*  
 ‘Juan did not come to work yesterday. He must have been (lit. would have been) away’  
 The Conditional (*estaría*) refers to an E preceding S (= *estuvo/estaba*), which the speaker cannot state with great certainty → displaced meaning of the Conditional

7 The epistemic Future as in (1b) seems to be normal in other Romance languages such as French and Italian, but this is not the case for the Conditional as in (2b), which, according to Squartini (2001), is only to be found in Spanish and Portuguese.

Rojo's (1974) temporal displacement model of the Future and Conditional was developed by Veiga (1992; 2002; 2008),<sup>8</sup> who focused on the internal relationship between temporality and modality in all temporal forms of the Spanish paradigm, and prevented to consider the latter to be always a secondary, derived semantic meaning of the former.<sup>9</sup> Later studies focusing on evidentiality have nonetheless reinterpreted such utterances as examples of a core evidential meaning in many Spanish verbal forms (Bermúdez 2005; Escandell Vidal 2010; 2022). These authors contend that the “displaced meaning” of the Spanish Future and Conditional in (1b) and (2b) is the expression of a content that the speaker infers indirectly from some source. In these two examples, the source may be any external sign or acquired knowledge that leads the speaker to that conclusion, but it may also be another speaker's utterance, the temporal forms of which are echoed (see also Hennemann 2014; García Negroni 2016; Rodríguez Rosique 2019) (3):

- (3) - *Juan es el tipo más tonto que conozco.*  
 - *Será tonto, pero le va genial en los negocios.*  
 ↳ Juan is the stupidest guy I have ever met  
 - He might be (lit. will be) stupid, but he is very successful in business'

The speaker uses the Future to replicate the interlocutor's words to express doubts about their validity.

The question arises again: is the meaning behind these constructions evidentiality or epistemic modality? According to Escandell Vidal (2022, 16), the Future shows the speaker's “internal mental process” of knowledge, whereby s/he becomes the source of the inferred information, and so it is clear that the Future is always

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<sup>8</sup> According to Veiga (1992; etc.), the temporal use of Indicative verbal forms constitutes the modal content IND 0 (i.e., the just temporal, non-modal content). The Future and Conditional forms in the semantic use described here (“epistemic Future/Conditional”) constitute the modal content IND 1, whereas the use of the Conditionals (and the Imperfect) described below (§3.3.), associated with irrealty and counterfactuality, is modal content IND 2. Thus, the unmarked modal content IND 0 is common to all forms of the paradigm, while IND 1 and IND 2 are additional possibilities solely for the Future, the Conditional and, partly, the Imperfect. Although we only deal with the Indicative forms here, Veiga's system envisages a parallel semantic structure for the Subjunctive with only two possibilities: SUBJ 0 (all forms) and SUBJ 2 (for the Subjunctive Imperfect and Past Perfect, when they express irrealty).

<sup>9</sup> In fact, whether or not the modal meaning is derived or inherent to the Future, it could hardly be considered secondary in actual Spanish, since this meaning has become, in many Spanish-speaking regions, practically the only possible way to use the Future (see, among others, Fleischman 1982; Laca 2017; Azpiazu in press, etc.). The same is true, even more radically, with the Conditional in all Spanish varieties (see §3.3.).

an evidential form. Yet given that these are inferences that the speaker her/himself establishes without stating what they are based on, how can they be distinguished from the speaker's own epistemic evaluation of the evidence? Is the speaker saying that s/he has somehow been able to infer something, or rather is not able to guarantee its truthfulness? Is it even possible in Spanish to distinguish between one idea and another? As Squartini (2001, 313) recalls, with reference to Palmer (1986) and Van der Auwera/Plungian (1998), “inferentials have often been considered as intermediate between epistemic modality and evidentiality”.

At this point, the evidential models lead to a dead end, because referring to epistemic inferential processes and talking about the *self* source of the information (in Frawley's 1992 terms) does not help us better understand the modality of utterances in languages in which these values are not grammaticalised, such as Spanish. In short, everything the speaker asserts is the result of processing information that must have come from any source either internal or external to him/her. If the language does not have special markers to highlight this content, it becomes obvious and therefore banal.

### 3.3 The irrealty Conditional

Example (2b) illustrated an epistemic meaning of the Spanish **Conditional**, parallel to the epistemic or inferential Future but anchored in the past. However, unlike the Future, this is not the only modal use of the Conditional, nor is it the only one for which an evidential value has been assumed. The biggest difference between this form and the Future, to which it is morphologically related, is that, in general terms, modalised uses of the Conditional are much more frequent in all varieties of the language than the merely temporal uses of the “future in the past”. In addition to the epistemic meaning in (2b), Rojo (1974), Rojo/Veiga (1999) and Veiga (1992; 2002; 2008) postulate a different one, not shared with the Future, which is the expression of irrealty, as in (4a and 4b):<sup>10</sup>

- (4) a. *Yo que tú iría ahora mismo a disculparme*  
 ‘If I were you, I *would go* right now and apologise’  
 b. *Habría sido tonta si me hubiera dejado engañar*  
 ‘I *would have been* a fool to let myself be tricked’

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<sup>10</sup> This is IND 2 in Veiga (1992, etc.).

Unlike (2b), in (4) there is hardly any trace of the basic temporal meaning of “future in the past”. The only relevant temporal meaning in (4a) is the fact that its content is highly improbable or impossible simultaneously with or subsequent to S, whereas in (4b) it refers to a counterfactual situation preceding S. This kind of strong modal content is as far as temporal-to-modal displacement goes in Spanish and the other Romance languages.

To the best of our knowledge, no evidential interpretation is admissible in cases such as (4), most likely because *irrealis* is a clear domain of subjective modality, where “asserting the evidence” makes little sense. Yet there is another use of the Conditional, often related to the “irreal” one as another kind of distancing from the content of the speaker’s utterance: the reportative, also called the “journalistic” or “rumour”, Conditional, as in (5a) and (5b):

- (5) a. *La Unión Soviética podría tratar de opacar a los Estados Unidos durante el próximo vuelo conjunto espacial de los dos países en julio, al tener una segunda tripulación de cosmonautas en órbita al mismo tiempo. Esa es la opinión de algunos observadores espaciales norteamericanos que han estado estudiando el lanzamiento, el 27 de diciembre último, de la estación espacial soviética Salyut 4.* (CREA: *El Tiempo*. Bogotá 14/01/1975)  
 ‘The Soviet Union *may* (lit. *might*) try to outshine the United States during the next joint spaceflight in July by having a second crew of cosmonauts in orbit at the same time. That is the opinion of some American space observers who have been studying the 27<sup>th</sup> December launch of the Soviet space station Salyut 4.’
- b. *varios médicos [ . . . ] afirman que el futbolista padece una necrosis en el cerebro a causa de su adicción. El ex internacional argentino habría entrado así en la etapa de daños irreversibles que atraviesan este tipo de enfermos.* (CREA: *El Mundo*, España, 1996)  
 ‘several doctors [ . . . ] claim that the football player is suffering from a necrosis of the brain due to his addiction. The former Argentina international has thus *entered* (lit. *would have entered*) the stage of irreversible damage that affects these types of patients.’

Like (4) and unlike (2), the temporal reference in (5) is not in the past, but in the present, with the simple Conditional corresponding to a present tense (*podría tratar* → *puede tratar*) and the compound Conditional to a past tense (simple: *entró*, or compound: *ha entrado*, depending on sundry factors such as the time reference or the language variety). Unlike (4), there is no evaluation of the evidence or epistemic modality here. In turn, (5) also differs from (2b) because, as the context reveals, the evidential meaning, while also indirect, is no longer inferen-

tial but reported; that is, the source of the information is not the actual speaker, but someone else: the space observers in (5a), the doctors in (5b). The fact that the source of the information is now detached from its evaluator (the speaker) makes it possible to establish distinct boundaries between them and therefore separate more clearly the evidential from the epistemic meaning in these utterances (Dendale 1993). In other words, the speakers emphasise the alien origin of the information in order to distance themselves from it, but they do not judge its truthfulness negatively (i.e., they do not consider it unreal, see Rodríguez Rosique 2011, 261).

In Spanish, reported evidentiality has also been affirmed for another verbal form, the Imperfect. We will now seek to verify whether “reported” evidentiality in the Imperfect is the same as that described above for the Conditional.

### 3.4 The modal Imperfect

The **Imperfect** is the third verbal form of the Indicative paradigm for which Rojo has posited a temporal-to-modal displacement in contexts of fictionality, which he interprets as unreal modality (1974, 117–118). In these contexts, the Imperfect is not being used as a “present in the past”, that is, a form of simultaneity with respect to a temporal past reference (Bello 1847; Rojo 1974; Rojo/Veiga 1999), but as an actual present with a complementary meaning of unreality. It is the same type of Imperfect that has been described in children’s speech when role-playing (the so-called “ludic” or “preludic” Imperfect) (6):

- (6) *Yo era tu profesora y te mandaba muchos deberes.*

‘I *am* (lit. *was*) your teacher and I *am giving* (lit. *gave*) you a lot of homework’

Furthermore, a number of “special meanings” of the Imperfect have been described in many Romance languages, where the reference is not to a past but rather to a present eventuality (7), or even to a future (8) state of affairs:

- (7) *Quería (= quiero) un billete para Madrid, por favor*

‘I would like (lit. wanted) a ticket to Madrid, please’

- (8) *Te has equivocado: el concierto era (= es) mañana*

‘You are mistaken: the concert is (lit. was) tomorrow’

There is a vast literature on the “special” uses of the Imperfect in Spanish and other Romance languages<sup>11</sup> involving diverse contexts and a different type of modality expressed by these means. In many cases, a direct allomorphic connection can be established between the Imperfect and the Conditional (Veiga 2008, §7.2):

- (9) = (7') *Quería / Querría un billete para Madrid*  
'I wanted/would like a ticket to Madrid'
- (10) *Yo que tú iba / iría ahora mismo a disculparme*  
'If I were you, I would go right now and apologise',

but this is not always the case:

- (11) = (6') *Yo sería (≠ era) tu profesora y te mandarías (≠ mandaba) muchos deberes*  
'I would be (≠was) your teacher and I would give (≠ gave) you a lot of homework'
- (12) = (8') *Te has equivocado: el concierto sería (≠ era) mañana (si lo hubiera)*<sup>12</sup>  
'You are mistaken: (if anything,) the concert would be (≠ was) tomorrow'

Specifically, the use of the Imperfect in cases like (8) has led many authors to refer to a “citative” or “reported” Imperfect; in other words, an “evidential” Imperfect (e.g., Reyes 1990; Squartini 2001; Leonetti/Escandell Vidal 2003; Böhm 2016; Haßler 2016; 2017). According to this approach, the Imperfect is the result of an elided speech act that took place in the past and whose content is the utterance with the Imperfect verbal form. Thus, a sentence like (8) is interpreted as the subordinate complement clause of an ellipsed *verbum dicendi* (Squartini 2001, 308): (*Te dije que el concierto era mañana* [(I told you) the concert was tomorrow]).

Although the reported meaning of the Imperfect in sentences like (8) seems obvious, they cannot be interpreted as truly evidential, or at least, as evidential in the same sense as the Conditional in (5). First of all, there is a big difference between (5) and (8) in terms of the source and location of the evidence: it is always other than the speaker in (5), but unknown or not specified in (8). It is usually said

<sup>11</sup> Among many others: Coseriu (1976), Reyes (1990), Gutiérrez Araus (1995), Squartini (2001), Leonetti/Escandell Vidal (2003), Pérez Saldanya (2004), Veiga (2008), NGL (2009, § 23.11), Haßler (2012; 2016; 2017), Böhm (2016), Böhm/Hennemann (2014), Zamorano Aguilar/Martínez-Atienza (2014), Fábregas (2015), Azpiazu (2022).

<sup>12</sup> In the proper context, these sentences are acceptable with both the Conditional and the Imperfect, but they are not synonymous.

that the Imperfect in sentences like (8) refers to another speaker's past speech act. However, the paraphrase of (8) stated above (*Te dije que*) *el concierto era mañana* ["(I told you) the concert was tomorrow"] points to the speaker as the source of the information. It is indeed possible to imagine another source of the report: (*Nos dijeron que*) *el concierto era mañana* ["(We were told that) the concert was tomorrow"], but it is also possible to imagine no reported source at all, but just the general and shared knowledge of an actual situation that started at some point in the past: (*Ya sabíamos/Se sabía que*) *el concierto era mañana*. ["(We already knew/It was already known that) the concert was tomorrow"] (Azpiazu 2022, 224; see also Veiga 2020, §2.6.2).

The main difference between the reported Conditional and the reported Imperfect in Spanish is that the latter, but not the former, can be interpreted without falling back on semantic temporal displacement. Indeed, we contend that the Spanish Imperfect is still a "straight" temporal form in (8). It seamlessly fits the definition of a form referring to an E simultaneous to an RP that precedes S (Veiga 2008, 116–117; 2020).<sup>13</sup> The RP is the moment in the past when the knowledge about the concert was generated, and this is all the speaker is saying. Thus, what is stated to be evidentiality in (8) is simply the statement of the information's past origin, which can actually be said of every assertion. By highlighting the temporal nature of the source of the information through the Imperfect, the speaker does not necessarily identify it. Instead, the contrary may be true: the possibility of identifying the source is neutralised. In (8), it is not asserted that "someone else" has provided the speaker with this information verbally, nor that the speaker has acquired it directly or indirectly. The only definite pragmatic inference here is that the speaker presents old information as a kind of common ground (even if it is not) for meeting the interlocutor and creating the illusion of a shared act of speech (Reyes 1990; Pérez Saldanya 2004; García Negroni 2016).<sup>14</sup> It is, in short, an attempt to attenuate the forcefulness of the message and facilitate the listener's integration into the conversation (Bajo Pérez 2017, 140–141; similarly Patard/Richard 2011 for French). There is no epistemic modalisation here (the speaker does not evaluate the assertion's truthfulness), nor is anything being asserted about the source of information, except that it is the past.

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<sup>13</sup> Zamorano Aguilar/Martínez-Atienza (2014) contend that the Imperfect is used here as an "enunciation's focal point", a function that neutralises the prototypical aspect-temporal meaning of the form. There is actually a kind of focussing on a past situation that may or may not be enunciative, although that does not imply that the basic temporal meaning of the Imperfect is neutralised.

<sup>14</sup> According to Pérez Saldanya (2004, 211), Ducrot (1979) maintains that Imperfect expressions predicate a situation of temporal interval assumed as shared information.

It should be noted again that the modal-like effects of the Imperfect in many Romance languages are the result of its being anchored in the temporal plane of “inactuality”, a characteristic it shares with the Conditional (see §3.1). Inactuality is not exactly the same as modal irreality, although their semantic effects in the discourse often overlap. Irreality is very strongly linked to counterfactuality or non-factuality, that is, with the impossibility of the event taking place or having taken place. As stated above, it has no relation to evidentiality. Inactuality designates the temporal orientation from which the event must be interpreted: a detached orientation from the elocutionary moment that makes it the right perspective to contemplate not only non-factual or counterfactual eventualities, but also para-factual or fictional ones. Thus, irreality can be considered a sub-effect of inactuality, but not vice versa. The Imperfect, which is the core form of inactuality in Coseriu’s model, can be used to create fictive worlds (as in the “preludic imperfect”, ex. (6)), and to express irreality (ex. (10));<sup>15</sup> see also Veiga 2008, §§7.5 and 7.6; Bajo Pérez 2017), but the Conditional, which is prospective with respect to the Imperfect, has more semantic constraints: the unreal world it presents presupposes the implicit negation of the real world, but not the creation of a parallel fictional world. Creating a new world prevents it from being evaluated in epistemic terms, as fictive information cannot be untrue, so the “preludic” Imperfect cannot be considered a modal use of the form (Veiga 2008, 58s., and note 56; Bajo Pérez 2017; Azpiazu 2022, 223).

The fact that the content expressed by the Imperfect is on a different temporal level to the speech act, a secondary “inactual” past level, contributes to the creation of a temporal distance that can easily become epistemic distance (Fleischman 1989; Rodríguez Rosique 2011). Regarding the “reported” or “citative” Imperfect in (8), its evidential interpretation becomes more apparent than real if we fully understand the form’s complex temporal structure.

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15 Although the interchangeability between the Imperfect and Conditional pointed out in (9) suggests that (7), a case of the so-called “Imperfect of courtesy”, is also a case of unreal Imperfect, it can also be interpreted as the mention of a state of affairs generated in the past. Note that in other cases, with no modal verb, a similar substitution is not possible: *Llamaba por lo del anuncio* ≠ *Llamaría por lo del anuncio* [“I am calling (lit. was calling) about the ad ≠ I would call about the ad”] (Bajo Pérez 2017, §3.3). In fact, courtesy here is only a pragmatically produced side-effect, as similar Imperfects in other contexts, that also describe situations that can be seen as generated in the past, cannot be qualified as “courtesy” and, of course, cannot be replaced with the Conditional: *Salía ahora mismo para tu casa* [“I am (lit. was) just leaving for your place”] ≠ *Saldría ahora mismo para tu casa* [“I would just be leaving for your place”]; *Te estaba llamando* [“I am/was calling you”] ≠ *Te estaría llamando* [“I would be calling you”], etc. Similar constraints on the use of the Imperfect and the Conditional have been described for French in Patard/Richard (2011).



## 4 Shifted meaning? The temporal-to-modal displacement of other forms in certain language varieties

We have dealt thus far with the semantic displacement of certain Spanish verbal forms with similar uses in all varieties of the language. The next step concerns another two tenses whose apparent modal use is restricted to dialects, and whose interpretation is often confusing or questioned. Both are compound forms, and thus express primary anteriority (Rojo 1974; Rojo/Veiga 1999): the Past Perfect and the Present Perfect.

### 4.1 The modal-evidential use of the Past Perfect

There is indeed a displaced use of the **Past Perfect** parallel to that of the irreality Imperfect in all Spanish varieties. Thus, if the Imperfect can be an allomorph of the simple Conditional in its irreal meaning (see (10)), the Past Perfect can equally be an allomorph of the compound Conditional:

- (13) *Yo que tú se lo había / habría dicho*  
 ‘If I were you *I would have told* him’

In fact, because the Past Perfect is a relative verb form morphologically linked to the Imperfect, it is expected in many of the contexts described for the modal Imperfect, such as the “preludic”, as the form for expressing anteriority to an RP (the Imperfect itself):

- (14) *Yo era la profesora y tú no habías hecho los deberes.*  
 ‘I *am* (lit. *was*) the teacher and you *have not done* (lit. *had not done*) your homework’

In addition to this, some studies on American varieties have linked the Spanish Past Perfect to the expression of evidentiality and/or mirativity<sup>16</sup> (e.g., Alonso 1935; Kany 1945; Klee/Ocampo 1995; Escobar 1997; Bermúdez 2005; Blestel 2014; García

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<sup>16</sup> Mirativity is the expression of the speaker’s surprise when faced with unexpected information (DeLancey 1997). It therefore has a clearly modal and subjective interpretation, and is supposed to have also an evidential one, as it ultimately refers to an indirect source of knowledge that runs against the speaker’s expectations (Soto/Olguín 2010, 85).

Tesoro 2015; Soto/Olguín 2019). It has been described for numerous diatopic varieties in Argentina, Uruguay, Bolivia, Peru, Paraguay, Ecuador, Colombia and Chile. However, the proposed examples of evidential/mirative Past Perfect in Spanish differ from each other and require a detailed analysis. They can be divided into four types, each represented by examples (15) to (18):

- (15) a. *no se me había ocurrido nunca* (cited by Soto/Olguín 2010 – Chilean Spanish)  
 ‘it never *occurred* (lit. *had never occurred*) to me’  
 b. *¿Vos no habías dejado de fumar?* (Blestel 2014, 38 – Argentinian Spanish)  
 ‘*Haven’t* (lit. *hadn’t*) you quit smoking?’
- (16) *¡Así que habías salido escritor después de todo!* (Blestel 2014, 40 – Argentinian Spanish)  
 ‘So you *have become* (lit. *had become*) a writer after all!’
- (17) *Sí. A un matrimonio un viejito creo que había entrado. . . (PERRO LADRANDO) a saludar, y esa señora, los que se han casado. . . a una casa que se han matrimoniado había entrado un viejito, y le habían. . . habían tenido asco porque estaba el abuelito con su moco así todo cochinito, entonces [sic] habían tenido asco, entonces de ahí dice una señora lo había limpiado, ¿no?, al abuelito. Entonces a esa señora le había dicho: “Anda, hijita al cerro, anda, pero no te vas a mirarte a tu detrás porque. . . no te vas a mirar, sin mirar te vas irte”.* (García Tesoro 2015, 62–63 – Peruvian Spanish).  
 ‘Yes. An old man I think *entered* (lit. *had entered*) to say hello to a married couple. . . (DOG BARKING), and that woman, the ones who were married. . . the house where they lived as a married couple an old man *entered* (lit. *had entered*), and they *were*. . . they *were* (lit. *had been*) disgusted because the old man had a runny nose and was quite repulsive, then they *were* (lit. *had been*) put off, then from there it is said a woman *wiped* (lit. *had wiped*) the old man’s nose, right. Then he said (lit. *had said*) to that woman: “Go, my dear, to the hill, but don’t look back because. . . don’t look, you’re going to leave without looking (back)’
- (18) *Había sido se perdió su pasaporte, por eso no pudo viajar Marín* (Blestel 2014, 37 – Paraguayan Spanish)  
 ‘*Apparently* (lit. *it had been*) Marín (had) lost his passport, which is why he couldn’t travel’

Examples (15 a & b) are the least interesting of all for us, as they represent the orthodox use of the Past Perfect as the expression of a state of affairs prior to an RP preceding the moment of speech (E – RP – S, in Reichenbachian notation). They can be paraphrased, respectively, as: (15a) “*Hace un momento se me ha ocurrido. Antes de ese momento no se me había ocurrido*”<sup>17</sup> ‘It occurred to me a moment ago. It *had not occurred* to me *before then*’, and (15b): “*Me dijiste/me enteré de que habías dejado de fumar y quiero confirmarlo*” ‘You told me /I found out that you *had quit* smoking and I want to confirm it’. In both cases we are dealing with telic events, i.e., completed before the RP in the past, and the Past Perfect in (15b) is the compound equivalent of the “citative” or “reported” Imperfect discussed in (8). These cases are by no means confined to a particular language variety: as shown above, identical cases have been described for the Spanish Imperfect in general use across all regions, for they are ultimately examples of the “right” or “straight” temporal meaning of the Past Perfect (see Becker/Egetenmeyer 2018, 51, for a discursive explanation of the form). As for the alleged mirative meaning of the expression, it may be the result of pragmatic emphasis of the construction in which it is embedded (e.g., the interrogative sentence in 15b), but not an intrinsic meaning of the expression itself.

Example (16) is rather different, as there is no clear RP in the past to which the state of affairs is anchored, so it seems to be located directly at the moment of speech or at another simultaneous point. If this is indeed so, we are dealing with a displaced use of the Past Perfect, now functioning as a Simple Past or Present Perfect (*habías salido escritor* ‘you had become a writer’ = *saliste/has salido escritor* ‘you became/have become a writer’). Can this displacement be another example of the modal use of a temporal form? There is certainly a surprised tone in this expression: the information was maybe known to someone but not to the speaker, who therefore expresses surprise at learning it. The question is whether this mirative meaning is contingent on the Past Perfect, or once again the pragmatic effect of the whole construction. In my opinion, it. . . may be both: the exclamatory intonation and the particle *así que*<sup>18</sup> are clearly unequivocal elements of a mirative expression, but the temporal displacement of the verbal form undoubtedly contributes to reinforcing the idea of epistemic “distance” with respect to its content.

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17 It is no coincidence that all the examples presented by Soto/Olguín (2019) to exemplify the mirative Past Perfect have negative polarity. The Past Perfect here describes a situation in which something did not happen before another RP (not always expressed) in the past, so the moment when it began to happen is highlighted.

18 According to Santos (2003, 206, §1.1.2), *así que* without a prior proposition can be used to elicit the hearer’s confirmation of previously stated information that perhaps the speaker did not know until then.

Royo (1974) did not consider this kind of temporal displacement, perhaps because of its dialectal constraints. However, the effect here is very similar to that described for the modal Conditional and Imperfect: “enunciative distance” (Rodríguez Rosique 2011, 264), which seems to be associated with all forms of Cose-riu’s inactuality level, i.e., relative forms with an RP in the past (see §3.1). Because of this effect, these verbal forms are best positioned for expressing semantic contents like courtesy, assertive attenuation, indirect evidentiality and mirativity. In this particular case, we can concede that the Past Perfect may be asserting the existence of a source of information rather than evaluating the truthfulness of the content.

As for (17), the Past Perfect is used in a narrative function, which has been frequently described for spoken Andean Spanish (Klee/Ocampo 1995; Escobar 1997; García Tesoro 2015). It is, again, a clear case of temporal dislocation. The Past Perfect seems to mostly assume the function of the “standard” simple narrative forms, i.e., the Simple Past (*había entrado, había limpiado, había dicho*) and the Imperfect (*habían tenido asco*). Like (16), there is no RP in the past enabling the Past Perfect, but the whole narrative moves forward only by means of this composite form. According to García Tesoro (2015, 62), the presence of the speech marker *dice* (‘it is said’) rules out the notion of first-hand information and reinforces the concept of indirect evidentiality. In this case, identifying the source overrides its evaluation.

The most striking aspect of (17) and, in general, of many of the examples of the Past Perfect in Andean Spanish is its insistent presence in narrative texts, as it reveals a wish to stress that the information is not first hand. In this case, unlike (16), the verbal form functions as the main element underpinning the evidential force. Given the insistent use of the Past Perfect in narratives and the fact that these expressions are quite usual in the Spanish of native speakers of Quechua, in which evidentiality is a grammaticalised verbal category, scholars consider this to be a case of semantic transference from the latter to the former (Klee/Ocampo 1995; Pfänder/Palacios 2013; García Tesoro 2015).

Finally, the case of (18) is by far the most interesting of all because the Past Perfect has undergone a process of stereotyping, so that it now functions as a modal operator rather than a predicate (NGLE 2009, §23.16h). Indeed, it appears only with *ser* ‘to be’ and is morphosyntactically fixed: the adjacent predicate (*se perdió* – ‘was lost’) is not an embedded clause here. The meaning and function of the construction is the same as the disjunct *apparently*. Its categorisation as an evidential operator is also manifested in the fact it can appear even in an incidental position between commas; see this example from Blestel (2014, 37): “*Era, había sido, Gumersindo, quien me invitó a tomar un cafecito en el centro*” ‘It was, *apparently* (lit. it had been), Gumersindo who invited me to have a coffee in town’. We cannot speak here of

“temporal displacement” because we are not even dealing with a verb form with temporal meaning, but with an evidential marker, which is the result of a previous categorial grammaticalisation.

## 4.2 The evidential use of the Present Perfect

A modal-evidential explanation for the **Present Perfect** in certain American varieties has also been proposed, which is partly similar and partly different to that for the Past Perfect. Such explanations concern the same or similar dialectal areas, although they are to some extent more heterogeneous than those referring to the Past Perfect. For instance, there is no unanimity on whether the evidentiality associated with the Present Perfect is of a direct or indirect nature. In other studies (e.g., Azpiazu 2016; 2019a; 2021) we have argued in more detail against models that associate evidentiality with resultative aspectuality, and thus inferred evidence (such as Bermúdez 2005). We have also questioned the validity of the evidential interpretations in some Andean regions (mostly Peruvian Spanish in contact with Quechua, but also Ecuadorian), where it appears that the Present Perfect is also often used for narration (see again ex. 17: *se han casado / se han matrimoniado*) instead of the Simple Past (Escobar 1994; 1997; Pfänder/Palacios 2013; García Tesoro/Jang 2018), as the following examples show:

- (19) i 24: *Y así y el día que he inaugurado el restaurante pa' turistas, ¡ay!, he llorado de alegría.*  
 e: *¿Cuándo, cuándo fue eso? ¿Hace cuántos años? [ . . ]*  
 i 24: *El turístico he abierto el dos mil cinco. El dos mil cinco, ¿no?, hemos abierto.* (García Tesoro/Jang 2018, 107; Peruvian Spanish)  
 'i 24: And so, and the day I *opened* (lit. *have opened*) the restaurant for tourists, oh! I *cried* (lit. *have cried*) for joy.  
 e: When, when was that? How long ago? [ . . ]  
 i 24: I *opened* (lit. *have opened*) the tourist one in two thousand and five. In two thousand and five, right?, we *opened* (lit. *have opened*) (it).'
- (20) *Tiene otro nombre en quichua<sup>18</sup> la Mama Cotacachi [ . . ] Pero tienen otros nombres de personajes mismo. Que por ella le dejó a la Mama Cotacachi [el Taita Imbabura]. Las lagunas se formaron por las lágrimas de la Mama Cotacachi acá. Y contaban que no tiene fondo. Eso se cree ¿no? no sé si será verídico pero que la laguna de Cuicocha no tiene fondo de pie, porque mucho ha llorado la Mama Cotacachi entonces. . .* (Pfänder/Palacios 2013, 79; Ecuadorian Spanish).

‘Mama Cotacachi has another name in Quichua [. . .] But they also have other monikers. That’s why they left Mama Cotacachi for her [Tata Imbabura]. The lakes were formed by the tears of Mama Cotacachi here. And it was said to be bottomless. That’s what people believe, right? I don’t know if it is true that Lake Cuicocha is bottomless, because Mama Cotacachi must *have cried* (lit. *has cried*) a lot then. . .’

Although (19), and especially (20), may seem equivalent to (17), they have certain peculiarities that warn against an overly clear-cut explanation in terms of evidentiality:

- a) Unlike the Past Perfect (and also the Conditional and Imperfect), the Present Perfect is a form directly related to the moment of speech and is therefore not an “inactual” but an “actual plane” tense. Its connection with S is more complex than the connection of the Simple Past with S, but both forms share the reference to previous events from the speech act itself, which makes them interchangeable in many Spanish varieties. The use of the Past Perfect as a narrative form seems therefore mostly contrary to its temporal structure, but the use of the Present Perfect in the same contexts does not. In many Romance languages (French, Italian, Romanian), as well as in other language families, the Present Perfect can operate as a narrative form (Bybee et al. 1994; Lindstedt 2000; Squartini/Bertinetto 2000; etc.). It can even be the only possible narrative form in spoken French and an increasingly widespread form in written storytelling (Azpiazu 2019b). The spread of the Present Perfect as a narrative form in oral contexts with an emphatic narrative function, similar to (19) (“aoristic Perfect”), is also fairly common in some Spanish varieties geographically distant from those represented in (19) and (20) (Azpiazu 2012; 2015; 2019a; Veiga 2019). Thus, although the use of the Present Perfect in the functional place of the Simple Past may be sporadic in the whole system, it is scattered across several different and distant areas, and can be explained in terms of its straight temporal meaning, without being associated with any additional epistemic or evidential meaning (Azpiazu 2016; 2019a).
- b) Both (19) and (20) appear in the literature as exponents of the evidential Present Perfect in Spanish, but the orientation of the evidentiality is differently interpreted and even contrasting. In (19), the Present Perfect must express experienced, first-hand information, and thus direct evidentiality. In (20), however, it is the form arising in the narration of a legend, i.e., an old story that has been orally transmitted for generations with no first-hand source, where it allegedly expresses indirect evidentiality. According to Palacios (2021, 194), this apparent contradiction is due to the existence of different functional solutions for past tense forms in Peruvian and Ecuadorian Spanish. Regarding the Present Perfect, she proposes two stages of evidential development. The less advanced stage is

in Peru, where the Present Perfect is more similar to the aoristic Perfect in Spain and maybe other regions: it relates to the speaker's pragmatical desire to expressively emphasize certain events, but it is not clearly evidential. In Ecuador, however, there has been an evolution from pragmatical subjectivity to indirect evidence related to more doubtful or less assertable information. Even if this idea is accepted, it is more a description of the facts than an explanation. There is indeed still no convincing explanation of why does expressive relevance lead to indirect evidentiality and not to the opposite, as García Tesoro/Jang (2018) and Escobar (1997) would posit for the Present Perfect in Peruvian Spanish.

Something we agree on with Palacios (2021) is that the Present Perfect in Ecuador seems to have taken its own path, occasionally leading to a severe temporal displacement that is unusual in other varieties, as shown by the following examples:

(21) *¿y el hijo de la señora Anita no ha estado aquí?* (Bustamante 1991, 216)  
'and Ms Anita's son, *isn't* he (lit. *hasn't* he *been*) here?'

(22) A: *pero me han dicho que no es tan bueno, porque si se daña la filmadora, se daña todo, por ejemplo.*

C: .. *hm, no he sabido eso, pero ha de ser.* (Dumont 2013, 280)

'A: but they have told me that it is not as good, because if the camera is damaged, everything is damaged, for example.

C: .. *hm, I didn't know* (lit. *I haven't known*) that, but it must be so.'

For us, both (21) and (22) seem to be much more distinct cases of temporal-to-modal displacement than (19) and (20). Firstly, because they are not embedded in a narrative of past events, contrasting with the Simple Past. Secondly, because the verbs in (21) and (22) do not describe dynamic eventualities but rather states. Thirdly, because in most language varieties the content of these sentences would never be expressed in these terms, but instead with the Present (21 – 21') and the Imperfect (22 – 22') (see the English non-literal translations of both examples above):

(21') *¿y el hijo de la señora Anita no está aquí?*

(22') C: .. *hm, no sabía eso, pero ha de ser.*

These cases and their interpretation in terms of temporal-to-modal displacement are discussed in greater detail in Azpiazu (2019a: §3.5.3.3; 2021, 248–249). Although (22) is not such a clear case of evidentiality as (21), it gives us the key for identifying the kind of semantic displacement here. The correct substitution in both cases is

not with the “actual” present form but with the “inactual” one, i.e., the Imperfect, which means that besides (21’), (21) can also be paraphrased as (21’):

(21’) *¿y el hijo de la señora Anita no estaba aquí?*

with the “reported” or “attenuating” interpretation of the Imperfect described in §3.4. The reverse, however, is not possible: the Perfect in (22) cannot be replaced by the Present (22’):

(22’) \*...*hm, no sé eso, pero ha de ser*

The semantic displacement of the Present Perfect is therefore even more striking than that of the Past Perfect, as it is a form of the actual plane that does not present, *a priori*, an effect of cognitive distance from the event; quite the opposite. In fact, such uses are extremely unusual or even non-existent in any variety other than Andean. It is therefore reasonable to assume that its presence there is conditioned by an external factor, such as another language with which Andean Spanish may coexist.

Unfortunately, many of the studies dealing with this phenomenon present certain epistemological gaps, so that a more convincing explanation of how this form shifts towards its modal/evidential meaning is still lacking. The most relevant arguments in favour of the “evidential” explanation are, on the one hand, the existence of grammaticalised evidentiality in the language in contact with this variety, and, on the other hand, the co-existence of this kind of “evidentiality” with the narrative Past Perfect described in §4.1. concerning example (17).<sup>19</sup>

The question remains as to why, out of all the temporal forms available in Spanish, speakers in this region choose this one for their modalising purposes, given that, as explained before, it is not a form of inactuality like the Past Perfect, but rather its counterpart on the actual plane. It is otherwise similar to the Simple Past, which is the form most clearly outside any temporal-to-modal shift (Pérez Saldanya 2004, 225).

Before identifying the phenomenon we are dealing with here, it needs to be analysed within a wider linguistic and sociolinguistic context, taking into account

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<sup>19</sup> Bustamante (1991), Pfänder/Palacios (2013, 93), Palacios (2021), and Dumont (2013) contend that the supposed influence of Quichua in the Ecuadorian evidential Present Perfect should not be understood as a simple semantic calque, but as an indirect change or semantic extension of the form, whereby speakers try to adjust the referential field of the Spanish verb forms to the referential field of verbs in Quichua. In fact, Pfänder/Palacios (2013) do not speak of an “evidential Present Perfect” but rather of the desire to validate and modalise the information. However, Palacios (2021) does indeed advocate more decisively for considering (20) as evidential.



aspects such as the social level and the level of bilingualism of the speakers using it, its frequency, its combination with other evidential strategies, and especially its relationship of coexistence with the evidential Past Perfect.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, another open question involves the extent to which the evidential Present Perfect in Ecuadorian Spanish can be seen as an allomorph of the evidential Past Perfect.

## 5 Conclusions

a) Studies on evidentiality in languages in which it is not a grammaticalised category, such as Spanish, have prompted a kind of euphoria about the possibility of providing new and better explanations for old questions concerning temporal and modal phenomena. There is a need to be more realistic with the explanatory possibilities of this notion in the languages in which it is a pragmatic strategy and not a grammatical category. If evidentiality is not structural in the verbal system, there is a significant risk of confusing it with related, well-established categories, such as epistemic modality. Attempts to keep them separate, as in De Haan (1999), are not particularly feasible, as speakers of these languages do not consider it relevant to distinguish the source of the information when it is direct, and tend to evaluate it in epistemic terms when it is inferred. In our view, only when the information is indirectly acquired but not inferred by the speakers themselves (i.e., it comes from other sources outside the speaker) can the evidential meaning be more clearly separated from epistemic modality. Thus, contrary to Squartini (2001), the key to identifying evidentiality in languages such as Spanish would not be the type of evidence (direct/indirect), but rather the origin of the information (self/other). This also coincides with the deictic nature of evidentiality according to several authors (Bermúdez 2005; Haßler 2010). This paper concludes that the “journalistic” or “rumour” Conditional is the clearest exponent of evidentiality separated from epistemicity in Spanish. It is, however, restricted to very few discursive contexts.

b) We claim that evidentiality is not a strong category of the Spanish verbal system, as it does not help to understand its functioning better than temporality or epistemic modality. Nevertheless, even epistemic modality is mostly a secondary context effect in Indicative verbal forms (with the probable exception of the forms expressing posteriority, such as the Future in many American varieties and the Conditional), derived from a semantic displacement of the original “straight” temporal meaning. In fact, there is not a single form of the paradigm that is not able to express a deictic

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<sup>20</sup> Many of these issues are certainly addressed in Palacios (2021).

temporal relationship between E and S, mostly via an RP (IND 0 function, according to Veiga 1992). The contrary, however, is not true: some verbal forms do not undergo modalisation (*canto, canté*), or only do so dialectally (*había cantado he cantado*). Modalisation is not a phenomenon that is always available in every form of the paradigm, but a semantic possibility that must be activated in the discourse. This makes the affected forms plurifunctional (Friedman 1986; Veiga 1996).

c) The Spanish Imperfect is one of these plurifunctional forms, but not to the extent that it is usually assumed to be. It is a modalised form, an allomorph of the Conditional in some unreal conditional sentences or courtesy expressions. Yet it is not so clearly modalised in the so-called “preludic” or “citative” uses. Ultimately, the latter refers to the notion that the information has been generated in the past and is still valid at the moment of speech, which can be understood as an attempt to emphasise its origin or as the speaker’s desire to involve the listener in this knowledge. Is this, therefore, evidentiality? Probably not, as this is not really an assertion of *how* the information has been acquired nor of *who* has generated it, but simply of *when* was it generated. This emphasis on the temporal origin of the information can be understood precisely as an attempt by the participants in the speech act not to highlight the source of the information, in order to make it easier to agree with the hearer on the content.

d) Many of the forms for which the possibility of an evidential interpretation has been proposed have something in common: their temporality is anchored in the axis of anteriority, or the inactual plane. This seems to be the optimal perspective for the cognitive “distancing” effect that provides these forms with additional “subjective” values besides merely temporal ones. This may also be the explanation for modalised Conditionals and Imperfects in all language varieties, as well as for the evidential/mirative effects of the Past Perfect in some American varieties. As for the Future, a form anchored in the actual plane, according to Rodríguez Rosique (2019), its modalisation occurs due to the distancing effect generated by its “forward” orientation, towards a place still unknown to the speaker. Explaining the evidential Present Perfect is more complicated, as this form does not fit the above-mentioned pattern of modal displacement connected to temporal inactuality, nor does it refer to yet unknown eventualities. In fact, the temporal structure of the Spanish Present Perfect implies the opposite: E designates an actual state of affairs, somehow closely attached to S. Thus, (21) and (22) are counter-intuitive cases that need to be studied in greater detail to determine the extent to which they complement, or coincide with, in both their sociolinguistic and their structural extension, other cases of evidentiality described in the same linguistic areas.

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**Aspect and *Aktionsart* and the interaction  
with adverbs**





Johanna Mattissen

# Lexical actional classes in Romance languages in interaction with aspectually relevant material in the clause

**Abstract:** The present study challenges several approaches to the category of aspect and establishes a coherent descriptive model which is applicable cross-linguistically. Based on fieldwork and assuming an interactional model of aspect, it proposes a fine-grained categorisation of thirteen universal, lexically-inherent, actional classes and provides a coherent explanation of the aspectual behaviour of verbs by illustrating how perfective and imperfective forms of verbs in combination with verb root-external elements, such as completive markers and the stacking of TAM forms, activate the lexically pre-defined readings, and interact with the affectedness and quantification of nominal participants and with various adverbials in Romance and other languages. Specifically, verbs of consumption and production and verbs of goal-attaining motion form a clearly delimited successive-terminative class in its own right with a dynamic phase proceeding up to a final boundary. In addition, this contribution argues for two inceptive classes with a lexically-inherent initial boundary and an ensuing dynamic or static phase, two classes of two-phase verbs with a preparatory dynamic phase preceding the initial boundary and an ensuing static or dynamic phase, a comparative-terminative class with a scalar phase, a preudial-terminative class with an uninterruptible in-run phase to boundary transgression, and a semelfactive class, among others.

**Keywords:** actional class, aspect tests, two-phase verbs, successive-terminative, differential lexicalisation

## 1 Aspect and actional class

### 1.1 The aim of this study

Aspect is one of the most controversial categories in linguistic discussion, especially among specialists of different language families. Aspect in the sense of “aspectuality” has been approached with quite different frameworks and dis-

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cussed with respect to the verbal lexicon, morphology and syntax (for an overview cf. Sasse 2002). The aim of this study is to challenge several “traditional” approaches and to establish a coherent, descriptive model which is applicable cross-linguistically.

The following concepts in particular are challenged here:

- the four-cell grid of actional classes, also called “aktionsarten” (e.g., Dessi Schmid 2014), established by Vendler (1967) and Dowty (1979);
- the conception that actional class is a property of VPs or clauses;
- the conception that the actional class changes depending on features of overt participants of the verb and adverbials in the clause (cf. also Sasse 1991; Olbertz 1998, 105; Dessi Schmid 2014, 50);
- the unquestioned assignment of verbs to actional classes on the basis of translational equivalents and extralinguistic reasoning;
- the non-distinction of the following levels: lexical actional class, grammatical aspect category, so-called phasal verbs, verbal periphrases (analytic constructions such as *empezar a* ‘begin’, *terminar de* ‘finish’, *dejar de* ‘stop’, *seguir + gerund* ‘go on’, *tardar en* ‘take a long time’, cf. Olbertz 1998), verbal derivations (such as *releer* ‘reread’, *erblühen* ‘blossom’) and syntax (the contribution of participants and adverbials to aspectuality), e.g., De Miguel (1999); Dessi Schmid (2014); Haßler (2016, 219);
- the conception of aspect as a point of view of a state of affairs from before, after or during the state of affairs (as in Fábregas 2015, 17) and any non-binary conception of the grammatical aspect category, e.g., one which includes prospective aspect or perfect as aspect forms (cf. Fábregas 2015, 3.1)
- the view that perfective aspect encodes a state of affairs *only* as a completed whole (from beginning to end; cf. Comrie 1976, 16; Haßler 2016, 74, 190, 240) or as punctual (cf. Dahl 1985, 78).

Instead, I propose a finer-grained categorisation of universal, lexically-inherent, actional classes, based on Breu’s approach (1992; 1994; 1996; 1997; 2000) and on fieldwork with native speakers of French and Spanish,<sup>1</sup> in which a range of verbs along the lines explained in section 1.3 were tested (= Mattissen field data 2017). The classes are presented in detail in section 2 with examples of their language-specific representations with a view to illustrating the differences between the present model and others and to making it possible to compare Romance languages with

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<sup>1</sup> Research for this paper was funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG), Project-ID 281511265, SFB 1252. I would like to express my profound gratitude to all those who discussed a considerable battery of questions, tests and examples with me!

other languages described along the same lines. Section 3 shows how these classes, in particular the successive-terminative, interact with grammatical aspect and various aspectually relevant elements in a clause, again placing Romance languages in the wider context of aspect languages. This section illustrates how, in the present model, the overall aspectual effect comes about through the activation of lexically pre-defined readings, not with any class change of expressions, so that the erratic behaviour of verbs in context, which has made theories of aspectuality unwieldy, is merely apparent, not real. Section 4 concludes.

## 1.2 Theoretical prerequisites

The most influential work on actional classes is still that by Vendler (1967) and Dowty (1979), which takes an entangled lexical, phrasal and clausal approach to “aspect” in English (cf. Sasse 1991, 25). While using their four classes – “states”, “activities”, “accomplishments” and “achievements” – aspectualists have nonetheless been increasingly aware of the need for finer-grained distinctions to be able to describe the actual behaviour of verbs and VPs in aspectual contexts in a satisfactory manner (cf. Sasse 1991, 22–23, 25; Rappaport Hovav 2008), which has led to the introduction of subclasses such as “delimited activities”, “active accomplishments” or “degree achievements” (e.g., Rothstein 2004).

Only Breu (1992; 1994; 1996; 1997; 2000) and Sasse (1991), however, have proposed more than these four classes as lexical classes in their own right. Ebert (1995); Sasse (2000) and Mattissen (2001; 2003) have made additions to their model and these will be discussed here. Breu’s finer-grained approach seems to be the most promising for gaining a unified insight into the lexical properties of verbs and their interaction with aspect as a grammatical category and other material in the clause. It also allows for cross-linguistic comparison of aspect systems. In this contribution, it will be partially reformulated, augmented with additional classes and applied to several Romance languages, especially French and Spanish.

Breu (1994, 24, 29; 1995) and Sasse (1991) established a classification not of VPs or clauses, but of meanings of verbal lexemes (the readings/meanings of polysemous verbs may belong to different classes) that are determined by their temporal boundary characteristics. Breu proposed the following six actional classes, one with two “subclasses”, another with four: “totally static” meanings typically have “a lack of boundaries” and no temporal dynamics, e.g., Russian *vesit* ‘weigh’ (1994, 25); “relative-static” meanings (1996, 40) have a possible temporal delimitation; “inceptively static” verbs have an inherent initial boundary marking the entry into a situation and a static situation, but no probable final boundary, e.g., Italian *seppa/sapeva* and Spanish *supo/sabía* ‘knew’ (Sasse 1991, 5; Breu 1994, 26; 1996, 44).

A further class with an inherent initial boundary comprises “inchoative” verbs that have two phases (situations), an activity-like phase before the entry into the state of affairs and a temporary stative resultative situation after the entry (Breu 1996, 45s.). In a footnote, Breu (1996, 46) further alludes to “inchoative” verbs with an activity-like resultative situation, as in *nascondersi* ‘hide’. Breu’s “activities” do not have an inherent limitation, rather a probable initial and final boundary because they cannot be maintained for a limitless duration of time, e.g., *lavorò/lavorava* ‘worked’ (1994, 26; 1996, 41). “Gradually terminative” meanings have a situation that is a prefinal stage characterised by a gradual approach to the inherent final boundary (1994, 26; 1996, 41). As a subdivision, Breu (1994, 29) envisages situations that express quantitatively partial completion, e.g., Russian *(po)stroit* ‘build’, conativity, e.g., *ubedit’/ubeždat’* ‘(try to) convince’, or a tendency, e.g., *umeret’/umirat’* and *mori/moriva* ‘died’, that does not exclude the possibility of interruption (recovery in the case of ‘die’) as well as a tendency that does (such as English *was dying*; 1994, 33). For “totally terminative” meanings the final boundary is obligatory as soon as the state of affairs has begun, without any possibility of interruption, i.e., the state of affairs is conceptualised as a pure situation change, e.g., *trovò/trovava* ‘found’ (Breu 1994, 26).

In Breu’s (1996, 39) model, the perfective aspect of a verb encodes a situation change by highlighting the inherent boundaries, whereas imperfective aspect highlights the given situation without any boundaries. Taxis describes the relationships the aspect forms enter into with each other in context (Bondarko 1987; Breu 1994, 27; Sasse 1991, 11), viz. sequence (two perfective forms), parallelism/simultaneity (mainly two imperfective forms) and incidence (perfective in relation to imperfective form). Sasse (1991, 2) points out the differences with the Vendlerian (and Dowty’s) conception: Vendler and Dowty do not delimit lexical semantics, aspect morphology and syntactic context, but apply the term actional class to all these levels. They describe actional classes as varying with the construction of a verb and do not consider the contribution of adverbials, which they merely use as tests for class membership (cf. Sasse 1991, 25).

In accordance with Breu’s conception, here actional classes are held to be lexically inherent and conceptualised as meaning designs consisting of boundaries and phases<sup>2</sup> (see section 2). The classes exist independently of an aspect system, i.e., an obligatory grammatical category of the verb in the form of a binary opposition of morphosyntactic perfective and imperfective forms (independent of the morpho-

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<sup>2</sup> Note that here “phase” is not used in the sense of beginning and end, nor of “phasal verbs”, but of a temporal extension (a run-time interval) during which the state of affairs holds, regardless of any boundaries.

logical means for their encoding (stem or affix) and of the tense and mood system of the language, although interacting with it).

Actional classes are, furthermore, held to interact with aspect forms: a perfective form of a verb activates any of the lexically-inherent boundaries for its reading, whereas an imperfective form activates any of the lexically-inherent phases while suppressing the boundaries (cf. Sasse 1991, 11). This means that a perfective aspect form may have the following readings: entry into a state of affairs, as in French *elle sut* ‘she got to know’; transgression (cf. Sasse 1991, 17, for the term) of the sole inherent boundary, as in *il éclata* ‘it burst’; completion of a state of affairs, as in *elle ouvrit* ‘she opened’, or a state of affairs *en bloc* (from beginning to end), as in *il travailla* ‘he worked’. The imperfective aspect may have a continuous, progressive, accruing, conative or habitual reading etc.

Verbal periphrases or affixes that encode a single one of those imperfective or perfective readings, such as progressive (*stare* + gerund, *être en train de* + infinitive), completive (*terminar de*), resultative, repetitive (*re-*), habitual (*soler* + infinitive), constitute a different level to both the lexical actional class and the perfective-imperfective aspect opposition, and are called “aspectoids” here. Aspectoids are usually on a grammaticalisation cline towards an aspect system and are found in languages without an aspect category (such as the progressive in German), or in addition to an aspect category (such as the progressive in Romance languages). When an aspectoid is marked on a verb form together with perfective or imperfective, here this is called “stacking of aspectual markers” (head marking) on the predicate, e.g., *il était en train de faire qc* ‘he was doing sth.’.

The manner in which or the degree to which an undergoer is affected by the state of affairs is also relevant to the aspectual effect. The manner of affectedness can, for instance, be holistic, as in *see sth.*: the whole of the undergoer is affected as soon as the state of affairs starts; or it can be partial or full, as in *eat sth.*, where the undergoer is processed in steps until no more is left to process; or it can be gradual, as in *cool sth.*, where a property of the undergoer changes continuously in an increasing or decreasing manner.

As verbs of different actional classes in different aspect and aspectoid forms enter syntagmatic constructions, that syntactic material (quantified participants and adverbials, in particular) interacts with the inherent lexical class in different ways, both within a single language and from a cross-linguistic perspective (see section 3). From this interaction, an aspectual effect arises as an overall feature of a clause.

The term “aktionsart” is avoided in this approach in order to avert misunderstandings. “Aktionsart” has been used for what I call actional class here (e.g., Dessi Schmid 2014), but also for “aspectoids” (morphosyntactic expressions for single readings, including verbal periphrases), and for verbs derived from the same root

but that in their derived forms fall into different actional classes, e.g., *blühen* ‘be in blossom’, activity; *er-blühen* ‘blossom (into)’, ingressive (cf. Dressler 1968; Comrie 1976, 6; De Miguel 1999; Haßler 2016, 219).

Instead of “phasal verb” (such as ‘begin’, ‘continue’, ‘end’) the term “stage verb” is used in this approach in order to avoid confusion with the term “phase”, which is used for the run-time interval of the actional class design.

### 1.3 Morphosyntactic tests

While the set of possible actional classes is universal, the classes actually represented in a given language and the assignment of individual verbs to one of these classes are not. Breu (1994, 32) shows that whereas English *sit* and Russian *sidet’* are an activity, Italian *sedette/sedeva* is an inceptively stative verb (as is Nivkh *hurʔivd*, cf. Gruzdeva 2012, 470). Furthermore, Spanish *sentarse* and French *s’asseoir* are gradually terminative (Mattissen field data 2017) and Laz *pxer* (Mattissen 2001, 20) is totally stative.

In most of the aspect literature the class membership of a verb is taken for granted and is not questioned: either a verb is classified in the same way as its (nearest) English translational equivalent was classified by Vendler (1967) or Dowty (1979), as e.g., in Olbertz (1998, 101), Dessi Schmid (2014, 21s.) and Fábregas (2015), or it is classified according to extra-linguistic reasoning (cf. Olbertz 1998, 101; Rothstein 2004, 11, 97–99, 115; Dessi Schmid 2014, 22, 77), for instance that ‘build’ means erect scaffolding, buy materials, lay foundations and bricks, take rests, etc., and ‘run’ means lift one foot, move it forward, etc.

As verbs do not encode extra-linguistic states of affairs, but rather concepts of states of affairs (cf. Ogden/Richards 1923), the actional class a verb will belong to cannot be entirely predictable (cf. Sasse 1991, 21). In order to avoid classification by translational equivalents or on extra-linguistic grounds, the class membership of a verb has to be determined by language-specific linguistic tests. Such tests are (i) compatibility with aspectuality-related morphology and morphosyntax, e.g., perfective or progressive forms (cf. Breu 1994, 28, 29; Mattissen 2001), (ii) readings of verbs with regard to their aspectuality-related morphology and morphosyntax, i.e., possible readings of perfective and imperfective forms (see section 1.2; Breu 1994, 28; 1996, 37; Mattissen 2001; Haßler 2016, 225s.), and the compatibility of the verbs with aspectoids, verbal periphrases (such as resultative *estar* or *stare* + gerund; cf. Breu 1996, 45, 64; Olbertz 1998, 120s., 170), avertives (‘almost’ constructions) and stage verbs; (iii) compatibility with time and degree adverbials (cf. Bertinetto/Squartini 1995; Braginsky/Rothstein 2008); and (iv) coherence (contradiction) tests in which imperfective and perfective forms are opposed, as shown in (1) (cf. Garey 1957;

Comrie 1976; Dowty 1979, 60; Breu 1996, 50, 67; Behrens 1998, 290ss.; De Miguel 1999, 2982, 2988; Gardenghi 2000; Mattissen 2001; 2003; Sasse 2002, 246; Rothstein 2004):

- (1) a. interruption test  
 When someone Vs / was V-ing [IMPERFECTIVE FORM] and is/was interrupted, has s/he V-ed [perfective form]?
- b. contradiction test  
 Someone was V-ing [IMPERFECTIVE FORM], but didn't V [PERFECTIVE FORM].
- c. continuation test  
 Someone/something V-ed [PERFECTIVE FORM] and is still V-ing [IMPERFECTIVE FORM].
- d. antiresultative test  
 Something V-ed [PERFECTIVE FORM], but was/is not [RESULTANT STATE], e.g., *sth. (has) dried but isn't dry.*

Not all tests are equally (or easily) applicable to verbs of all classes and some tests are difficult for native speakers to assess, as my fieldwork showed. For reasons of space, only the tests that yielded the most characteristic results and readings are used in what follows to determine the class membership of verbs.

The most popular tests for actional classes of verbs in the literature are assessments of compatibility and readings with time adverbials, viz. duration adverbials like 'for x time' and time span adverbials like 'in x time' (e.g., Breu 1994, 28). Behrens (1998, 290ss., 297–298) considers these tests problematic as diagnostics as these adverbials are not neutral, but contribute to the overall aspectual effect of a clause. As will be shown in sections 2.4 and 3.1, the duration adverbial 'for x time' on the one hand measures the duration of a phase (the run-time interval), as in *run for two hours*, while on the other hand it encodes the delimitation of a state of affairs at the same time: the running is not open-ended, but has a determined time limit. This constitutes the so-called boundary paradox. Furthermore, Bertinetto/Delfitto (2000) show that apparent translational equivalents of adverbials are not semantically congruent and do not interact similarly with TAM forms and actional classes cross-linguistically.

## 2 Actional classes

Actional classes are conceptualised here as designs of states of affairs in terms of boundaries and phases. Phases can be static, dynamic, scalar and (un)interruptible; a boundary can be either the initial one whose transgression corresponds to the



entry into a state of affairs, the final one, whose transgression marks the end of a state of affairs, or intermediary. These different types of phases and boundaries are responsible for the different readings of perfective and imperfective forms of verbs of different actional classes. For example, the perfective form of a verb with an inherent final boundary reads as completive (final boundary transgression), e.g., French *il a ouvert qc* ‘he has opened sth.’ means that the opening process is complete, i.e., sth. is open, whereas the perfective form of a verb with an inherent initial boundary reads as ingressive (initial boundary transgression), e.g., Spanish *supo* ‘s/he got to know sth.’ means that someone has entered the state of knowing. A verb with a lexically-inherent boundary is terminative; if the boundary is the final one, the verb is also telic.

While the set of possible actional classes is universal, the (number of) classes represented in a given language and the assignment of verbs to one of these classes are language-specific (cf. Sasse 1991, 6). Each single verb or each meaning of a polysemous verb in a given language belongs to one fixed, lexically-inherent class (cf. Horrocks/Stavrou 2007, 633; Rappaport Hovav 2008, 15).

In the following sections, the classes will be presented in turn with examples from Romance languages. The terminology follows Breu, while new terms have been coined for classes that do not feature in his model.

## 2.1 Totally-stative and relative-stative states of affairs

Totally-statives are conceptualised as a (permanent) state, i.e., a non-bounded stative phase without any lexically-inherent boundaries (cf. Breu 1996, 40). Verbs belonging to this class are characterised by their incompatibility with stage verbs, such as ‘begin’, ‘end’ etc., and by not having perfective forms. This class is marginal in Romance languages, e.g., Italian *splendere* ‘shine’, French *bruire* ‘buzz, rustle’, *gésir* ‘lie (buried)’, which do not have perfective forms (cf. Haßler 2016, 226), but it contains a greater number of verbs in Greek, e.g., *ksero* ‘I know’ (Sasse 1991, 15), Russian (Breu 1996, 38) and other languages.

In Romance languages, stative verbs generally have perfective forms. They belong to the relative-stative actional class. This class is conceptualised as a temporary state, i.e., a stative phase without lexically-inherent boundaries (cf. Breu 1996, 40). The fact that the state is temporary, however, implies a beginning and an end, i.e., boundedness. Therefore, perfective forms of the relevant verbs present the state of affairs as a totality, *en bloc*. This is called the delimitative reading of a perfective form, which is – extending Breu’s approach – characteristic of all atelic verbs (i.e., without a lexically-inherent final boundary).

Examples of relative-stative verbs are French *espérer* ‘hope’, *consister* ‘consist of’, *dominer* ‘dominate’, Spanish *durar* ‘last’, *costar* ‘cost’, and Italian *appartenere* ‘belong’, *chiamarsi* ‘be called’ (Breu 1996, 32). In the continuation test (imperfective form of a verb in a posterior relation to its perfective form, as in (2)) a relative-stative verb yields a contradiction.

- (2) Italian (Gardenghi 2000, 118)

*Se Piero ebbe i capelli rossi, dopo aveva i capelli rossi?* – No.

‘If Piero had [PFTV] ginger hair, did he have [IPFV] ginger hair afterwards? – No.’

## 2.2 Inceptive-stative and inceptive-dynamic classes

In distinction to Breu, I present two inceptive actional classes which are conceptualised as states of affairs with a lexically-inherent initial boundary, whose transgression marks the entry into the state of affairs, and an ensuing temporary phase, which is static in the case of inceptive-stative and dynamic in the case of inceptive-dynamic states of affairs. Neither has a lexically-inherent final boundary. However, as the states of affairs are temporary, final boundedness is entailed.

The interaction between the verbs of both classes and a grammatical perfective form produces two readings: as the perfective form selects the boundary component as well as the temporariness of the phase, it may be read either as the entry into a state of affairs (ingressive) or as delimitative (cf. Breu 1996, 44). The imperfective form of inceptive verbs has a stative meaning for inceptive-statives and a progressive reading for inceptive-dynamics, as well as a habitual reading for both.

- (3) a. perfective past form, ingressive reading;      imperfective past form, stative reading
- |         |                |                  |                  |                            |
|---------|----------------|------------------|------------------|----------------------------|
| French  | <i>j’ai su</i> | ‘I got to know’  | <i>je savais</i> | ‘I knew’                   |
| Spanish | <i>vi</i>      | ‘I spotted’      | <i>veía</i>      | ‘I saw’                    |
| Greek   | <i>ayápisa</i> | ‘I fell in love’ | <i>ayapúsa</i>   | ‘I loved’ (Sasse 1991, 15) |
- b. perfective past form, delimitative reading
- Spanish (Chapado Chorro/García García 1991, 51)
- Tú conociste muy bien a María Z.*  
 ‘You knew Maria Z. well.’ (Maria Z. is dead)
- Italian (Breu 1996, 44)
- la vide per due ore*  
 ‘s/he saw her for two hours’

The continuation test (compare (2) and (4)) does not yield a contradiction with an inceptive-stative verb.

(4) Italian (Gardenghi 2000, 118)

*Se Piero si trovò nel bosco, dopo si trovava nel bosco? – Sì.*

‘If Piero was [PFTV] in the forest, was [IPFV] he in the forest afterwards? – Yes.’

The inceptive-stative class is well represented in the world’s languages, including the Romance languages, Greek (Sasse 1991), Russian, Nivkh (cf. Gruzdeva 2012) and Laz (Mattissen 2001), but is absent from German and English, which is why it does not feature in the Vendler/Dowty grid. Examples are:

(5) French: *être* ‘become/be’, *savoir* ‘learn/know’, *avoir* ‘get/have’

Spanish: *conocer* ‘(get to) know’, *saber* ‘learn/know’, *ver* ‘spot/see’, *tener* ‘get hold of/have’

Italian: *sedere* ‘sit (down)’, *vedere* ‘see’ (Breu 1994, 32, 35)

Inceptive-dynamic verbs were also postulated by Ebert (1995, 191) and described for Moroccan Arabic by Chaara (2003, 113s.). Where this class is represented, verbs of source-oriented motion, like ‘set off’ + ‘go’, typically belong to it, for example Nivkh *vi-* (adapting Gruzdeva 2012, 473) and Moroccan Arabic *mša-* (cf. Chaara 2003, 99). The perfective form selects the initial boundary (ingressive) and encodes the setting-in-motion, or the state of affairs *en bloc* (delimitative reading); the imperfective form selects the ensuing dynamic phase of the ongoing motion. I found no Romance examples for this class. An Ancient Greek example is:

(6) Ancient Greek (Comrie 1976, 17)

a. *ebasíleusa*

reign.PFTV.PST.1s

‘I became king/ascended the throne’      ingressive

b. *ebasíleusa*      déka      étē

reign.PFTV.PST.1s      ten      years

‘I reigned for ten years’      delimitative

c. *ebasíleuon*

reign.IPFV.PST.1s

‘I was king’



## (9) Spanish

- a. *estoy hirviendo agua* ‘I’m bringing water to the boil’
- b. *la sopa está hirviendo* ‘the soup is boiling’

it does not count as an inchoative-dynamic verb but as two different verbs (cf. also Sanz 2000, 68).

## 2.4 Activities

Activities are conceptualised here as temporary dynamic phases without any lexically-inherent initial or final boundaries (cf. Breu 1996, 41), and which affect their patients holistically (cf. Krifka 1989, 160–161). They are atelic and aterminative, but, as temporary phases, they entail initial and final boundedness. Therefore, the perfective forms of verbs belonging to this class denote the ended state of affairs *en bloc* (delimitative reading; cf. Sasse 1991, 15). Verbs belonging to this class can be intransitive or transitive, e.g., Spanish *trabajar* ‘work’, *llorar* ‘cry’, *buscar* ‘look for’, *empujar* ‘push’; French *travailler* ‘work’, *chercher* ‘search’, *souffrir* ‘suffer’; Italian *lavorare* ‘work’, *cercare* ‘search’ (Breu 1994, 28).

Contrary to Dowty’s claim (1979, 60), activity verbs may be compatible not only with stage verbs, such as ‘start’ and ‘stop’, but also with ‘finish’, for instance in French:

## (10) French (Mattissen field data 2017)

*Elle a fini de travailler.*

‘She has finished working.’

With activities, the interruption test (cf. (11a)) yields a positive answer. The contradiction test (imperfective form + ‘but’ + perfective form) yields a contradiction (11b):

## (11) Spanish (Chapado Chorro 2000, 65)

- a. *Estaba trabajando. Le interrumpieron.* – *¿Ha trabajado?/¿Trabajó?* – Sí.  
‘S/he was working. S/he was interrupted. – Has s/he already worked/Did s/he work? – Yes.’

- b. French (Mattissen field data 2017)

*\*Elle travaillait/était en train de travailler, mais elle n’a pas travaillé.*

\*‘She was working, but didn’t work.’

Traditionally, activities are said to be compatible only with duration adverbials, not with time span adverbials (as in (12a) vs. (12b, c); Dowty 1979, 60). In fact, adverbial

compatibility not only interacts with the actional class, but also with grammatical aspect (cf. Bertinetto/Delfitto 2000, 207) and morphosyntactic properties such as the presence and quantification of a participant (cf. Behrens 1998, 297–301). As a duration adverbial nevertheless denotes a delimited period of time, the “boundary paradox” arises (cf. Behrens 1998, 297–298): the adverbial refers to the duration of a phase and at the same time measures it out (indicates its boundedness). This dual nature means that its compatibility differs cross-linguistically. In English, the adverbials’ measuring function is tuned out and its durational character fits the phase of an activity.

- (12) a. \**She worked in one hour.*  
 b. *She worked/used to work/has been working for one hour.*  
 c. *She had been working for one hour when . . .*

In Italian, on the other hand, the delimiting nature prevails, therefore the duration adverbial is not compatible with the imperfective past (*lavorava* in (13a)) nor the progressive form (*è stata ballando* in (13b)) of an activity verb with a non-delimiting reading, but is compatible only with the perfective form (*lavorò*).

- (13) Italian (Breu 1994, 28)  
 a. *lavorò* (*/\*lavorava*) *due ore*  
 ‘s/he worked for two hours’  
 b. \**Maria è stata ballando per due ore.*  
 ‘Maria has been dancing for two hours.’

Spanish has a special paradigmatic form combining a perfective past form (*indefinido*) and a progressive (*estuvo bailando* in (14), see section 3.2) with the same dual nature of the boundedness of an enduring state of affairs (cf. Bertinetto/Delfitto 2000, 201, 207), which is compatible with a duration adverbial, while an imperfective or progressive form (*estaba bailando*) is not.

- (14) Spanish (Bertinetto/Delfitto 2000, 207)  
*María estuvo bailando* (*/\*estaba bailando*) *durante dos horas.*  
 ‘Maria was dancing for two hours.’

In French, an activity verb is compatible with a duration adverbial in both the perfective (*passé simple/passé composé*; *a miaulé* in (15a)) and imperfective past form (*imparfait*; *miaulait* in (15b)).

- (15) French [www.chat-et-cie.fr/forum/chatons-4-mois/douchka-t5089-75.html, accessed 31/1/2020]
- a. *Elle a miaulé pendant une heure et puis s'est résignée.*  
'It miaowed for an hour, then resigned itself to its fate.'
  - b. *Elle miaulait miaulait miaulait pendant une heure.*  
'It miaowed miaowed miaowed for one hour.'

This varying compatibility is one of the reasons why testing actional class membership with temporal adverbials is problematic (cf. Behrens 1998, 290–293).

The difference between states of affairs with a lexically-inherent initial boundary and activities can be seen with a perfective form: the former have two possible readings, the latter only the delimitative reading.

- (16) Spanish (Mattissen field data 2017)
- a. *vio* 's/he spotted sth.' ingressive  
's/he looked at sth. for a while' delimitative
  - b. *trabajó* 's/he worked for a while' delimitative  
'\*s/he started working'

The boundary-selecting stage verb *acabar* 'end' refers to the initial boundary for inceptive and inchoative verbs, but to the state of affairs *en bloc* for activities:

- (17) Spanish (Chapado Chorro 2000, 71)
- a. *Acaba de conocerle.*  
'S/he has just got to know him.' (and knows him now)
  - b. *Acabó de trabajar.*  
'S/he finished work.' (and was not working after that point)

## 2.5 Totally-terminative, preludial-terminative and semelfactive classes

Three actional classes are characterised by a dominant boundary component.

First, totally-terminative states of affairs are conceptualised as a boundary without any phase (cf. Breu 1994, 26), which is why they are often described as punctual. The perfective forms of verbs belonging to this class have a completive reading. In the absence of a phase that could be selected, these verbs frequently lack imperfective forms, but if imperfective forms do exist, they have a habitual reading. Totally-terminative verbs are usually not compatible with stage verbs.

- (18) French (Mattissen field data 2017)
- a. *\*Il est en train de trouver ses lunettes.*  
'He is finding his glasses.'
  - b. Spanish (Chapado Chorro 2000, 60)  
*\*Empezó a encontrar la llave.*  
'S/he began to find the key.'

The participant is affected holistically and a single participant can only transgress the boundary once (the state of affairs is not repeatable). A mass, collective participant or a plurality of participants, however, can trigger a series of single boundary transgressions, and these boundary transgressions in succession establish a phase of homogeneous states of affairs "through the back door", similar to a (non-episodic/non-actual) habitual (cf. Lindstedt 1985, 203). Therefore, totally-terminative verbs may be compatible with imperfective forms or stage verbs in such a distributive reading.

- (19) French (Mattissen field data 2017)
- a. *\*Il est en train d'arriver.*  
'He is arriving.'
  - b. *Les alpinistes étaient en train d'arriver au sommet quand une avalanche . . .*  
'The mountaineers were arriving at the summit (one by one) when an avalanche . . .'
  - c. *La neige tombait pendant des heures.* (Haßler 2016, 226) distributive  
'It snowed [IPFV] for hours.'
  - d. *Il trouvait ses lunettes trois fois par jour.* habitual  
'He used to find [IPFV] his glasses three times a day.'

Verbs which typically belong to this class are translational equivalents of 'find' or 'explode'.

- (20) French *trouver* 'find', *arriver* 'arrive'  
 Spanish *encontrar* 'meet, find', *explotar* 'explode'  
 Italian *trovare* 'find' (Breu 1994, 29)

Secondly, preludeal-terminative states of affairs, established by Sasse (2000, 227) for Cayuga (termed class "T2" there; cf. also Botne 2003, 240s. for English), are conceptualised as a dynamic, non-interruptible, preludeal phase leading to a final boundary. The phase, no matter how long it lasts, cannot be separated from the boundary



transgression: whenever the prelude is true, the state of affairs cannot be interrupted but inevitably transgresses the final boundary. To put it metaphorically: the preludial phase is like the in-run in ski jumping, once the athlete gets off the Happle-bar (on which s/he sits before the start) s/he has to go all the way to take-off and cannot give up halfway. Therefore, the interruption test is not applicable and the contradiction test yields a contradiction:

(21) English

*\*He was dying, but didn't die in the end.*

Imperfective forms of preludial-terminatives, such as Spanish *llegar* 'arrive', select the prelude or are read projectively ('on the verge of', as in (22a)), in contrast to the "ongoing" reading of an activity in (22b)).

(22) Spanish (Chapado Chorro/García García 1991, 56–57)

a. *Salía cuando sonó el teléfono.*

'I was on the verge of going out [IPFV] when the telephone rang [PFTV].'

b. *Paseaba cuando oí un ruido.*

'I was going for a walk [IPFV] when I heard [PFTV] a noise.'

Thirdly, semelfactive states of affairs (first introduced as an actional class by Smith 1991) are conceptualised here as a temporary phase produced by multiple (repeated) homogeneous boundary transgressions. Typically, translational equivalents of 'knock', 'flash', 'cough' or 'wink' belong to this class, e.g., Spanish *golpear* 'hit', *relampaguear* 'flash'; French *frapper* 'knock', *taper* 'hit', *cligner* 'wink, flash'.

Similarly to totally-terminative states of affairs, a succession of boundary transgressions constitutes the phase, but in contrast to them, a single participant can repeat the boundary transgression. Therefore, semelfactives do not have a defined endpoint or resultant state and behave as aterminative states of affairs, similar to activities (cf. Smith 1991). The boundaries that are transgressed are thus intermediary boundaries. Accordingly, semelfactives act like activities in the interruption and contradiction tests:

(23) French (Mattissen field data 2017)

a. *S'il est en train de frapper et on l'interrompt, a-t-il déjà frappé? – Oui.*

'If he is knocking and is interrupted, has he already knocked? – Yes.'

b. *\*Il frappait, mais il n'a pas frappé.*

\*'He was knocking, but didn't knock.'

The perfective forms of semelfactive verbs have two readings: a single boundary transgression (the technical semelfactive) or the whole phase of multiple boundary transgressions *en bloc* (delimitative reading). In addition, semelfactive verbs are compatible with progressive morphemes and stage verbs ((23a), (24)).

(24) Spanish (Mattissen field data 2017)

a. *estaba golpeando*

‘s/he was hitting’ (several hits, semelfactive)

vs

b. *estaban besándose*

‘they were kissing’ (one longer or several kisses, activity)

## 2.6 Gradually-terminative, comparative-terminative and successive-terminative classes

Finally, there are three actional classes which are worth dwelling on a little longer. They have an interruptible, temporary, dynamic phase and a lexically-inherent final boundary and are thus telic. They are oriented to a resultant state, a result (effectee or product) or the attainment of a goal, which are reached by transgressing the final boundary. The resultant state may be either implicit, i.e., lexically inherent, or expressed by a co-predicate or adverbial, as in English. This depends on the grammaticalisation status of the aspect system in a given language (cf. Horrocks/Stavrou 2003, 299), the relation to the subject or object (cf. Rothstein 2000), the form of the result expression (adjective, metaphorical noun, adverbial etc.; cf. Farkas 2011) and the verb (cf. Riaubiené 2015), with fewer types of overt results possible in aspect languages (compare the ungrammatical Romance forms with the English translations; cf. Giannakidou/Merchant 1999).

(25) Spanish (Sanz 2000, 101; Farkas 2011, 81)

a. *El río se congeló (\*solido)*

‘The river froze [PFTV] solid.’

b. *Juan fregó la mesa (\*limpia).*

‘Juan wiped [PFTV] the table clean.’

c. French (Farkas 2011, 81)

*Jean a essuyé la table (\*propre).*

‘Jean wiped [PERF] the table clean.’

d. Italian (Farkas 2011, 81)

*Gianni ha pulito il tavolo a lucido/a specchio.*

‘Gianni wiped [PERF] the table to a shine/mirror clean.’

- e. Romanian (Farkas 2011, 69, 81)  
*Lac-ul a înghețat bocnă.*  
 lake-DEF has frozen bone  
 ‘The lake has frozen solid.’
- f. *Fata a frecat masa lună/oglindă.*  
 Girl has scrubbed table moon/mirror  
 ‘The girl scrubbed the table to a shine/mirror clean.’
- g. *wipe sth. clean, sing s.o. to sleep, beat s.o. black and blue, hammer sth. flat*

### 2.6.1 The gradually-terminative class

As Breu does not establish subclasses of gradually-terminative states of affairs in their own right (1996, 43–45), the gradually-terminative class here is not congruent with his, but is rather conceptualised as a temporary and interruptible dynamic phase encoding an attempt at transgressing the inherent final boundary. Therefore, imperfective forms of verbs belonging to this class have a conative reading (*imperfectum de conatu*; cf. Sasse 1991, 13), as distinct from preludial-terminatives. The phase does not have stages or intermediate results. Therefore, when the phase is interrupted, the state of affairs has not been realised at all, as the interruption and contradiction tests show:

- (26) French (Mattissen field data 2017 and cf. Garey 1957, 105)
- a. *Il était en train d'ouvrir la fenêtre, mais on l'a interrompu. A-t-il ouvert la fenêtre? – Non.*  
 ‘He was opening the window but was interrupted. Did he open/has he opened the window? – No.’
- b. *Figurez-vous un homme qui se noyait, mais qu'on a tiré du fleuve avant qu'il n'ait pu mourir: s'est-il noyé? – Non.*  
 ‘Imagine a man who was drowning, but was rescued from the river before he could die: did he drown? – No.’
- c. Italian (Breu 1994, 33) (varying grammaticality judgements)  
*Moriva, ma non morì.*  
 ‘S/he was dying, but didn’t die.’
- d. Spanish (Haßler 2016, 220)  
*La cogía, pero no la cogió.*  
 ‘S/he tried to catch her, but didn’t get her.’

The conative phase can be measured by a duration adverbial in Italian (27). The Spanish stage verb *acabar* ‘end’, which selects a lexically-inherent boundary, refers to the resulting state after the transgression of the final boundary ((28) vs. (17)).

(27) Italian (Breu 1996, 44)

*Spiegò il problema per due ore.*

‘I tried to explain the problem for two hours.’

(28) Spanish (Chapado Chorro 2000, 72)

*Acaba de ahogarse.*

‘S/he has just drowned.’

If a language has an ‘almost’ (avertive) construction, it is typically said to have two readings with gradually-terminatives (or there may be two different constructions): one meaning is that the state of affairs has not begun (has been completely avoided, reading (i) of (29)), the other is that it has been started but interrupted before the transgression of the final boundary (reading (ii) of (29)).

(29) French (Mattissen field data 2017)

*Hier, je suis presque mort.*

‘Yesterday, I almost died.’

(i) I avoided a life-threatening situation.

(ii) I was very close to passing away (in a life-threatening situation).

Usually, French would distinguish the two by using *j’ai failli mourir* for the first meaning. De Miguel (1999, 3003) mentions the difference between verbs with readings (i) and (ii) and other classes of verbs which only have reading (i) in the Spanish construction with *casi* ‘almost’.

The perfective forms of gradually-terminative verbs are read as completive, not delimitative. Typically, translational equivalents of ‘open’ and ‘break’, and in some languages also ‘die’, belong to this class: Italian *morire* ‘die’, *persuadere* ‘convince’; Spanish *poner* ‘put’, *sentarse* ‘sit down’, *ahogarse* ‘drown’; French *ouvrir* ‘open’, *mourir* ‘die’, *se noyer* ‘drown’.

## 2.6.2 The comparative-terminative class

What I call comparative-terminative states of affairs here were introduced by Bertinetto/Squartini (1995) as “gradual completion verbs”, two subclasses of which they describe. Their variant ( $\alpha$ ) has been adopted here as the comparative-ter-

minative class, while variant ( $\beta$ ) seems to be the gradually-terminatives of 2.6.1 (cf. Bertinetto/Squartini 1995, 22). The former class is conceptualised here as a temporary scalar phase (run-time interval) leading up to a final boundary. The phase is characterised by degrees of one and the same state of affairs with a later degree higher or lower on the scale than any preceding one. For example, something which is enlarging becomes larger compared to a former stage. The comparison inherent in comparative-terminatives implies intermediary boundaries in the sense that any entry into a new degree corresponds to the transgression of such a boundary delimiting two adjacent stages. In distinction to semelfactives, there is also a final boundary, although comparative-terminative states of affairs can end without transgressing the final boundary and reaching a resultant state (e.g., something which has become larger need not be large), or they can end by transgressing the final boundary and reaching the resultant state (e.g., something has become large by becoming larger). Accordingly, the perfective forms of verbs belonging to this class have two possible readings: either they select the final boundary (completive reading), or they select an intermediary boundary, which ends a temporary phase without final boundary transgression (delimitative reading).

(30) Italian (Bertinetto/Squartini 1995, 21)

*Il livello dell'acqua si è abbassato.*

'The water level sank.'

(i) *Il livello dell'acqua è più basso.*                      intermediary stage

'The water level is lower.'

(ii) *Il livello dell'acqua è basso.*                      resultant state

'The water level is low.'

Bertinetto/Squartini (1995) give the following examples of comparative-terminative verbs in Italian and English; the Spanish and French examples are from my fieldwork (compare also Sanz's (2000, 79–81) "degree achievements" and Rothstein 2012, 68):

(31) English: *fatten, improve, enlarge, increase, lower, warm up*

Italian: *avanzare* 'move forward', *migliorare* 'improve', *invecchiare* 'grow old', *raffreddarsi* 'cool down', *aumentare* 'increase' Spanish: *mejorar* 'improve', *ruborizarse* 'blush', *bajar* 'lower, decrease' French: *s'améliorer* 'improve', *faciliter* 'facilitate', *sécher* 'dry', *vieillir* 'grow old'

To identify verbs belonging to this class, Bertinetto/Squartini (1995, 16) introduced the test of compatibility with the adverb of multiplicity ‘by a lot’, which is not compatible with verbs of the other actional classes.

(32) Italian (Bertinetto/Squartini 1995, 21, 16)

- a. *La situazione è migliorata di parecchio.*  
‘The situation has improved by a lot.’
- b. *\*Pippo ha corso / ha risolto il puzzle / è partito / possiede la sua casa di parecchio.*  
\*‘Pippo has run/has solved the puzzle/is gone/owns his house by a lot.’

This test is also applicable in French, as the following examples show. In addition, comparative-terminative verbs are compatible with both duration and time span adverbials.

(33) French (Mattissen field data 2017)

- a. *La situation s’est améliorée, mais elle n’est pas bonne.*  
‘The situation has improved, but is not good.’
- b. *Ça s’est amélioré de beaucoup.*  
‘It has improved by a lot.’
- c. *La situation s’est améliorée pendant la journée.*  
‘The situation improved during the day.’
- d. *La situation s’est améliorée en deux ans.*  
‘The situation has improved in two years.’

### 2.6.3 The successive-terminative class

The most challenging actional class from a traditional viewpoint is the successive-terminative class, introduced by Mattissen (2001; 2003), which emerges from the actional class tests (e.g., the interruption test, see below). The behaviour of its member verbs becomes comprehensible and is no longer erratic once one accepts the basic conceptions that actional class is a property of verbs, including inherently-transitive verbs, not of VPs or clauses, and that it does not change according to features of overt participants of the verb and adverbials in the clause. Rather participants and adverbials *activate lexically pre-defined phases and boundaries* (as shown in greater detail in section 3). Successive-terminatives constitute a class of their own; they are neither activities nor accomplishments nor changing back and forth between the two. This constitutes the major difference from traditional approaches.

Successive-terminative states of affairs are conceptualised as an interruptible temporary dynamic phase (a run-time interval which is not comparative) leading eventually to a final boundary (cf. Mattissen 2001; 2003). A participant is gradually effected (produced) or partially affected up to full affectedness.

Although such a state of affairs is on the whole telic, its phase is neither conative nor a prelude and can end without transgressing the final boundary and reaching a resultant state, like the phase of comparative-terminative states of affairs. Therefore, the perfective forms of verbs belonging to this class have two possible readings (as in (34)): the completive one (like telic verbs) and the delimitative one (like atelic ones).

(34) French

*Il a écrit des lettres.*

‘He wrote some letters.’

Russian successive-terminative verbs stand out as a class because they have two perfective aspect partners to one imperfective form, each marked with a different prefix, i.e., one for each reading, e.g., *pisat* ‘write’ has the completive perfective past *napisal* ‘he wrote (to the end)’ and the delimitative perfective past *popisal* ‘he wrote (for a while, i.e., without finishing)’ (cf. Isačenko 1962, 392).

Typically, verbs of consumption (e.g., ‘eat’ or ‘read’), production (e.g., ‘build’ or ‘draw’; mostly transitive) and goal-attaining motion (e.g., ‘go somewhere’; mostly intransitive) belong to this class cross-linguistically (cf. Krifka 1989, 161; Mattissen 2003).

Successive-terminative verbs are compatible with progressive forms and all sorts of stage verbs.

(35) French

*Il était en train de manger.*

‘He was eating.’

They combine characteristics they share with activities and characteristics they share with telic states of affairs, e.g., compatibility with both duration and time span adverbials.

(36) Spanish (Sanz/Laka 2002, 325)

*Mi hermano leyó un libro toda la tarde/en una hora.*

‘My brother read [PFTV] a book the whole afternoon/in one hour.’

However, they generally elicit a specific response to the interruption test, which is neither “yes” (as with activities) nor “no” (as with gradually-terminatives), but rather “yes, partially/a bit/a while” (cf. also Chapado Chorro 2000, 65; Mattissen 2001; 2003).

(37) Spanish (Mattissen field data 2017)

*Estaba leyendo. Le interrumpieron. ¿Leyó? – Sí, un rato.*

‘S/he was reading. S/he was interrupted. Did s/he read? – Yes, for some time.’

The answer shows that at the interruption, the state of affairs has already begun and has proceeded to a certain point (a characteristic shared with activities), but is not completed, in contrast to both preudial-terminatives, whose phase necessarily leads to boundary transgression, and to gradually-terminatives, whose phase encodes an attempt at a boundary transgression (cf. (26)).

Successive-terminative verbs can be intransitive or transitive, e.g., Spanish *comer* ‘eat’, *tomar* ‘take’, *leer* ‘read’, *construir* ‘build’, *pintar* ‘paint’, *cantar* ‘sing’, *tocar* ‘play’, *cocinar* ‘cook’; French *manger* ‘eat’, *lire* ‘read’, *jouer* ‘play’, *peindre* ‘draw’, *chanter* ‘sing’.

In English and German, such verbs are typically ambitransitive, e.g., *eat* (sth.), *read* (sth.), *write* (sth.), *sing* (sth.), and there has been discussion regarding (i) whether the verb without an overt object and the verb with an overt object belong to different actional classes (activities and accomplishments in the Vendlerian model), or (ii) whether actional classes (under the label “aspect”) are a property of lexemes, verb phrases or clauses, or (iii) whether verbs may be recategorised by their context (e.g., features of participants; cf. Smith 1991; Sasse 2002, 214–216).

We assume that lexemes are not reclassified by syntactic constructions (see section 3), instead their behaviour as a whole is determined by their lexically-inherent properties. So a verb does not belong to the activity class as a lexeme and to “accomplishments” in a VP, but rather it belongs to the lexical successive-terminative actional class without or within any context. The different inherent (pre-defined) possible readings of verbs of this class, e.g., the delimitative and completive readings of a perfective form, are then *activated* (not changed) by syntagmatic material, in particular (non-)quantified participants and adverbials, as will be shown in the next sections.



### 3 Interactions among aspectually relevant elements in a clause

Where verbs – due to their actional class membership – allow two readings of one and the same aspect form, there are several ways to signal which reading is to be chosen in a given context.

Verb-external elements of a clause, *viz.* arguments, adverbials and copredicates, for which I use the term “dependent” here, interact with the actional class of the verb in the sense that they activate one or the other possible readings. They do not change the lexically-inherent actional class. For reasons of space, we will focus on dependents activating the completive reading of successive-terminative verbs here, *viz.*

- (i) dependents measuring out the state of affairs
- (ii) dependents setting an explicit endpoint
- (iii) dependents naming an overt result.

These terms are used somewhat differently to Tenny (1994, section 1.2.3, 96, 76), *viz.* dependents measuring out a state of affairs may be:

- increments (see 3.1)
- cognate objects, encoding one instance of a state of affairs and thus quantifying it, as in *sing a song*
- a physical measure (a distance or interval), as in *run a mile*.

An explicit endpoint may be set by:

- a temporal limit, as in *read until 8 o'clock*
- a telos, as in *go there/to the park* (as distinct from *go about* without a telos).

The overt result may be

- an effectee or product of a verb of creation, as in *build a house*
- a resultant state, as in *wipe clean*
- a resultant locale, as in *drink s.o. under the table*.

#### 3.1 Increments

A state of affairs can be measured out with the help of a verb-external explicit increment (subject or object), *i.e.*, by a participant that is not affected holistically, but rather in discrete stages from partially affected to fully affected (*cf.* Braginsky/Rothstein 2008, 31). A state of affairs cannot continue beyond the point where the

available input material has been completely processed, as then it transgresses its final boundary (cf. Tenny 1994). In order for the available material to be fully processable, there has to be a defined quantity of it (cf. Krifka 1989) and this quantity may be signalled by quantifiers, articles or differential object/subject marking (e.g., as in Finnish). On the other hand, in the absence of an overt participant, or with a bare plural form or a mass noun there is no quantified participant. So, a quantified participant activates the completive reading of successive-terminatives, a non-quantified one a delimitative reading.

- (38) non-quantified: delimitative reading    quantified: completive reading  
*I ate*    vs.    *I ate an apple*  
*I ate apples, I ate pie*                          *I ate the apples, I ate two apples,*  
    *I ate two pies*

The Romance languages use different strategies with respect to the activation of readings through the interaction of quantified participants and successive-terminative verbs.

In Oltenian Romanian, a perfective past form of a presumably successive-terminative verb cannot be used without an overt quantified patient, while there is obviously no such restriction on verbs of some other actional classes (cf. Manoliu-Manea 1989, 108–109).

- (39) Oltenian Romanian (Manoliu-Manea 1989, 108–109)

- a. *dormii*  
    ‘I slept [PFTV]’
- b. \**bău*  
    ‘s/he drank [PFTV]’
- c. *bău*    *un pahar cu apă*  
    drink.PFTV.PST.3s    a    glass    with    water  
    ‘s/he drank a glass of water’

In French, mass noun participants are marked differently according to whether they are affected partially or totally: a partially affected mass noun is marked by the partitive article, whereas where the total quantity is affected it is marked by the definite article ((40); see also Krifka 1989, 182s.). The perfective past form (*passé composé* or *passé simple*) may be used with both a partially affected object (which does not measure out the state of affairs, delimitative reading) and a totally affected object (completive reading). The imperfective past form (*imparfait*), however, is not compatible with a totally affected object (40d) as there would be a clash between the imperfective form selecting the lexically-inher-

ent phase and the boundary transgression being activated by the totally affected object (see 3.2).

- (40) French (Mattissen field data 2017)
- |    |   |                                      |
|----|---|--------------------------------------|
| a. | <i>il a bu du vin</i> [PERFECTIVE PAST + PARTITIVE]     | ‘he drank (from the/some) wine’      |
| b. | <i>il a bu le vin</i>                                   | ‘he drank up the wine’               |
| c. | <i>il buvait du vin</i> [IMPERFECTIVE PAST + PARTITIVE] | ‘he was drinking/used to drink wine’ |
| d. | * <i>il buvait le vin</i>                               | ‘he was drinking up the wine’        |

As the object clitics in French encode either partial (*en*) or full affectedness (*le, la, les*) and, depending on the context, may not be omitted (*il a bu?* ‘did he drink?’ would refer to alcohol), the interruption test has to be presented in two versions for a mass-noun object:

- (41) French (Mattissen field data 2017)
- Il était en train de boire de l’eau. On l’a interrompu.*  
 ‘He was drinking water. He was interrupted.’
- |    |  |   |   |
|----|--|---|---|
| a. | <i>Il l’a bu?</i> ‘Did he drink it?’       | – | <i>Non.</i> ‘No.’ (total quantity, completive)      |
| b. | <i>Il en a bu?</i> ‘Did he drink from it?’ | – | <i>Oui.</i> ‘Yes.’ (partial quantity, delimitative) |

When a quantified participant activates a completive reading, in French and Romanian a duration adverbial cannot at the same time measure the extent of the phase. Only a time span adverbial is compatible, which measures the time until boundary transgression.

- (42) French (Mattissen field data 2017)
- |    |  |                                      |
|----|--|--------------------------------------|
| a. | <i>Il a lu pendant une heure.</i>            | ‘He read [PFTV] for one hour.’       |
| b. | * <i>Il a lu un livre pendant une heure.</i> | ‘He read a book for one hour.’       |
| c. | <i>Il a lu un livre en une heure.</i>        | ‘He read [PFTV] a book in one hour.’ |

(43) Romanian (Stoicescu 2013, 120)

- a. *A mâncat bețe timp de zece minute (cal-ul).*  
 has eaten sticks time of 10 min. (horse-the)  
 'It (the horse) ate sticks for ten minutes.'
- b. *A mâncat mingea în zece minute.*  
 has eaten ball in 10 min.  
 'It ate the ball in ten minutes.'

As a third strategy, the Spanish perfective past form may have a delimitative reading even with a quantified participant: in (44) *leyó un libro* is compatible with a duration or a time span adverbial.

(44) Spanish (Sanz/Laka 2002, 325)

- Mi hermano leyó un libro (toda la tarde/en una hora).*  
 'My brother read [PFTV] a book (the whole afternoon/in one hour)'

However, the delimitative and completive readings are distinguished by an obligatory completive marker in the form of the reflexive pronoun *se* in Spanish, which is used with verbs of different actional classes and in different TAM forms. The function of the form has been frequently discussed (e.g., Nishida 1994; Sanz 2000; Sanz/Laka 2002). Evidence for *se* being a completive marker lies in the fact that it is obligatory (cf. (45a)) with quantified patients, which can be interpreted or are marked as totally affected (as in *se sabe toda la lección* 's/he knows the whole lesson', cf. Nishida 1994, 441); native speakers disprefer *comió dos manzanas* 's/he ate two apples' without *se* (Mattissen field data 2017). At the same time, *se* is incompatible with non-quantified patients (as in (45b) vs. (45c); cf. Nishida 1994, 431–432, 439) and with imperfective forms (except when the reading is habitual; Nishida 1994, 446), i.e., with forms activating the delimitative reading.

(45) Spanish (Chapado Chorro/García García 1991, 66)

- a. *Se comió dos manzanas/la manzana.* completive  
 'S/he ate [PFTV] two apples/the apple.'
- b. *Comió manzanas.* delimitative  
 'S/he ate [PFTV] apples.'
- c. \**Se comió manzanas.*

In addition, continuation with something remaining is impossible with the completive marker: when the final boundary is transgressed, nothing of the increment can be left over.

- (46) Spanish (Nishida 1994, 432)
- a. *Juan leyó el libro un poco más anoche, y ahora le faltan dos capítulos.* delimitative  
 ‘Juan read [PFTV] the book a bit further last night and now he has two chapters left.’
- b. *Juan se leyó el libro (\*un poco más anoche, y ahora le faltan dos capítulos).* completive  
 ‘Juan read [PFTV] the book through (\*a bit further last night and now he has two chapters left).’

A duration adverbial is not compatible with a completive *se*-form (compare (44)).

- (47) Spanish (Sanz/Laka 2002, 325)
- Mi hermano se leyó un libro en una hora / (\*toda la tarde).*  
 ‘My brother read [PFTV] a book in one hour / (\*the whole afternoon).’

The Spanish completive marker *se* constitutes a (stacked) second layer of aspectual marking in addition to the paradigmatic perfective and imperfective forms, but there can be even more layers.

### 3.2 Stacking of aspectual marking

Stacking of aspectual marking means head-marking of aspect, aspectoids and other boundary markers on the predicate and is especially striking when (i) perfective forms are combined with material that encodes readings which are comprised of or have an affinity with the imperfective (e.g., progressive, habitual), and (ii) imperfective forms are combined with material that encodes readings that have an affinity with perfective aspect (e.g., completive).

Spanish allows seemingly contradictory aspectual means to be combined, *viz.* perfective past (*indefinido*) with a progressive form (*estar* + gerund as in (48a); cf. Chapado Chorro/García García 1991, 64–65; Breu 1994, 38), and the completive marker *se* with an imperfective past progressive (as in (48b)). This means that a category that activates a phase can be combined with a category that activates a boundary.

- (48) Spanish (Sanz 2000, 87)
- a. *Mi hermano estuvo [PFTV] leyendo un libro.*  
 ‘My brother was reading a book.’
- b. *Se estaba comiendo la carne cuando oyó un disparo.*  
 ‘S/he was just eating up the meat dish when s/he heard a shot.’

These combinations express finer-grained aspectual information. In (48a), a delimited phase is presented as temporally extended. In (48b), the completive marker *se* + the quantified patient (the definite article *la* signals total affectedness) activate the final boundary transgression and the progressive form stretches the immediate approach to this final boundary transgression (similar to the prelude of preludial-terminatives). In the example given, this means taking the last forkful of the meal to the mouth. In addition, the final stage of eating constitutes the backgrounded state of affairs in the incidence taxis configuration and, as such, is in the imperfective past form. The intruding state of affairs is that a shot is heard.

A layering as in (48) is not possible in Italian (Breu 1994, 39; Bertinetto/Delfitto 2000, 197) nor in French. To express the stretched approach to the final boundary transgression, an imperfective past form (*imparfait*) or progressive form cannot be used with a participant marked for total affectedness (as in (49a)). Instead, a different verb featuring an inherent final boundary has to be used in the imperfective past form: *finir* ‘finish’ (as in (49b)).

(49) French (Mattissen field data 2017)

- a. *\*il buvait le vin quand . . . / \*il était en train de boire le vin quand . . .*  
‘he was drinking up the wine when . . .’
- b. *il finissait le vin quand . . .*  
‘he was drinking up the wine when . . .’
- c. Italian (Haßler 2016, 256)  
*Francesca stava giusto finendo di scrivere una lettera, . . .*  
‘Francesca was just finishing writing a letter, . . .’

In its layering of aspectual markers, Spanish resembles the South Slavonic languages Bulgarian and Macedonian (cf. Lindstedt 1985, 209; Breu 1994, 37–38; 1996, 62) and the Kartvelian language Georgian (cf. Mattissen 2003, 266–268). All three have a binary grammatical aspect opposition of perfective and imperfective forms and distinguish completive and delimitative readings (cf. Lindstedt 1985, 169–171, 173) parallel to the Spanish use of completive *se*. Bulgarian and Macedonian also mark definiteness on nouns.

In Bulgarian and Georgian, perfective past (*aorist*) forms usually bear a completive prefix (glossed PRV in (50)–(52)), whereas imperfective forms generally do not (cf. Lindstedt 1986, 169s.; Holisky 1981, 139–141). However, it is possible not to prefix a perfective form (the so-called “imperfective aorist”) in order to signal the durativity/temporal extension of a sequential state of affairs ((50a), compare Spanish (48a)); prefixation of an imperfective form (so-called “perfective imperfect”) is possible for a habitual completive reading or a habitual sequence ((50b) cf.

Lindstedt 1985, 169–171). Non-prefixation of successive-terminative verbs is interpreted as partial affectedness of the object in all three languages ((50c) vs. (50d), (51); (52a) vs. (52b)) while partial affectedness is not marked on the noun itself.

(50) Bulgarian (Lindstedt 1985, 175, 197, 185)

- a. *Toj caruva trijset godini.*  
 he reign.PFTV.PST.3s 30 years  
 ‘He reigned for thirty years.’
- b. *Prez ljatoto pro-čitax vseki den edna ruska kniga.*  
 in summer PRV-read.IPFV.PST.1s every day one  
 Russian book.ACC  
 ‘In summer I read a whole Russian book every day.’
- c. *jadox saxar*  
 eat.PFTV.PST.1s sugar  
 ‘I ate some sugar’
- d. *iz-jadox saxar-ta*  
 PRV-eat.PFTV.PST.1s sugar-DEF  
 ‘I ate the sugar’

(51) Macedonian (Lindstedt 1985, 176)

- Nè jade što nè jade dodeka ne nè iz-ede.*  
 us eat.PFTV.PST.3s that us ate until not us PRV-PFTV.PST.3s  
 ‘It ate us, ate us, until it had eaten us up.’

(52) Georgian (Vogt 1936, 238)

- a. *ḡuri v-čame*  
 bread 1s-eat:1s.PFTV.PST  
 ‘I ate (at the) bread’
- b. *ḡuri še-v-čame*  
 bread PRV-1s-eat:1s.PFTV.PST  
 ‘I ate up the bread’

The use of the prefix in Bulgarian, Macedonian and Georgian, and the use of Spanish *se* have clear parallels as stacked completive markers. In addition, the delimitative reading of partial affectedness as opposed to a morphologically marked completive reading for one class of verbs constitutes another argument for establishing the successive-terminative actional class. As can be clearly seen, the two readings are lexically inherent in the verb and not induced by any marking on a participant in Georgian.

### 3.3 Goal-oriented motion

Slobin (2004) distinguishes between verb-framing languages, in which the “path”, i.e., direction-of-motion component, is encoded in the verb, and satellite-framing languages, in which the manner-of-motion component is encoded in the verb and the path component in a dependent form. Romance languages belong to the verb-framing type (less so Italian; cf. Hijazo-Gascón 2017, 307–308), as do, for instance, Greek and Japanese (cf. Sanz 2000, 105; Slobin 2004; Horrocks/Stavrou 2007).

In satellite-framing Germanic languages, which do not have a fully grammaticalised aspect system (i.e., no binary opposition of perfective and imperfective forms), manner-of-motion verbs usually belong to the successive-terminative class. Their inherently possible delimitative and completive readings are activated and distinguished with the help of an explicit (dependent-marking) endpoint of the state of affairs. Such an endpoint is set by means of a *telos* (a goal attained) or a temporal or distance limitation as a cut-off point or buffer (e.g., *walk a mile*). The attainment of the goal or limit corresponds to the final boundary transgression (cf. Sasse 1991, 22), whereas motion in a place or in the direction of a goal yields a delimitative reading for one and the same verb.

- (53) non-goal-attaining: delimitative reading    goal-attaining: completive reading  
*walk, walk in the park,*  
*walk in the direction of the park*    vs.    *walk to the park*  
*she swam near the island*                    vs.    *she swam to the island*

Verb-framing languages, however, tend to assign non-goal-oriented verbs, especially manner-of-motion verbs, and goal-attaining verbs to different actional classes: the former belong to atelic, the latter to telic classes. I call this differential lexicalisation. Goal adverbials are only compatible with telic verbs ((54a); native speakers comment that *\*nadar a la isla* “may be heard but does not sound correct”), whereas atelic verbs are compatible with local (as in (54b)) and directional adverbials (as in (54c)), which do not imply the attainment of a goal and thus do not measure out the state of affairs.

- (54) Spanish (Mattissen field data 2017)
- a. *ir a la isla* vs. *\*nadar a la isla*  
    ‘go to the island’ ‘swim to the island’
  - b. *nadar en la playa*  
    ‘swim at the beach’
  - c. *nadar hacia/hasta la isla*  
    ‘swim towards the island’



Differential lexicalisation of motion verbs is also observed in verb-framing languages such as Japanese (56) and Nivkh (57), which do not have a fully grammaticalised aspect category, and in Slavonic and Kartvelian languages, which are satellite-framing and have a grammatical category of aspect, e.g., Russian *idti* ‘go (to a goal)’ vs. *xodit’* ‘go (around or somewhere and back)’, and Laz *bulur* ‘I go (to a goal)’ vs. *go-bulur* ‘I go (around)’ (Mattissen 2003, 264; for Georgian cf. Holisky 1981, 76–78).

To combine a manner of motion and a goal, verb-framing languages have to use both in a dependent construction of a goal-attaining finite verb (cf. (55), (56b), (57)).

- (55) Spanish (Sanz 2000, 105)

*Fue a la costa nadando.*

Lit.: ‘s/he went to the coast swimming’

- (56) Japanese (cf. Horrocks/Stavrou 2007, 610)

a. \**Toshi=wa kishi=e oyo-da* →

T.=TOP shore=to swim-PST

b. *Toshi=wa kishi=e oyo-de it-ta.*

T.=TOP shore=to swim-CV go-PST

‘Toshi swam to the shore’

- (57) Nivkh (Panfilov 1965, 88)

*tə-eri maŋ-gur verla-va ŋi řəm-t*

this-river strong-CV wide-if 1s swim-CV

*tozə-jiki-nə-ŋ-ra*

cross-cannot-FUT-IND-HILI

‘if this river is very wide, I will not be able to swim across’

The correlations among verb/satellite-framing, (in)compatibility with goal adverbials, the category of aspect, actional class membership of verbs and the structure of the verbal lexicon as a whole needs further exploration.

## 4 Conclusion

The model of lexically-inherent actional classes originally developed by Breu (1992–2000) and extended in this study provides a coherent explanation of the aspectual behaviour of verbs, the different readings of perfective and imper-

fective forms of verbs, their interaction with the affectedness and quantification of nominal participants and with various adverbials in Romance and other languages. The model is universally applicable and provides a fine-grained grid of actional classes, all classes in their own right, which is open to further expansion.

In particular, the lexically-inherent design of successive-terminative verbs has been shown to consist of a dynamic phase proceeding up to a final boundary, which allows a delimitative reading as an ended state of affairs *en bloc* without transgression of the final boundary as well as a completive reading with transgression of the final boundary. Verb root-external elements of a clause, such as completive markers, stacked TAM forms, (non-)quantified participants and adverbials, activate one of those possible readings in context cross-linguistically, but do not change the verb's class membership. Besides verbs of consumption and production, verbs of goal-attaining motion may belong to this class. The interaction of verb/satellite-framing and aspect as a verbal category, as observed in such verbs, is a field open for further research.

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Gerda Haßler and Verónica Böhm

# Adverbs as aspect markers and their interaction with verb forms

**Abstract:** Aspectuality can be defined as a universal category that is realised in different ways in different languages. Unlike aspectual languages, such as the Slavic languages, where aspect is grammaticalised and manifests itself morphologically in correlated verb pairs, in Romance languages the boundary or course of a situation must be expressed through various other means. As a semantic-functional category, aspectuality encompasses all the linguistic devices that allow situations to be limited or represent as in progress. In this paper, we examine adverbs in particular as aspectual markers that (can) modify aspectual meanings in the context of aspectually marked verb forms. For example, the French adverbs *soudainement* and *longtemps* and their equivalents in the other Romance languages can change aspectual meaning. We will investigate whether time-limiting adverbs interact with imperfective verb forms in a similar way to how time-extension marking verbs interact with perfective verb forms. The compatibility and non-compatibility of adverbs as aspectual markers with certain verb forms is considered. The investigation is based on data obtained from the search engine Sketch Engine and the CREA (Corpus de Referencia del Español Actual), CORDE (Corpus Diacrónico del Español) and CORPES XXI corpora.

**Keywords:** aspect, aspectuality, adverbs, interaction, functional grammar

## 1 Introduction

In contrast to the verbal categories tense and aspect, much less research has been carried out on temporal and aspectual adverbials, particles and discourse principles. This is surprising since, unlike the aforementioned verbal categories, adverbials are not only found in all languages, they also allow for a much greater differentiation of expression. With Klein (2009, 41), one might wonder why tense and aspect are necessary at all given the possibilities presented by the adverbial domain. One answer to this might lie in the efficiency of the grammatical categories that are given with every verb and that allow for the marking of temporality,

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whereas lexical means, while allowing for more precise temporal classification, are referentially bound and thus subject to constraints. The aspectual quality of verb forms can interact with other markers of aspectuality without being lost. This gives rise to the complex character of aspectuality, to which adverbs also contribute.

This article focuses on the contribution of adverbial constructions to the marking of aspectuality and on their interaction with aspectually marked verb forms. In order to do this, it will first be necessary to state our understanding of aspectuality. Following this we will develop a hypothesis based on languages that have aspectual correlation, then test it on data from Romance languages. Finally, the historical development of adverbs that can also take on aspectual meanings in certain contexts will be presented by way of example.

## 2 Aspectuality and its means of expression

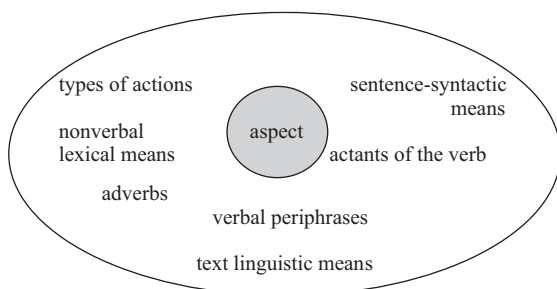
We consider aspect to be a grammatical category of the verb that provides a holistic representation of a situation or a representation in progress. Aspect differs from its neighbouring category tense in that it has no deictic quality, i.e., it does not express the relationship between the time under consideration and the speech act time. The exclusion of aspect as a grammatical category by many prominent Romance linguists (cf., e.g., Weinrich 1973; Rojo/Veiga 1999; Gabilan 2011; and to a large extent also Coseriu 1976) can be justified for Romance languages at the morphological level, because there is no aspect correlation, but it does not do justice to the way these languages function in expressing situations in their wholeness and their progression. Bondarko (1967) and Comrie (1976) have used the functional characteristics of aspect in aspectual languages as a comparative criterion for typological study in languages without aspect stems and aspect correlations.<sup>1</sup> Dessì Schmid (2014, 2–3) points out that in the world's languages the various types of aspect-related information have clear semantic similarities and connections among each other, exhibiting more or less obvious regularities, even if they are formally rendered very differently and involve different linguistic levels.

We consider aspect to be a grammatical category of the verb. In addition to this grammatical category, there are various means of conveying the holistic representation of a situation or an insight into the course of events. We summarise these means of expression in the functional-semantic category of aspectuality,

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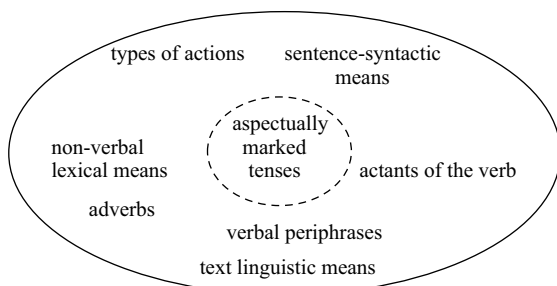
<sup>1</sup> For other conceptions of aspect and aspectuality cf. Schwall (1991); Pollak (1988); Bache (1995); Auwera (1998); Confais (2002 [1990]); Verkuyl (2005); Abraham/Leiss (2008); Bertinetto/Lenci (2012) and Binnick (2012).

which is grouped around the core of the verbal aspect in aspectual languages (cf. Haßler 2016, 191–192):



**Figure 1:** The functional-semantic category of aspectuality in aspect languages (Haßler 2016, 191).

Even in the absence of the grammatical category of aspect, it can be assumed that other means of aspectuality can provide a holistic representation of the situation or are capable of representing it in its course and its phases. The expression of aspectuality through these means is merely less systematic, but can also be more nuanced and complex precisely because of the interactions among different linguistic levels. Aspect is replaced by verb forms that mark aspectuality grammatically and that stand in opposition to each other. However, at the same time these verb forms have temporal qualities and are not specialised for the expression of aspectuality:



**Figure 2:** Functional-semantic category of aspectuality in Romance languages (Haßler 2016, 192).

The difference between the expression of aspectuality by aspectually-temporally marked verb forms and its expression in languages with pure aspect can be illustrated by comparing a sentence in an aspectual language with one in a Romance language. While the correlationally linked aspectual pair *сдавать* ('deliver, hand over, pass (an exam)<sub>impf</sub>') / *сдать* ('deliver, hand over, pass (an exam)<sub>pf</sub>') in Russian



can carry the opposition ‘attempt’ and ‘result’ on its own due to the aspectual correlation, in the French sentence, by contrast, the use of an imperfective and a perfective verb form is not sufficient for this purpose. Here, the telicity in the lexical meaning of *passer* would override the aspectual meaning of imperfective, which occurs in its special conative meaning; a meaningful utterance with a conative meaning of *passait* would not obtain:

- (1) Он сдавал экзамен, но не сдал  
 he pass.3.SG.IPFV exam but not pass.3.SG.PFV  
 ‘He took the exam but didn’t pass it.’

- (2) Fr. \**Il passait l’examen, mais il ne l’a pas passé.*

In languages that have aspectual correlation, the imperfect seems to override the lexical meaning and not vice versa, as here in French. In distinguishing aspect and the other means of expressing aspectuality, we do not operate with discrete semantic categories and certainly assume continua in diachronic development and the cognitive commonalities of the elements of a functional-semantic category in language use, i.e., the same “semantic cast” (*semantische Gussform*, Dessì Schmid 2014, 221). In the ensemble of these linguistic phenomena, however, we acknowledge the central position played by aspect in languages with aspectual correlation, and by aspectually-temporally marked verb forms in Romance languages, since they usually determine the aspectual character of predication. However, abstracting away from the specificity of the various means of expression of aspectuality and adopting a universal standpoint that also allows comparison with aspectless languages, lexical and grammatical markings of aspectuality turn out to be of the same kind.

Even in German, where verb forms have lost their aspectual marking, adverbs, for example, can mark aspectuality. While the difference between examples (3) and (4) is purely stylistic and diatopic, in examples (5) and (6) the non-limitation and the progression of the situation are stressed:

- (3) *Dann sind wir das Rheinufer entlang gelaufen bis zum Schokoladenmuseum.*  
<http://www.adenauer-gymnasium.de/kl/24-jahre-englandaustausch/> ‘Then we walked along the banks of the Rhine to the Chocolate Museum’.
- (4) *Dann liefen wir das Rheinufer entlang bis zum Schokoladenmuseum.*

- (5) *Dann sind wir gerade das Rheinufer entlang gelaufen bis zum Schokoladenmuseum.* ‘Then we just walked along the banks of the Rhine to the Chocolate Museum.’
- (6) *Dann liefen wir gerade das Rheinufer entlang bis zum Schokoladenmuseum.*

Adverbs can also modify action types. Thus, durative verbs (e.g., seek) readily co-occur with adverbs referring to punctual progressions (e.g., *plötzlich* ‘suddenly’) and take on inchoative meanings in sentences like (7). Certain telic verbs (e.g., *finden* ‘find’), on the other hand, exclude adverbs denoting situations of long duration, as in (8):

- (7) *Ich habe den Schlüssel plötzlich gesucht.* ‘I suddenly looked for the key.’
- (8) *\*Ich habe den Schlüssel lange gefunden.* ‘I found the key for a long time.’

The different means of expression of aspectuality can complement each other and may also compete with each other. The complexity of the interaction of linguistic means in shaping the aspectuality of an utterance can be illustrated by the following Spanish example, in which six elements contribute to the aspectuality of the predication:

- (9) *Estuve escribiendo la novela durante los tres últimos años.*
- With the verbal periphrasis *estar + gerund*, no delimitation of the situation is made and the course of the action is focused.
  - The *gerund* as such also contributes to the representation of the ongoing situation and does not impose any limitation.
  - The lexical meaning of the verb *escribir* in itself also suggests durativity.
  - The verb form of the auxiliary (*pretérito perfecto simple*) sets an aspectual limit and specifies the consideration of the situation as a whole.
  - The determinate actant *la novela* limits the interval of writing to the period necessary for a novel.
  - Finally, this period is also precisely named with the adverbial *durante los tres últimos años* and is thus limited.

In this sentence, therefore, a limited, thus perfective situation is expressed, to which the imperfective verbal periphrasis contributes an interior perspective at the same time.

### 3 Compatibility and incompatibility of adverbials with verb forms in aspect languages

Given the interactions among the means of aspectuality, it could be hypothesized that adverbs that focus on the course of the situation co-occur more easily with the imperfective, and that those adverbs that limit the situation occur more readily with perfective verbs. We first tested this hypothesis with an aspectual language by examining 1,000 randomly selected examples from the 148,367 occurrences of the Russian adverb *вдруг* ‘suddenly’ in the Russian National Corpus. The majority of these occurrences do indeed appear with a perfective verb:

- (10) *А тут вы вдруг нарушили международные законы, начали бомбить — несмотря на вето России в ООН.* (Игорь Свиначенко. Умытая Россия // “оммерсантъ-Власть”, 1999)  
 ‘And then suddenly you violated international laws, you started bombing, despite the veto of Russia and the UN.’
- (11) *А дочка просто вдруг начала читать сама (до этого предпочитала семейные чтения вслух).* (Наши дети, Подростки, 2004)  
 ‘And suddenly the little daughter began to read to herself (previously she had preferred reading aloud in the family).’

Perfective aspect delimits the situation, marking a start or end point or even having a punctual character. The adverb emphasises the rapidity of the described change and the difference from the previous situation.

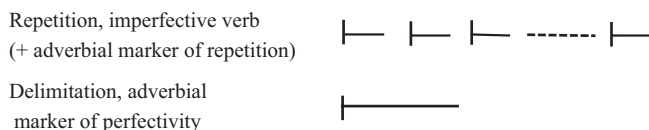
As in all aspectual languages, there are no present tense forms of the perfective aspect in Russian. It is therefore not surprising that the adverb *вдруг* also occurs with imperfective verbs in the present tense to describe the beginning or the punctual progress of a situation: 16% of the occurrences of *вдруг* were of this type:

- (12) *Вдруг они стоят на балконе и всё слышат.* (Андрей Геласимов, Ты можешь, 2001)  
 ‘Suddenly they are standing on the balcony and hearing everything.’
- (13) *А из Таниной спальни выходит вдруг маленькая девочка.* (Андрей Геласимов, Чужая бабушка, 2001)  
 ‘And suddenly a little girl comes out of Tanja’s bedroom.’

However, our hypothesis is confirmed by the fact that only in 3.5% of the corpus examples of this adverb occurred with imperfective verbs in the preterit. This still does not disprove the incompatibility between a delimiting adverb and an imperfective verb, but it does confirm its rarity. In example (14), the imperfective verb denotes a repeated action and *вдруг* marks the punctual character of each action. It is therefore a multiplication of a perfective process:

- (14) *Иногда из него вырывалось вдруг, когда не в силах был вытерпеть этой улыбки, что казалась ему какой-то болью: “Сынóк, не грусти!”* (Олег Павлов. Карагандинские девятины, или Повесть последних дней // “Октябрь”, 2001)  
 ‘Sometimes it would suddenly burst out of him when he couldn’t stand that smile that seemed somehow painful, “Son, don’t be sad.”’

The expression of aspectuality by conflicting linguistic means thus occurs on two levels: the adverbial perfective aspectuality marker characterises the single isolated process as delimited, while the imperfective verb, here again supported by another adverbial, represents it as repeated.



**Figure 3:** Impact of adverbs on aspectuality.

With the adverb *долго* ‘long’, which denotes the extension of a situation and thus contributes to the expression of imperfection, we found no restriction of the context with respect to the verbal aspect.

- (15) *Грибы при этом долго сохраняют аромат, не теряют характерного для них вкуса. (Это полезно // “Даша”, 2004)*  
 ‘Under these conditions mushrooms retain<sub>[imperfective]</sub> their aroma for a long time, they do not lose their special flavour.’
- (16) *А не откажется — продаст бизнес дешёво и не вернётся долго. (Сергей Доренко, Левые силы – перезагрузка // “Завтра”, 2003.08.13)*  
 ‘And if he does not refuse, he will sell the business cheaply and will not return<sub>[perfective]</sub> for a long time.’

The adverb of temporal extension highlights the internal aspectuality, but it has no influence on the delimitation or non-delimitation of the situation. It can describe an almost indefinite situation (15) or the beginning of a situation in the future, which will then last for a long time (16).

While there is no restriction on the combinability of the adverb of temporal extension with respect to aspect, we did not find any collocations of *долго* with inchoative verbs such as *расцветать* ‘to blossom’ and *пойти* ‘to go off’, or terminative verbs, such as *окончить* ‘to finish’ and *забыть* ‘to forget’.

## 4 Compatibility and interactions between aspect markers and verb forms in Romance languages

In the following, the compatibility and possible interactions of limiting or situation-extending adverbs with verb forms in Romance languages will be analysed. First, we will consider the French verbs most frequently modified by the adverb *soudainement*. A search of Sketch Engine (French Web 2017. frTenTen17) revealed that the verbs most frequently co-occurring with this adverb were: *disparaître*, *arrêter*, *apparaître*, *lever*, *interrompre*, *réveiller*, *surgir*, *envahir*, *sentir*, *devenir*, *transformer*, *stopper*, *retourner*, *figer*, *retrouver*, *cesser*, *changer*, *frapper*, *accélérer*, *relever*, *réapparaître*. They are mainly verbs of change of state and verbs denoting the appearance or disappearance of a thing or a person. Among the past tense forms of these verbs co-occurring with *soudainement*, perfectives clearly dominate:

- (17) *Le calme disparut soudainement de son esprit pour laisser place à une rage sans borne.* (<http://rpspira.bbfr.net/t42-drame-pv-frank>)  
‘The calm suddenly disappeared from his mind and was replaced by a boundless rage.’
- (18) *Puis me reprenais, comme à mon habitude. Je me sentis soudainement bizarre. Comme si toutes mes forces s’envolaient au fur et à mesure.* (<http://black-butler.keuf.net/t154-une-rencontre-allechante>)  
‘Then I picked myself up, as usual. I suddenly felt strange. As if all my strength was going away as I went along.’

There are also 1,627 co-occurrences of the delimiting adverb *soudainement* with the *imparfait*, 2% of which are with the verb *disparaître*. However, closer inspection reveals that they are all subordinate clauses introduced by *si*. The use of the *imparfait* is therefore conditioned by the unreal conditional construction. This appears

as a complete sentence (19) or as a reduced construction in an interrogative (20) or exclamatory sentence (21):

- (19) *Si Le Pen disparaissait soudainement d'ici 2007, ce ne serait pas très étonnant, et cela signifierait qu'il est sans doute trop tard pour espérer que quelque-chose change positivement de façon pas trop dure.* ([http://lesogres.info/article.php3?id\\_article=3061](http://lesogres.info/article.php3?id_article=3061))

'If Le Pen suddenly disappeared by 2007, it would not be very surprising, and it would mean that it is probably too late to hope that something will change positively in a not too difficult way.'

- (20) *Et si . . . tous les livres au monde disparaissaient soudainement dans trois secondes ?* (<http://vampyre-castle.forumactif.fr/t27p30-jeu-et-si>)

'What if . . . all the books in the world suddenly disappeared in three seconds?'

- (21) *Comme si les autres journaux du groupe Gesca disparaissaient soudainement !!* (<http://radioquebec.lolforum.net/post?t=4183&mode=reply>)

'As if the other newspapers of the Gesca group suddenly disappeared!!'

For verbs indicating a change of state, we restricted our analysis to *arrêter* and of the 1,817 cooccurrences with *soudainement* 3% were *imparfait*. In the majority of cases, this was a narrative *imparfait* (cf. Bres 2005), which conveys a more intensive view of the course of the process of change depicted (22).

- (22) *Je m'arrêtais soudainement de rire en voyant la tête déconfite de mon invitée.* (<http://artefact-rpg.forumsactifs.com/t1261-une-jolie-rencontre-pv-hildegarde>)

'I suddenly stopped laughing when I saw the discomfited face of my guest.'

In example (23), the construction *je m'arrêtais soudainement* is inserted into a series of sentences in the narrative imperfect:

- (23) *J'attrapais un ballon pour commencer à chauffer mes muscles, à mon tour et driblais en rythme, courant à petites foulées. Je m'arrêtais soudainement lorsque mon regard se posa sur une silhouette de dos, dont la tête était recouverte d'une capuche ; il s'agissait de l'Hermione Granger de la Push que je devais me farcir en cours d'éducation physique et sportive.* (<http://xhistoria-brady.skyrock.com/3003836525-Oui-je-sais-si-j-ai-besoin-de-parler-tu-es-la-et-blabla-Ca-changera.html>)

'I grabbed a ball to start warming up my muscles, and dribbled in rhythm, running with short strides. I stopped suddenly when my eyes fell on a figure with a hood over her head; it was Hermione Granger from the Push who I had to put up with in physical education and sports class.'

In example (24), the construction *je m'arrêtais soudainement* appears as a marker of narrative style:

- (24) *J'arrivais toujours à créer des choses en regardant, en observant. Le musée, une autre bulle. Une bulle remplie par les idées des artistes passés et présents, faite pour créer les artistes du futur. Ouah, quelle phrase poétique. Je m'arrêtais soudainement. Arrivé à mon point d'arrivée. Une bonne journée se profilait en tout cas. Je m'installais sur un banc. Devant une peinture de Van Gogh. J'observais les couleurs.* (apocalyppto.superforum.fr)

'I always managed to create things by looking, by observing. The museum, another bubble. A bubble filled with the ideas of artists past and present, made to create the artists of the future. Wow, what a poetic phrase. I suddenly stopped. Having arrived at my point of arrival. A good day was ahead of me anyway. I sat down on a bench. In front of a Van Gogh painting. I observed the colours.'

The same can be said for the other verbs that frequently co-occur with *soudainement*. Their use in the imperfect is rare and is limited to the narrative imperfect and the representation of a situation that begins suddenly then lasts for a long time. In (26), the *imparfait* seems to be motivated by the fact that it appears embedded under the marker of habituality à *chaque fois*.

- (25) *Horrible. Soudain, un cri d'effroi retentit et une masse jaune et bleue s'écrasa devant moi. Je me levais soudainement prêt à combattre.* (<http://www.m-h-3.com/t2608p60-evil-chronicles>)

'Horrible. Suddenly there was a frightened scream and a yellow and blue mass crashed in front of me. I suddenly stood up ready to fight.'

- (26) *Je vous promets qu'à chaque fois que je passais cette porte estampillée VIH, je me sentais soudainement en bonne santé.* (<http://blog.kardamome.fr/le-sida-et-moi-et-vous/>)

'I promise you that every time I walked through that door marked HIV, I suddenly felt healthy.'

The Spanish *de repente* exhibits a slightly different behaviour, but even with this construction the simple perfect dominates:

- (27) *A poco de llegar, se murió de repente el administrador.* (CREA, Palou, Inés: *Carne apaleada*. Barcelona: Círculo de Lectores, 1975.)  
 ‘Shortly after his arrival, the administrator suddenly died.’

The *imperfecto* appears in 4% of the occurrences of *de repente* in the Real Academia Española’s *Corpus de referencia del español actual* (CREA). This is not very much more than the equivalent adverb in French. The slightly higher frequency of the adverbial perfective marker with the imperfective verb form could be due to the use of the *imperfecto* with modal meaning, which increases the number of occurrences of this verb form in conflicting contexts. In the following example, *hacía* refers to the virtuality of the situation, which is nevertheless presented as having arisen suddenly. The modalisation appears here superimposed on the aspectual marking:

- (28) *Hubo un momento en que parecía que el mundo se hacía bueno de repente, por fin.* (CREA, Revilla, Benedicto: *Guatemala: El terremoto de los pobres*. Madrid: Sedmay, 1976)  
 ‘There was a time when it seemed like the world was suddenly becoming good, at last.’

The modal or evidential meaning is also present in the narrative use of the imperfect (cf. Böhm 2016). The text producer is describing a situation that is not her/his own or is conveying information received from someone else. In its co-occurrences with the *imperfecto*, *de repente* marks the beginning of a situation that then lasts for a long time afterwards or it indicates the narrative character of the utterance. The coincidence of these two explanations can be observed in example (29), in which a slowly approaching change that then suddenly takes place is narrated. In the examples discussed so far in section 4, the adverb comes after the verb. There can be many reasons for placing it before the verb. For example, in (30) *de repente* has a topical function for the following clause, while in (29) it precedes a complex verbal construction.

- (29) *Creo que nunca la he visto tan feliz como aquel día. De repente rompía a reír, con aquella risa desbocada que a veces la dejaba sin aliento.* (Salisachs, Mercedes, *La gangrena*, Barcelona, Planeta, 1976)  
 ‘I don’t think I’ve ever seen her so happy as she was that day. Suddenly she would burst out laughing, with that unbridled laughter that sometimes took her breath away.’



- (30) *Todo parece surgir de un tiempo condicionado; la infancia: “Y también se podía esperar el instante que llegaba. . . que llegaba. . . y, de repente, se precipitaba en presente, y de repente se disolvía. . . y otro que venía. . . que venía. . .” El tiempo salta de la creación al recuerdo, de forma que el momento vivido se hace asfixiante, demoledor.* (Clarice Lispector, narrativa brasileña, la narrativa, o la literatura desconocida, *El País*, Madrid, Diario El País, S.A., 1977-09-04)  
 ‘Everything seems to emerge from a conditioned time; childhood: “And one could also wait for the instant that came. . . that came. . . and suddenly it rushed into the present, and suddenly it dissolved. . . and another that came. . . that came. . .”. Time jumps from creation to memory, so that the lived moment becomes suffocating, shattering.’
- (31) *Esas frases pintadas las había visto muchas veces. Ni se fijaba. Ahora, de repente, parecían ponerse a vivir.* (Alba, Víctor, *El pájaro africano*, Barcelona, Planeta, 1975)  
 ‘He had seen those painted phrases many times. He didn’t even notice them. Now, suddenly, they seemed to come to life.’

In contrast, the construction *mucho tiempo*, which denotes temporal extension, occurs predominantly with perfective verb forms. It directs attention to the internal imperfective aspectuality; the focus is on the course of an extended, completed situation:

- (32) *Durante mucho tiempo se ha creído que los factores motivacionales influyen en el olvido y en la retención.* (Ardila, Rubén, *Psicología del aprendizaje*, Madrid, Siglo XXI, 1986)  
 ‘Motivational factors have long been believed to influence forgetting and retention.’
- (33) *Esos pensamientos me preocuparon mucho tiempo.* (Palou, Inés, *Carne apaleada*, Barcelona, Círculo de Lectores, 1975)  
 ‘These thoughts troubled me for a long time.’

When *mucho tiempo* is used with the *imperfecto*, the situation is presented as permanent and not completed. In the following example, the text producer emphasises the fact that they always spent a lot of time in the metro:

- (34) *Mi vivienda estaba lejos, de modo que me pasaba mucho tiempo en el metro, leyendo.* (Alba, Víctor, *El pájaro africano*, Barcelona, Planeta, 1975)  
 ‘My home was far away, so I spent a lot of time in the metro, reading.’

In Spanish, as in the other Ibero-Romance languages, aspectual periphrases must be considered important means of expressing aspectuality. Imperfective aspectuality is often marked by the periphrases *llevar* + gerund, *llevar* + participle, *llevar* + *sin* + infinitive:

- (35) *Llevaba mucho tiempo pensando en esto.* (Palou, Inés, *Carne apaleada*, Barcelona, Círculo de Lectores, 1975)  
‘I have been thinking about this for a long time.’
- (36) *Llevaba mucho tiempo ensimismada. No se confiaba a nadie.* (Salisachs, Mercedes, *La gangrena*, Barcelona, Planeta, 1976)  
‘She had been self-absorbed for a long time. She did not confide in anyone.’
- (37) *Se defendía diciendo que llevaba mucho tiempo sin salir de España.* (Salisachs, Mercedes, *La gangrena*, Barcelona, Planeta, 1976)  
‘He defended himself by saying that he had not left Spain for a long time.’

In these cases, *mucho tiempo* delimits a period of time, perceived as long, in which an action took place or a state of affairs unfolded, while with the periphrasis the action itself in its duration is focused.

In Portuguese and also Italian limiting adverbs denoting the sudden onset of a situation are mainly combined with perfective verb forms. Nevertheless, there are some cases where such adverbs co-occur with the imperfect. In the following Portuguese examples, this combination marks the sudden onset of a situation that continues and is not limited. In (38), Stephanie’s loneliness is characterised as occurring suddenly, but then persisting:

- (38) *De repente, Stephanie estava só.* (<http://www.circuloleitores.pt/catalogo/1019686/o-clone-e-eu>)  
‘Suddenly, Stephanie was alone.’

In (39), the desire to be Jewish is described as suddenly occurring, but as being permanent:

- (39) *Subitamente, todos os amigos de Klara queriam ser judeus.* (<http://memoria-inventada.weblog.com.pt/arquivo/2006/04>)  
‘Suddenly, all of Klara’s friends wanted to be Jews.’

In the following examples, the sudden change in a situation, which was permanent before and afterwards in each case, is marked. In (40) this change refers to the disappearance of a wall, in (41) it refers to a change of location:

- (40) *Nos anos anteriores era expressamente proibido passar o muro para o outro lado, o castigo era grande para quem o fizesse e, de repente, não havia muro, e éramos convidados a usar todo o espaço do recreio.* (<http://ante-et-post.weblog.com.pt/2007/04/index0>)

‘In previous years it was expressly forbidden to cross the wall to the other side, the punishment was great for those who did so, and, suddenly, there was no wall, and we were invited to use the whole playground.’

- (41) [. . .] *eu estive com a minha música e deixei-a estudar, sabendo que seria a única oportunidade que teria para olhar para os livros: . . . e de repente estávamos em Frankfurt onde esperamos uma hora pelo próximo voo. . . lá começamos a segunda parte da viagem com um Alemão que era de uma simpatia invulgar; o meu medo era que nos atirasse pela janela do avião fora.* (<http://www.amigosdomindelo.pt/ecoclubes/diariopolonia2006.htm>)

‘[. . .] I was with my music and let her study, knowing that it would be the only opportunity she would have to look at her books: . . . and suddenly we were in Frankfurt where we waited an hour for the next flight. . . there we started the second part of the trip with a German who was unusually nice, my fear was that he would throw us out the window of the plane.’

The following Italian examples also focus on a change of situation. In (42) the way appeared immediately difficult for everyone and it remained difficult for some time. Example (43) presents a sudden switch from the centre to the left. In example (44), the *imperfetto* is used with a modal quality, in so far as an impression created at first sight is presented as deceptive.

- (42) *Il percorso si presentava da subito ostico per tutti.* (<http://www.vivaiochlorofilla.it/zenhtml/Articoli.htm>. 01.09.2019)

‘The way was immediately difficult for everyone.’

- (43) [. . .] *l’immagine “filava” leggermente (ovvero l’otturatore era leggermente fuori fase) ed il sonoro passava repentinamente dal centro a sinistra.* (<http://www.cinemattech.it/forum/viewtopic.php?f=12&t=101&start=0>)

‘[. . .] the image “flickered” slightly (i.e. the shutter was slightly out of phase) and the sound switched abruptly from the centre to the left.’

- (44) *Ma quando escono le altre serie?? Subito sembrava che dovessero uscire una ogni 5 o 6 mesi. . . e invece!!* ([http://www.dvdweb.it/index.mv?1287638097\\_4CBFCC51000DD7480000795B00000000\\_147.251.45.74+Browse\\_Cafe+022320CD+1](http://www.dvdweb.it/index.mv?1287638097_4CBFCC51000DD7480000795B00000000_147.251.45.74+Browse_Cafe+022320CD+1))  
 ‘But when are the other series coming out? At first it seemed like they were supposed to come out every 5 or 6 months. . . but instead!!!’

## 5 Adverbs that denote slowness as a marker of imperfective aspectuality: the case of Spanish

Adverbs denoting slowness can also be seen as a means of expressing internal aspectuality. Identifying processes, actions and situations that unfold slowly is an important communicative and cognitive need, to which languages respond differently. The linguistic resources that carry this out can be considered part of the functional-semantic category of aspectuality described in section 2 of this paper. In Dessi Schmid’s (2014, 111) terminology, these adverbs denote internal aspectuality. She distinguishes three dimensions of aspectuality (Dessi Schmid 2014, 110–138): external aspectuality comprises the delimitation or non-delimitation of a situation between a starting point and an end point; adjacency-related aspectuality refers to whether the preceding or following context is influenced or determined by the situation described, for example, by setting the beginning and the end; internal aspectuality, on the other hand, refers to the division of the described situation into phases and also the speed or slowness of its development. The interaction between adverbs denoting slowness and verb forms will be shown in what follows using Spanish as an example.

In example (45) *lento* focuses on the process of walking, which is already represented as imperfective by the aspectual periphrasis *seguir caminando*.

- (45) *Lento, seguimos caminando para alejarnos lo más posible de la multitud, que ya formaba un círculo en torno al caído.* (CORPES XXI. Luiselli, Valeria, *Los ingravidos*, México D. F., Sexto Piso, 2011)  
 ‘Slowly, we continued walking to get as far away as possible from the crowd, which was already forming a circle around the fallen man.’

In the majority of the examples found in the *Corpus del español del siglo XXI* (CORPES XXI), the adverbs denoting slowness occur with imperfective verb forms, the imperfect, as in (46), and the present, as in (47), as well as with imperfective verbal periphrases (48) or with the gerund (49):

- (46) *Me da miedo, por eso iba muy despacio, agarrada a la baranda tratando de pisar bien firme, contando los escalones para hacer algo con el tiempo.* (CORPES XXI. López, Alejandro, *La asesina de Lady Di*, Buenos Aires, Adriana Hidalgo editora, 2001)  
 ‘It scares me, that’s why I was going very slowly, holding on to the railing trying to step steadily, counting the steps to do something with the time.’
- (47) *Finalmente llegan a una calle pequeña. Conducen lentamente hasta que se detienen ante un portal.* (CORPES XXI. Gay, Cesc/Aragay, Tomás, *Truman*, Madrid, Ocho y Medio, 2016)  
 ‘Finally they reach a small street. They drive slowly until they stop in front of a gate.’
- (48) *Sin embargo, no fue así: el tren llegaba en ese momento y fue frenando lentamente hasta quedarse inmóvil.* (CORPES XXI. Palomares, José Antonio, *Toda la verdad sobre las mentiras*, Barcelona, Penguin Random House Grupo Editorial, 2015)  
 ‘However, this was not the case: the train was arriving at that moment and slowly came to a standstill.’
- (49) *Me lo dijo mientras se quitaba el bañador y se ponía la ropa seca, pasándose lentamente la toalla, que ella tenía muchas cosas más importantes en qué pensar, y yo le miraba sus tetas blancas como quesones.* (CORPES XXI. Sánchez-Andrade, Cristina, *Bueyes y rosas dormían*, Madrid, Ediciones Siruela, 2001)  
 ‘She told me as she took off her swimming costume and put on her dry clothes, slowly towelling herself, that she had much more important things to think about, and I looked at her tits as white as cottage cheese.’

In a few cases, however, they also appear with perfective verb forms, such as the simple perfect and the compound perfect. In these cases, the external aspectuality is perfective, as a particular delimited situation is described, although this situation is not presented as punctual, but rather as a slow progression:

- (50) *Lo bebió lentamente, se recostó sobre su lado izquierdo, y se quedó en silencio para siempre.* (CORPES XXI. Santos, Carmen R., *Antón Chéjov, de cuento entero*, in: *ABC*. Madrid, abc.es, 2016-12-23)  
 ‘He drank it slowly, lay down on his left side, and remained silent forever.’

- (51) [. . .] *éste, que se ha sentado a mirar la tierra, despacio que se ha sentado a fumar, despacio que se ha sentado a esperar, siempre espera algo, con su paraguas abierto, fumando y despacio.* (CORPES XXI. Sánchez-Andrade, Cristina, *Bueyes y rosas dormían*, Madrid, Ediciones Siruela, 2001)  
 ‘[. . .] this one, who has sat down to look at the earth, slowly who has sat down to smoke, slowly who has sat down to wait, always waiting for something, with his umbrella open, smoking and slowly.’

With 9,268 occurrences in the *Corpus del Español del Siglo XXI* (CORPES XXI), *lentamente* is the most frequent adverb denoting slowness and occurs in all the Hispanophone regions of the world, with a slightly greater frequency in Chile and the Rio de la Plata. An analysis by text type shows *lentamente* to be most frequent in fictional texts, followed by popular science texts.

The examples of adverbial markers of slowness found in the CORPES XXI confirm the functional characteristics of aspectual adverbials: *lentamente* appears preferentially with imperfective verb forms (52, 53), but it can also focus internal aspectuality in perfective contexts (54):

- (52) *Algunos de estos episodios han marcado su manera de pintar: esas mañanas en el estudio de José María Cruz Novillo, viendo cómo trabajaba lentamente; o las clases que recibió en su pueblo de niño y, sobre todo, el desencadenante de que hoy sea pintor.* (CORPES XXI. Heras Bretín, Rut de las, *Vicente Verdú se libera de la sintaxis con una explosión cromática*, in: *El País*, Madrid, cultura.elpais.com/cultura/2016/11/27/actualidad/1480279198\_140178.html, 2016-12-09)  
 ‘Some of these episodes have marked his way of painting: those mornings in José María Cruz Novillo’s studio, watching him work slowly; or the classes he attended in his village as a child and, above all, the reason for him becoming a painter today.’
- (53) *Se trata de una afección que tiene mayor incidencia entre las personas expuestas al humo del tabaco y que produce como síntoma principal una disminución de la capacidad respiratoria, que avanza lentamente con el paso de los años y ocasiona un deterioro considerable en la calidad de vida, pudiendo ocasionar incluso una muerte prematura.* (CORPES XXI. EPOC: *la mayoría de los que la padecen no tiene un diagnóstico adecuado*, in: *La Prensa*. Buenos Aires, laprensa.com.ar, 2016-11-06)

‘The condition is most prevalent among people exposed to tobacco smoke and its main symptom is a decrease in respiratory capacity, which progresses slowly over the years and causes a considerable deterioration in quality of life and may even lead to premature death.’

- (54) *Después encendió el motor y avanzó lentamente hasta pasar junto al coche detenido unos metros más adelante. Miré por la ventanilla.* (CORPES XXI. Bolaño, Roberto, Gómez Palacio. *Putas asesinas*, Barcelona, Anagrama, 2001)  
 ‘Then he started the engine and drove slowly forward until he passed the car stopped a few metres ahead. I looked out of the window.’

The adverb *despaciosamente*, which is formed secondarily from *espacio*, appears less frequently today and is limited to the written language throughout the Spanish-speaking world. The earliest uses of *despaciosamente* in the *Corpus diacrónico del español* CORDE were recorded from the 19th century onwards and represent the classic function of emphasising the imperfective inner aspect, designating the slowness of a process or an action.

- (55) *En efecto, el tío Candiola avanzaba despaciosamente por el Coso, y llegó a la puerta del convento.* (CORDE. Pérez Galdós, Benito, *Zaragoza*, 1874)  
 ‘In fact, uncle Candiola advanced slowly along the Coso, and arrived at the door of the convent.’

- (56) *Estaba, pues, el viejo solo, enteramente solo, encerrado en la espantosa jaula de sus tristes pensamientos, que era como una jaula de fieras. Pasaba del sentimentalismo más patético a la desesperación más rabiosa, y si a veces secaba sus lágrimas despaciosamente, otras se mordía los puños y se golpeaba el cráneo contra la pared.* (CORDE. Pérez Galdós, Benito, *El terror de 1824*, 1877)

‘So the old man was alone, all alone, shut up in the dreadful cage of his sad thoughts, which was like a cage of wild beasts. He passed from the most pathetic sentimentality to the most raging despair, and if at times he wiped his tears slowly, at others he bit his fists and banged his skull against the wall.’

In the language of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, too, *despaciosamente* ‘slowly’ expresses the slowness of a process, highlighting the internal imperfective aspectuality. It appears predominantly with the imperfect (57), the present (58) and the gerund (59), but there are also co-occurrences with the simple perfect (60). In the latter case, the aspectuality is complex: the situation is delimited externally by the form of the verb and the adverb conveys a durative and extended internal view.

- (57) *Taylor escrutaba con reserva, como a unos intrusos, aunque se tratara de asiduos al lugar, con los cuales el tabernero hablaba con familiaridad mientras servía despaciosamente cerveza.* (CORPES XXI. García-Galiano, Javier, *Especulaciones cabalísticas*, in: *Especulaciones cabalísticas*, México D. F., Mondadori, 2012)  
 ‘Taylor scrutinised them guardedly, as if they were intruders, even though they were regulars in the place, with whom the barman spoke familiarly while slowly pouring beer.’
- (58) *Esa mujer y ese hombre beben despaciosamente mientras se siguen acariciando con la mirada.* (CORPES XXI. Prieto, Francisco, *El calor del invierno*, México, D. F., Jus, Libreros y Editores, 2014)  
 ‘This woman and this man drink slowly while they continue to caress each other with their eyes.’
- (59) *Una luz va iluminando, despaciosamente, todo el foro.* (CORPES XXI. Prieto, Francisco, *Felonía*, México, D.F., Jus, 2007)  
 ‘A light is slowly illuminating the entire forum.’
- (60) *Expulsé el humo del cigarro despaciosamente, procurando no toser.* (CORPES XXI. Gutiérrez Aragón, Manuel, *Cuando el frío llegue al corazón*, Barcelona, Anagrama, 2013)  
 ‘I exhaled the cigarette smoke slowly, trying not to cough.’

In addition to the adverbs *lentamente* and *despaciosamente* formed by derivation, Spanish also has the adverbialised adjective *lento* and the adverb *despacio*,<sup>2</sup> derived from the prefix *de-* and *espacio*, which was metaphorically transferred from space to time. However, the use of these two forms without a suffix – *lento* and *despacio* – is very different: while *lento* often appears as an adjectival modifier in nominal phrases both pre- and post-nominally, we found no instance of *despacio* with adjectival function in current Spanish in CORPES XXI.

We found only 48 instances of the adverb *lento* in 45 documents in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century Spanish Corpus, and these are distributed throughout the various Spanish-speaking countries. It is notable that in all cases *lento* appears as an adverb in sentence-initial position:

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2 On the adverbial uses of such elements cf. Hengeveld (1997; 1998); Ramat/Ricca (1998); Maienborn/Schäfer (2011); Sarda (2014); De Cesare (2016); Hummel/Valera (2017); De Cesare et al. (2018) and Hummel (2018) and on the expression of aspectuality by adverbs cf. Haßler (2016, 191–216).



- (61) Lento *la tomó de los hombros y la hizo girar*. (CORPES XXI. Ramos-Izquierdo, Eduardo, *La mirada en la sombra*, in: *Los años vacíos*, México D. F., Siglo XXI Editores, 2002)

‘Slowly he took her by the shoulders and turned her around.’

- (62) Lento, *hazlo mucho más lento*. (CORPES XXI. Beltrán, Rosa, *Alta infidelidad*. México D. F., Alfaguara, 2011)

‘Slow down, make it much slower.’

In other cases, *lento* appears in elliptical sentences, confirmation that the adverb *lento* can be equivalent to a whole sentence, for example, an exhortative sentence:

- (63) Lento *el corazón*. (CORPES XXI. Fernández, Chus, *Defensa personal*, Madrid, Editorial Castalia, 2003)

‘Slow the heart.’

- (64) Lento, *más lento*. (CORPES XXI. Tizón, Eloy, *La voz cantante*, Barcelona, Anagrama, 2004)

‘Slow, slower.’

While the use of *lento* as an adverb is very limited, adjectival use of *lento* is very common. In the diachronic corpus of the Spanish language, *lento* is not frequently used until the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and it was used only as an adjective. CORDE contained only 13 examples in which *lento* refers to the mitigation of any quality, not just speed. In example (65) *lento* is used in the predicate and is related to pleasure, while in (66) it appears with *dolor* in the nominal group:

- (65) *Por cierto, yo fablo de coraçón: si devo aver menor parte del honor, nunca me será más lento el plazer de aquesta fiesta*. (CORDE. Palencia, Alfonso de, *Tratado de la perfección del triunfo militar*, 1459)

‘Certainly, I speak from my heart: if I should have a lesser share of the honour, the pleasure of this feast will never be slower for me.’

- (66) *Las señales desta postema son blancor, ca la materia es blanca & muelle, ca la materia es rala & un dolor lento, ca la materia por su frialdad diminuy el dolor*. (CORDE. Burgos, Fray Vicente de, Traducción de *El Libro de Propietatibus Rerum* de Bartolomé Anglicus)

‘The signs of this disease are whiteness, white matter & softness, thin matter & slow pain, because of its coldness it diminishes the pain.’

This usage continued until the 16<sup>th</sup> century, but there were some adverbial uses where *lento* has the specialised meaning of reduced speed.

- (67) *Puesto que tenga la raíz tan honda, vese lento venir; claro y süave, sin que ruido o furia dentro esconda.* (CORDE. Hurtado de Mendoza, Diego, Poesía, c. 1535–1575)

‘Since its root is so deep, see it slowly come, clear and soft, without noise or fury within it hiding.’

- (68) *Con volar lento, y fué porque reporta La nueva mas despacio á quien le importa.* (CORDE. Rufo, Juan, *La Austriada*, 1584)

‘With slow flying, and it was because he reports the news more slowly to those who care.’

The emerging adverbial usage in the 16<sup>th</sup> century seems to favour the specialisation of the meaning of *lento*: 22% of the instances of *lento* appearing in that century are in the collocations *paso lento* (69) / *lento paso* (70), exhibiting already the specialised meaning of reduced speed.

- (69) [. . .] *que primero llegara a paso lento, voló después con raudo movimiento.* (CORDE. Arguijo, Juan de, Poesías, 1585–1604)

‘[. . .] who first arrived at a slow pace, then flew with a swift movement.’

- (70) *Con lento paso á la difícil cumbre, Goza quietud perfecta y mansedumbre.* (CORDE. Cairasco de Figueroa, Bartolomé, *Obra poética*, 1590–1610)

‘With slow step to the difficult summit, Enjoy perfect stillness and meekness.’

With regard to the use of the adverb *despacio*, CORDE contains 12 cases from the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Some of these already denote a process that is developing slowly and carefully (71), but otherwise the spatial meaning still dominates (72).

- (71) *Amadís anduvo más despacio y llegó a la puerta, sobre la cual estava una torre y vio a una finiestra della la dueña [. . .]* (CORDE. Rodríguez de Montalvo, Garci, *Amadís de Gaula*, libros I y II, 1482–1492)

‘Amadis walked more slowly and came to the door, over which there was a tower and he saw the mistress at one of its windows [. . .].’

- (72) *Pero como allí, con la turbación, descargava con los ojos la lengua, más entendía en mirar maravillas que en hazer preguntas; y como la vista no estava despacio, vi que las tres cadenas de las imágenes que estavan en lo alto de la torre tenían atado aquel triste, que sienpre se quemava y nunca se acabava de quemar* (CORDE. San Pedro, Diego de, *Cárcel de amor*, 1482–1492)  
 ‘But as there, in the turmoil, I unloaded my tongue with my eyes, I understood more in looking at wonders than in asking questions; and as my sight was not slow, I saw that the three chains of the images that were at the top of the tower had tied that sad one, which always burned and never finished burning.’

This situation seems to have changed by the 16<sup>th</sup> century, as there are already 411 instances in 170 documents in CORDE, although alongside the meaning ‘slowly, carefully’, *despacio* still keeps its spatial meaning of ‘spacious’. Examples (73) and (74) can be considered bridging contexts: a place is mentioned (*Medina del Campo, esta tienda*), presumably spacious, which can allow the interpretation of ‘place’, but the actions of seeing and looking can also unfold little by little and over a certain amount of time.

- (73) *Feria, en Medina del Campo la veremos despacio, y hallaréis en qué emplear vuestros dineros mejor que aquí.* (CORDE. Arce de Otárola, Juan de, *Coloquios de Palatino y Pinciano*, C 1550)  
 ‘Feria, in Medina del Campo we will see it slowly, and you will find a better way to spend your money than here.’
- (74) *Ahora miremos despacio lo que hay en esta tienda y después me diréis de qué tenéis más cobdicia.* (CORDE. Arce de Otárola, Juan de, *Coloquios de Palatino y Pinciano*, C 1550)  
 ‘Now let’s take a slow look at what’s in this shop and then tell me what you’re most jealous of.’

All 5,490 instances of *despacio* in CORPES XXI are adverbial uses and mean an expansion of the length of time in which a process takes place. They are mostly combined with imperfect verb forms and highlight the expanded unfolding of the situation (75, 76). However, there are also cases in which it is used with the *pretérito perfecto simple* (77, 78), so that the internal development of the situation is focused and is at the same time delimited by the verbal form. The fact that no occurrences with the *pretérito perfecto compuesto* were found could be explained by the types of texts in which *despacio* predominantly appears:

- (75) *Arantxa* masticaba despacio *un trozo de merluza*. (CORPES XXI. Aramburu, Fernando, *Patria*, Barcelona, Tusquets, 2016)  
‘Arantxa slowly chewed a piece of hake.’
- (76) *Mientras* cerraba despacio *la puerta, repitió, nervioso, apocado, con la cara pegada a la abertura, en defectuosa lengua española, que iba a llamar a su amigo Wolfgang*. (CORPES XXI. Aramburu, Fernando, *Patria*, Barcelona, Tusquets, 2016)  
‘As he slowly closed the door, he repeated, nervously, embarrassed, with his face pressed against the door opening, in defective Spanish, that he was going to call his friend Wolfgang.’
- (77) *Holmes decide renunciar a resolver el problema, al menos hasta que lleguen más datos: “Por fin, me di la vuelta y caminé despacio hasta mi casa”*. (CORPES XXI. Tubau, Daniel, *No tan elemental. Cómo ser Sherlock Holmes*, Barcelona, Ariel, 2015)  
‘Holmes decides to give up solving the problem, at least until more data come in: “At last, I turned around and walked slowly home”.’
- (78) Bajó despacio *la escalera y metió los pies en el río*. (CORPES XXI. Garland, Inés, *La arquitectura del océano*, Buenos Aires, Alfaguara, 2014)  
‘He slowly climbed down the ladder and dipped his feet in the river.’

## 6 Conclusion

With regard to the combinability of delimiting and temporal extension adverbs with perfective and imperfective verb forms, Romance languages behave similarly to aspectual languages. The delimited representation of a situation given by a perfective verb combines more readily with an adverb that conveys a temporal extension of the situation – and hence an internal view – than delimiting adverbs combine with imperfective verbs.

Verbs in the imperfect retain their aspectuality even when they are connected with delimiting adverbs. The conclusion drawn from this is that aspectuality is a complex category with several dimensions. Comparison of imperfective and perfective verb forms has shown that the latter are more aspectually marked than the former, which means they can more readily co-occur with adverbs that oppose their aspectual quality. The compatibility of perfective and imperfective verb forms

with adverbial constructions also depends more on the action type the less aspectuality is grammaticalised.

In using non-grammaticalised forms of aspectuality, such as lexical markers, the speaker is free to make a temporal localisation or to express an aspectual perspective. That the speaker can make a choice in this regard has been a crucial reason why we have treated lexical and grammatical means of aspectuality differently. This does not change the fact that adverbial markers can delimit situations or focus their duration and thus express aspectuality. In some cases, they can even do this more precisely and explicitly than verb forms. As shown by the example of Spanish, temporal-aspectual markers developed from spatial designations (*despacio*, *despaciosamente*) and mitigators of any quality (*lento*), which confirms the cognitive need to designate the internal development of a process. As we have seen, aspectuality is a complex category in which the external limitations and internal representations of the unfolding of a situation interact.

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## Corpora

- CREA = Real Academia Española, Banco de datos (CREA) (en línea), *Corpus de referencia del español actual*, <https://www.rae.es/banco-de-datos/crea>.
- CORPES XXI = *Corpus del español del siglo XXI* (CORPES XXI), <https://www.rae.es/recursos/banco-de-datos/corpes-xxi>.
- CORDE = *Corpus diacrónico del español* (CORDE), <https://www.rae.es/recursos/banco-de-datos/corde>.
- Sketch Engine, <https://www.sketchengine.eu/> (French Web 2017. frTenTen17, Italian Web 2016. itTenTen16, Portuguese Web 2011. ptTenTen11, Spanish Web 2018. esTenTen18).



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# The value of acquisitional data for describing cross-linguistic differences in the expression of aspectuality. A focus on the learning strategies of German-speaking learners of Spanish

**Abstract:** With the aim of revealing the additional value that studies in Second Language Acquisition can contribute to linguistic theory building, this paper draws some conclusions from two published studies on German-speaking learners of Spanish as a foreign language. Whereas native speakers use tense-aspect markers in order to express the aspectual nuances required by the context, the learners in our studies seem to interpret them merely as reflections of other elements in the sentence, such as temporal adverbials. Often, such adverbials appear in textbooks of Spanish and are taught in class as markers of tense-aspect. However, with non-prototypical combinations the learning strategy of using temporal adverbs as markers of tense-aspect is often misleading and can lead to learning difficulties. Throughout both studies there is an orientation towards temporal adverbs, which is, unlike what has been previously reported with reference to learners of other native languages, independent of lexical aspect. We argue that these patterns help us understand the real function of aspectual markers in Spanish and at the same time confirm the alleged general tendency of German to be a more lexically-oriented language.

**Keywords:** cross-linguistic differences, transfer, tense and aspect, second language acquisition, Spanish language, learning strategies, metalinguistic awareness

## 1 Introduction

The study of the Spanish verb system has a long tradition going back to authors such as Bello (1847), who formulated the idea that the (Romance) Imperfect is characterised by its anaphoricity, suggesting that aspectual relations are merely

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coincidental effects. Assuming this perspective, it might be claimed that the Imperfect and the Preterit are not aspectual forms in the strict sense. Although similar ideas have been defended by several scholars (e.g., Reichenbach 1947; Rojo 1990; Giorgi/Pianesi 2004), who find support in so-called time-relational theories of aspect (e.g., Klein 1994), these approaches stand in contrast to the argument – advanced by authors such as Comrie (1976) and Smith (1997) – that the aforementioned forms are themselves aspectual as they refer to whether a situation is viewed as bounded or unbounded (perfective or imperfective aspect, respectively).

To contribute to this long-standing debate, but from a different perspective, we will use data from second language (L2) acquisition<sup>1</sup> studies to assess the relevance of theoretical arguments. As argued by, for instance, Judy/Perpiñán (2015, 1–20), L2 studies on tense and aspect can effectively contribute to theoretical questions. In this vein, we will analyse the results of two different studies: on the one hand, we will examine the metalinguistic knowledge of aspectual distinctions by 103 German-speaking learners of Spanish; on the other hand, we will compare the acceptability judgements of different groups of learners of Spanish with a native-speaker control group. From the results of both studies, we draw some general conclusions regarding the nature of aspect in Spanish. The paper is organised as follows: after some introductory notes on the marking of aspect in Spanish (section 2), we will consider the most important hypotheses concerning its acquisition (section 3). In section 4, we present the methodological characteristics of the two studies and their results. Finally, we discuss the results and some of their limitations.

## 2 The role of grammatical aspect in Spanish grammar

In the following analyses, we make a clear distinction between three categories associated with the linguistic expression of time, following Comrie (1976): tense, which creates a connection to language-external elements and is thus deictic; grammatical or viewpoint aspect, which describes the relationship between several language-internal temporal layers; and lexical or situation aspect, which is defined by

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<sup>1</sup> The terms *acquisition* and *learning* are often used to distinguish between implicit and explicit appropriation mechanisms. As there is no agreement on the use of these terms in the L2 literature, we will use both synonymously. Furthermore, we will use *second language* “as a cover term for any language other than the first language learned by a given learner [. . .] irrespective of the number of other non-native languages possessed by the learner” (Sharwood Smith 1994, 7; emphasis in the original). Therefore, no distinction between second and third language acquisition will be made.

the lexical expression of a situation, such as states, activities, accomplishments and achievements (Vendler 1957).

In linguistic reality, the three concepts usually appear together and often turn out to be difficult to separate. This is especially true for the past tenses in Spanish, which we focus on in this chapter. Consider the following examples:

- (1) *Pablo vio* <sub>PRET</sub> *la serie completa.*  
'Pablo watched the whole series.'
- (2) *Pablo veía* <sub>IMP</sub> *la serie completa.*  
'Pablo was watching/used to watch the whole series.'

In both sentences, we find a telic verb phrase 'watch the whole series' which carries an inherent endpoint. The use of the Preterit in (1) adds the information that this endpoint was reached in the past, whereas the same information is uncertain in (2). Depending on the context or situation, the Imperfect in (2) can be understood as indicating an interruption, marking an ongoing action, or a habit of a television enthusiast. In terms of the concepts proposed by Comrie (1976), the Spanish Imperfect can therefore be described as conveying imperfective aspect since the action is presented as unbounded as opposed to the Preterit, which always carries a notion of completion or completeness (= bounded). As this distinction is internal to the situation, the contrast is characterised as aspectual.

It is important to note, however, that there is no general agreement on whether this sharp distinction between external and internal properties necessarily leads to a distinction between tense and aspect. Thus, conceptualisations such as Klein's (1994), which builds on Reichenbach (1947), aim to describe all temporal properties as a whole, making use of relationships such as anteriority, simultaneity and inclusion. In a similar vein, Rojo (1990) and Giorgi/Pianesi (2004) defend the view that the Romance Imperfect<sup>2</sup> is, in fact, characterised by its anaphoricity, while aspectual relations are merely the coincidental effect of a given situation. In this sense, one could adopt the terminology coined by Bello (1847), according to whom a more appropriate term for the form *veía* is Co-Preterit, which is not only another label, but represents a very different conceptualisation of the verb system. Without repeating all of their arguments, Giorgi/Pianesi's (2004) main point is that the Imperfect needs a so-called anchor provided by linguistic or extra-linguistic factors. This anchor can be represented by a *verbum dicendi* introducing indirect speech or

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<sup>2</sup> Giorgi/Pianesi's (1997) arguments are based on Italian but can be transferred equally well to Spanish.

by a certain type of temporal adverb, such that the tense form can be described as *present-in-the-past*. However, the anchor can also be replaced by a more abstract form of licensing<sup>3</sup> context, for example, reference to a dream or a game, and this, according to Giorgi/Pianesi (2004), is the reason why the Imperfect is the only past tense that can express an orientation towards the future or convey modal readings. In sum, it is inherent in this view that the notion of grammatical aspect is not a part of Spanish grammar.

This approach is therefore crucially different from that defended by García Fernández (1999), Leonetti (2004) and Fábregas (2015), who argue that it is the Imperfect's anaphoricity that is the coincidental effect, whereas grammatical aspect inherently characterises the contrast between Imperfect and Preterit. To refute the counterargument, García Fernández (1999) insists on the connection between the lexical aspect of a verb and possible readings induced by combinations with different tense forms, as shown in the following examples:

- (3) *Juan nos contó* <sub>PRET</sub> *que María había llorado* <sub>PLUPERF</sub> *el día de su boda.*  
 'Juan told us that Maria had cried on her wedding day.'
- (4) *Juan nos contó* <sub>PRET</sub> *que María estaba* <sub>IMP</sub> *triste el día de su boda.*  
 'Juan told us that Maria was sad on her wedding day.'

Although both predicates, i.e., 'crying' in (3) and 'being sad' in (4), happened in anteriority to *contó* 'told', only the activity verb requires the pluperfect. This is due to the connection between lexical aspect and grammatical aspect. In this case, the dynamic verb is compatible with perfectivity so the anteriority can be marked with a pluperfect. The stative verb instead receives the interpretation of anteriority directly from the adverbial. This example shows that aspectual levels are not independent.

Leonetti (2004), in turn, draws a connection to the distinction between stage-level and individual-level predicates, arguing that it is precisely the unboundedness of the Imperfect that requires the presence of an anchor or other type of functional motivation (e.g., linguistic or extra-linguistic information provided by the context). That is, the anaphoricity is not an inherent property of the Imperfect, but a necessary effect of its aspectuality.

We will provide evidence in favour of the latter arguments taken from studies in L2 acquisition. We will show that learners whose first language does not have grammatical aspect but instead relies on lexical cues such as temporal adverbs (e.g.,

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<sup>3</sup> Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out.

German)<sup>4</sup> will struggle to master the Spanish past tenses. These empirical findings consequently only support the view that the Imperfect expresses imperfectivity, i.e., that aspectuality underlies the contrast between the verb forms. This argument is based on the following idea: if we assume the contrary, i.e., if the Spanish past tenses are not characterised by aspectual features, a language learner would only need to understand temporal features such as simultaneity and anteriority, and any aspectual uses would follow automatically as coincidental effects. Thus, for a learner whose L1 already possesses and uses such temporal features, there should be no problem, as these features can be simply transferred or rearranged (see, e.g., Hawkins/Hattori 2006; Lardiere 2009).

To show that this transfer is, in fact, not so simple, we take German L1 as an example. German has similar temporal contrasts to Spanish, but no grammatical aspect (see footnote 4). As the findings of the studies described below show no evidence of simple transfer (as even the most advanced learners fail to acquire the aspectual meanings of the past tenses in Spanish), the assumption that aspect is not part of Spanish grammar must be considered suspect. In the next section, we will review some of the most important hypotheses regarding L2 acquisition of aspect to illustrate some of the learning problems that can arise when L1 transfer is not possible and new aspectual concepts have to be learned.

### 3 Hypotheses about the L2 acquisition of aspect

Given the complexity of aspect as described in the previous section, the development of tense-aspect provides a fruitful ground for research in L2 acquisition. The topic became particularly prominent after Roger Andersen (1986; 1991) proposed his Lexical Aspect Hypothesis. A number of subsequent hypotheses along with a significant body of empirical data collected over thirty years (see Salaberry/Comajoan 2013; Bardovi-Harlig/Comajoan-Colomé 2020 for recent reviews) have provided a solid foundation for the theoretical analysis of an ever-expanding range of tense-aspect phenomena. The following are some of the hypotheses that are relevant to the aims of this paper.

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4 German is a so-called non-aspect language (Diaubalick 2019, 82–91; Eibensteiner 2021, 34–39). This means that it does not have any grammatical devices to express aspectual distinctions and therefore has to rely on pragmatic or lexical devices, such as, for example, the particle *gerade*, to express imperfectivity (progressivity), e.g., *Ich schlief gerade, als er mich anrief*. ‘I was sleeping when he called me’. In this sense, both German past tense forms, i.e., *Präteritum* (*ich schlief*) and *Perfekt* (*ich habe geschlafen*), express the same temporal notion of pastness [+ anteriority] and can be used interchangeably (keeping stylistic differences apart) (Heinold 2015).

### The Lexical Aspect Hypothesis

The Lexical Aspect Hypothesis (Andersen 1986; 1991; Andersen/Shirai 1994) asserts that during the initial stages of acquisition L2 learners will recognise and mark aspectual configurations along a developmental path that is defined by inherent lexical aspectual meanings. In these initial stages learners usually produce prototypical combinations of lexical and grammatical aspect (i.e., stative predicates with imperfective morphology, telic predicates with perfective morphology), ... lexical aspectual values are learned and then superseded by viewpoint or grammatical aspectual values.

### The Default Past Tense Hypothesis

In contrast to the Lexical Aspect Hypothesis, Salaberry's Default Past Tense Hypothesis (1999; 2003; 2011) asserts that beginner (tutored) learners will initially default to a single marker of past tense to convey past tense in general. This is based on empirical data that show that anglophone learners of Spanish will use perfective morphemes to contrast present and past tenses (i.e., use morphology as a marker of tense). As the English Simple Past is not an aspectual form, but a tense marker (De Swart 2012), learners will basically transfer the temporal notion of pastness [+anteriority]. The same argument holds by and large when the L1 is German, which does not mark aspect grammatically either. A second claim of this hypothesis is that the effect of lexical aspect on the use of morphological markers increases with proficiency insofar as improvements in L2 knowledge also lead to a predominant use of prototypical pairings (Salaberry 2011; McManus 2013). The transition from prototypical to non-prototypical associations will only happen as learners gain access to larger amounts of L2 input data and gain experience and proficiency in the L2.<sup>5</sup>

### The Lexical Underspecification Hypothesis

Giacalone-Ramat/Rastelli (2008, 242) proposed that beginner L2 learners are unable to use information about the inherent semantic meanings postulated to be part of lexical aspect (see also Rastelli 2009; 2019; Rastelli/Vernice 2013). The Lexical Underspecification Hypothesis asserts that L2 learners will have to reconstruct lexical

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<sup>5</sup> Tong/Shirai (2016) expanded the scope of application of the Default Past Tense Hypothesis to include not just the past tense, but progressive aspect as well. Using data from L1 English speakers of L2 Chinese (Mandarin) on two aspectual markers (i.e., perfective *-le* and progressive *-zai*), Tong/Shirai argue that beginner learners primarily use the perfective marker *-le* across all lexical aspectual classes (a default form for past tense). Eventually, as their proficiency increases, learners show a stronger association between the lexical semantic information of verbal predicates and past tense markers.

aspectual categories of verbal predicates, even in the case of frequently used verbs. This hypothesis challenges the purported independence between lexical aspect and viewpoint aspect insofar as learners make use of a compositional definition of aspect comprising layers of information above the verbal predicate level from the very beginning of the learning process.

### Non-prototypical cases and the influence of adverbial phrases

The methodological problem with Andersen's Lexical Aspect Hypothesis and subsequent hypotheses is that they tend to focus on the initial stages of acquisition and therefore do not take into account the full complexity of aspectual meanings (i.e., non-prototypical cases). Accordingly, recent L2 studies have started to expand their focus to advanced stages of acquisition in order to address the full range of complexity of aspectual meanings, i.e., a broad range of contextual factors influencing the linguistic construal of a situation (e.g., Salaberry 2013).

It should be noted that the semantic contribution of context is not necessarily arbitrary or inconsistent – at least native speakers tend to be consistent in their interpretation of non-prototypical cases. For instance, the following examples from Spanish (Güell 1998, 102) illustrate the complex nature of non-prototypical aspectual interpretations of state verbal predicates engendered by the informational context provided by specific adverbial phrases:

- (5) *Lo supo* <sub>PRET</sub> / \**sabía* <sub>IMP</sub> *durante mucho tiempo.*  
'(S/he) knew it for a long time.'
- (6) *Lo \*supo* <sub>PRET</sub> / *sabía* <sub>IMP</sub> *desde hacía mucho tiempo.*  
'(S/he) knew it from a long time ago.'

First, the non-prototypical use of the Preterit with a state verb in (5) presented in conjunction with the adverbial *durante mucho tiempo* precludes an inchoative interpretation (i.e., the beginning of the state), but gives rise instead to an aspectual meaning typically reserved for the imperfective form (i.e., non-punctual, durative). Notice, however, that the imperfective form is dispreferred (marked with an asterisk) in (5) as the adverbial phrase triggers an interpretation of the situation as bounded. Along the same lines, the preference for the imperfective form in (6) stands out in this context given the use of the adverbial phrase *desde hacía mucho tiempo*, which, in principle, would trigger an inchoative interpretation. The choice of the imperfective, however, keeps the focus on the actual state irrespective of the explicit highlighting of the inception point. The situation is viewed as unbounded and the perfective form is therefore dispreferred.

A similar argument can be made for the case of events (telic or atelic). For instance, in the Romance languages imperfective and perfective forms are used to describe the iteration of eventualities: habituality and iterativity are conveyed with the Spanish Imperfect and Preterit, respectively (e.g., de Swart 1998; Langacker 1999). Thus, in its proper context, the Imperfect conveys the aspectual notion of habituality (as shown in 7), whereas in (8) the adverbial phrase *por años* triggers interpretation of the situation as bounded and so the Preterit is preferred with the consequence that a rather distinct aspectual concept (i.e., iterativity) – is conveyed:

- (7) *Cuando era niño, Lucas jugaba*<sub>IMP</sub> *al fútbol.* [habitual]  
 ‘When [he] was a child, Lucas played/used to/would play soccer.’
- (8) *Por años, Lucas jugó*<sub>PRET</sub> *al fútbol.* [iterative]  
 ‘For years, Lucas played soccer.’

As was the case in the example of states described above, the specific effects of the adverbial phrases trigger distinct aspectual meanings (i.e., habituality or iterativity) that transcend the simple prototypical meanings of boundedness assigned to the imperfective-perfective contrast.

Overall, the findings from studies assessing knowledge of non-prototypical cases tend to converge: non-native speakers have difficulty with non-prototypicality in aspectual marking. Among the studies that specifically address the nature of non-prototypical morphological selection of aspectual marking as part of the comprehensive definition of the construct of aspect, the data from Salaberry (2013) show that Spanish near-native speakers were unable to distinguish fine-grained representations of the aspectual concepts of habituality versus iterativity even though they demonstrated native-like judgements of prototypical uses of aspect (see also Pérez-Leroux et al. 2007; Salaberry/Martins 2014). Given the proposed protracted effect of prototypical markings, even advanced learners may continue to mark viewpoint aspect in close alignment with congruent lexical aspectual categories (Salaberry 2011). Other recent studies on L2 Spanish have compared data from L1 German learners with data from L1 speakers of Romance languages (e.g., Diaubalick/Guijarro-Fuentes 2019; Diaubalick/Eibensteiner/Salaberry 2020). These studies confirm that non-native speakers of Spanish (in this case L1 German speakers) also have difficulty with non-prototypicality in aspectual marking.

Finally, another example of non-prototypical combinations consists of atypical combinations of adverbials and verb forms. Some of these adverbials are taught in class and in textbooks as so-called “signal words” that serve as temporal

markers. For instance, *ayer* ‘yesterday’ is often regarded as a trigger word for the Preterit, while *cundo* ‘when’ and *siempre* ‘always’ are often found with the Imperfect. This approach has been critically discussed (see, e.g., Llopis-García et al. 2012), given that while these co-occurrences may have statistically relevant frequencies, they do not constitute linguistic dependencies. However, previous studies have found that these adverbs do play a decisive role in the selection of past tense forms, which can have either positive (see, e.g., González 2008; Baker/Quesada 2011) or negative effects (Rothman 2008; Diaubalick 2019) depending on whether the combination is prototypical or not. Crucially, it is especially native speakers of Germanic languages who tend to use such markers, as lexical marking plays a major role in their L1. However, not all Germanic speakers behave in the same way when the effect of their L1 conflicts with rule-guided learning (González/Diaubalick 2020).

Observation of an interaction between what is taught in class and what is actually relevant for proper language use leads us to the next factor relevant for L2 learning: metalinguistic rules.

### **Metalinguistic rules**

The overall outcome of the analysis of the meanings of aspect confirms what is a well-known phenomenon experienced by both native and non-native speakers: the use of aspectual contrasts is difficult because of an inherent ambiguity resulting from the effect of contextual components of sentences and discourse. Given this semantic complexity, the focus on pedagogical rules to explain the L2 development of aspectual contrasts has as long a history as Andersen’s Lexical Aspect Hypothesis (e.g., Lunn 1985; Frantzen 1995; Westfall/Foerster 1996). Efforts to teach an expanded conceptualisation of aspect focus on the development of (deep levels of) metalinguistic knowledge in the light of claims regarding the benefits of such pedagogical intervention. Hu (2010, 64), for instance, argues that “explicit discussion of and deliberate reflection on linguistic patterns and properties” is helpful “because linguistic terms are essentially succinct ways of categorizing patterns and relationships found in a language”.

In many cases, however, the descriptions of aspectual meanings have led to incomplete (and thus misleading) explanations. For instance, in Spanish most “rules of thumb” (e.g., Whitley 1986) focus on prototypical markings of verbal morphology. To address the challenge posed by inaccurate rules of thumb, two theoretical proposals have argued for a reconceptualisation of the way traditional instructional procedures guide learners to develop a representation of aspectual contrasts in L2 Spanish: Concept Based Instruction (e.g., Negueruela 2003; Negueruela/Lantolf 2006; Yáñez-Prieto 2008; Lantolf 2011) and the Competing



Systems Hypothesis (e.g., Rothman 2008; Long/Rothman 2012). The Competing Systems Hypothesis argues for the existence of a parallel system of grammatical representation developed through exposure to classroom instruction. Long and Rothman (2012, 70), for instance, claim that the system of learned metalinguistic knowledge “is likely to no longer be (completely) conscious to the learner, but would have passed from declarative memory to a system that is more proceduralised within the mind.” This second system competes with the default system, which is assumed to develop through direct access to L2 data (i.e., not mediated by pedagogical rules). Consequently, under the Competing Systems Hypothesis it is necessary to expand learners’ access to (naturalistic) language data beyond those typically found in instructional settings.

The Concept Based Instruction Hypothesis, on the other hand, proposes developing explicit linguistic knowledge (organised in such a way as to promote understanding, control and organisation) as the solution: “models must raise learners’ awareness of what linguistic resources are available to them to carry out concrete linguistic actions with specific purposes across all contexts” (Negueruela/Lantolf 2006, 84–85). In sum, both proposals highlight the importance of explicit metalinguistic rule-based knowledge in the acquisition of an L2, but the pedagogical implications are quite different. Whereas the Competing Systems Hypothesis emphasises the role of authentic, naturalistic input to obtain a native-like understanding of a given grammatical phenomenon, the Concept Based Instruction Hypothesis stresses the importance of awareness-raising strategies.

In the next section, we will review the results of two doctoral dissertations (Diaubalick 2019; Eibensteiner 2021). We will (1) show that (tutored) learners indeed rely on explicit knowledge (e.g., rules of thumb) to overcome learning difficulties with regards to aspectual distinctions, and (2) that the reliance on such learning strategies leads to native-like attainment in prototypical, but not in non-prototypical contexts. As L2 learners are apparently unable to acquire such non-prototypical contexts, we will argue that the Spanish past tenses are characterised by aspectual features that do not exist in the learners’ L1 German. Concept Based Instruction can therefore help learners understand the use of aspect in prototypical contexts and may play an important role in helping them understand non-prototypical ones, which are more difficult to process. In order to develop intuitions, however, high quality, authentic, naturalistic input seems to be necessary, as proposed by the Competing Systems Hypothesis.

## 4 Empirical Evidence from Germans learning Spanish

### 4.1 Study 1: Metalinguistic rule-based knowledge of German-speaking learners of Spanish – the use of temporal adverbs as a learning strategy

In this section, we present a study that is part of a larger research project (see Eibensteiner 2021), in which we used different tests to measure how the participants acquired the opposition of perfective and imperfective aspect in Spanish and whether they were influenced by their previously acquired linguistic knowledge. In addition to several tasks to elicit production and interpretation data, we used a metalinguistic reflection task based on a semantic interpretation task in order to elicit the learners' explicit rule-based knowledge. We will examine the kind of explicit rule-based knowledge German-speaking learners of Spanish use to overcome learning problems in cases where they are forced to make a decision between the Preterit and the Imperfect. We will show that one of these rules concerns temporal adverbs, the so-called “signal words”. Here, the students often overlook the fact that such rule-based strategies are merely (sentence-level) guidelines that do not exhaust the possible interpretations afforded by aspect in Spanish grammar.

#### 4.1.1 Methodology

In this study, we analysed data from 103 German-speaking learners of Spanish, whose ages ranged from 14 to 19. All of them were students attending a German or Austrian high school (*Gymnasium*) and, consequently, had knowledge of at least one other foreign language (i.e., English, French or Latin). Most of the participants were intermediate to advanced learners of Spanish,<sup>6</sup> and therefore had knowledge of the morphology and functions of Spanish past tenses.

The metalinguistic reflection task was based on a semantic interpretation task used in the main study (see the introductory notes to section 4.1). The interpretation task contained 35 items which consisted of a German context and two Spanish sentences contrasting perfective and imperfective aspect (*crucé* vs. *cruzaba* in the

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<sup>6</sup> Based on the guidelines of the German/Austrian curriculum for Spanish, we estimated their proficiency in Spanish to be on average between CEFR levels B1 and B2.

examples in Table 1). The participants had to judge the acceptability of the two sentences on a Likert scale from -2 (totally inappropriate) to +2 (perfectly appropriate):

**Table 1:** Examples of the semantic interpretation task – sentences (A) and (B).<sup>7</sup>

(A)	Ich war dabei, auf die andere Seite der Straße zu gehen. Ich bin jedoch nicht angekommen, weil mich mitten auf der Straße ein Auto angefahren hat.					
	<i>Crucé la calle.</i>					
	-2	-1	0	1	2	
(B)	Ich bin zu einem Freund auf der anderen Seite der Straße gelaufen. Nachdem ich auf der anderen Seite der Straße angekommen war, hat mich ein Radfahrer überfahren.					
	<i>Crucé la calle y me atropelló un ciclista.</i>					
	-2	-1	0	1	2	
	<i>Cruzaba la calle y me atropelló un ciclista.</i>					
	-2	-1	0	1	2	

Using a stimulated-recall procedure we selected six items from the semantic interpretation task to elicit the learners' metalinguistic reflections on their acceptability judgements of the sentences. Using pair think-aloud protocols the participants had to reflect orally on the sentences by answering the following questions:

1. Why did you choose the Preterit/Imperfect? How did you get to your decision?
2. What was easy/difficult for you?

The conversations were recorded, transcribed, and coded using qualitative content analysis procedures following Kuckartz (2016).

#### 4.1.2 Results

The analysis of the participants' metalinguistic reflections revealed different categories of explicit rule-based knowledge regarding the aspectual distinction between

<sup>7</sup> Translation of the German contexts (all translations by the authors):

(A) 'I was crossing to the other side of the street. I did not get there because a car ran me over in the middle of the street.'

(B) 'I ran to a friend on the other side of the street. Having got to the other side of the street, a cyclist ran me over.'

perfective and imperfective aspect. The main categories for the Preterit and the Imperfect are summarised in Table 2:<sup>8</sup>

**Table 2:** Explicit rule-based knowledge of the Preterit and the Imperfect.

Basis of the explication	Categories for the Preterit	Categories for the Imperfect
(1) Grammatical Aspect	Completion/boundedness	Non-completion/unboundedness Progressivity Habituality
(2) Discourse Function	Events/actions that move the storyline forward (e.g., one-time events; inchoative and punctual actions)	Descriptions of the background of a story
(3) Signal Words	Temporal adverbs (e.g., <i>ayer</i> ‘yesterday’)	Temporal adverbs (e.g., <i>de pequeño</i> ‘as a child’)
(4) Tense	Temporal explanations (e.g., something happened in the past)	Temporal explanations (e.g., something used to happen a long time ago)
(5) Lexical Aspect	– <sup>9</sup>	States Durative events

The first two categories are the most frequent and, therefore, possibly the most important. Regarding category (1), i.e., explanations based on notions of grammatical aspect, the participants made explicit reference to the (non-)completion and/or (un-)boundedness of a situation. Regarding sentence (B) of the reflection task (see Table 1), in which a cyclist ran over a person who had just crossed the street (i.e., the act of crossing the street had been completed), the learners explained that the person in the example had already crossed the street when the cyclist knocked him/her down and therefore the Preterit was required. In sentence (A), on the other hand, in which a car ran over the person as s/he was crossing the street, they judged that the Imperfect was required because the action of crossing the street was not

<sup>8</sup> The analysis is based on Eibensteiner (2021; see especially pp. 199–205 for a detailed description). For the purposes of this Chapter, however, the data were re-coded in order to obtain more straightforward categories that would be relevant for the present study (e.g., comments referring to specific temporal adverbs or to the fact that so-called “signal words” were used as a learning strategy were classified together under the category *signal words*).

<sup>9</sup> The explanations referring to punctual events subsumed under the category *discourse function* could also have been categorised as being based on lexical aspect as they make explicit reference to the lexical semantic notion of punctuality. However, their classification under category 2 seems more appropriate given that the learners did not usually stress the notion of punctuality but explained that they chose the Preterit because it is used to describe *foregrounded* punctual events.

completed. In the second category, i.e., explanations referring to the discourse function of the tenses, the participants were mainly of the view that the Preterit characterises events/actions that move the storyline forward (e.g., one-time events), while the Imperfect serves to describe events that embellish the main event.

Category 3, i.e., *signal words*, is of particular interest for the present purposes. Here, the participants refer to specific temporal adverbs that – in their opinion – trigger the use of the Preterit/Imperfect. For example, participant 522 argues that in sentence (D) of the reflection task,<sup>10</sup> in which a person met with some friends for having dinner (completed event), the adverb *ayer* acts as a signal word for the use of the Preterit:<sup>11</sup>

522: In [sentence] number (D), the action happened yesterday, and yesterday is a signal word, *ayer*, so – this means that you have to select the *Indefinido* [Preterit].

(Corpus B 517\_522: 4–6)

In general, the participants not only refer to temporal adverbs to explain the function of the tenses, they are also aware that such signal words can serve as a learning strategy. Participants 520 and 528, for example, claimed that they explicitly focussed on such trigger words when analysing the sentences in the semantic interpretation task:

528: [. . .] Why did you choose this particular verb form? (laughs)

Yeah. Why- why indeed-

520: Well, you look at the beginning of the sentences.

528: Yeah, at the er – signal words.

520: Yeah, exactly, the signal words.

(Corpus B 520\_528: 7–11)

In another example, participant 705 explained that she noticed the signal word *ayer* and, consequently, she knew that she had to use the Preterit, because she had learned at school that such words trigger the use of perfective morphology:

705: Well, er, looking at sentence [. . .] [D] we think that the first [option; the Preterit] is correct, because we have learned that *yesterday* or *ayer*, er, is a signal word for *Indefinido* and the first [sentence in the example] is *Indefinido*.

(Corpus B 705\_718: 62–64)

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<sup>10</sup> The trigger word *gestern* ‘yesterday’ is presented in the German context of sentence (D): *Gestern habe ich mich mit vielen Freunden zum Essen verabredet* ‘Yesterday I met many friends for dinner’.

<sup>11</sup> The original transcripts are in German and were translated by the authors for the purpose of the present article.

In fact, textbook analyses and interviews with teachers (Eibensteiner 2017) reveal that in German schools these signal words are often used to explain the difference between perfective and imperfective aspect. However, such learning strategies do not always lead to Spanish past tenses being learnt properly and can even impede acquisition, as is shown in the next statement, referring to sentence (A):

- 926: [. . .] I think, the first [option; the Preterit] is correct. – Or, maybe both [sentences] are wrong [. . .] because he has not- he has [still] not crossed the street.
- 925: Yeah, he was actually crossing the street, and therefore *cruzaba* [the Imperfect should be correct].
- 926: Yes, but there is no *cuando* or something like that. This means that both [sentences] are wrong.
- 925: Yes, but that's not important [for the selection of past tense forms].  
(Corpus B 925\_926: 27–31)

Whereas participant 925 correctly points out that the Imperfect is the correct option (as the person in the example has not finished crossing the street), participant 926 rejects both tenses because s/he does not find any lexical clue (i.e., a proper signal word) which s/he considers necessary for correctly interpreting the situation.

In sum, these examples show that learners explicitly rely on temporal markers that they have learned in class to interpret situations and to choose between the Preterit and the Imperfect. We propose that the reliance on signal words as a learning strategy will often lead to a correct choice of past tense forms, especially in prototypical cases. However, as will be shown in the next section, in non-prototypical contexts it can also lead to misinterpretation of the situation and therefore be the source of errors.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> As pointed out by an anonymous reviewer, the tendency to use adverbials as lexical means to express temporal-aspectual features in greater detail (especially in the case of natural learners) has also been highlighted by Klein (2009) and others. In contrast to Klein's proposal, however, the students in the study reviewed above do use morphological means to express tense and aspect (in part, as a reflection of explicit instruction in class). However, if an adverb is placed in the sentence, those morphological elements seem to merely reflect the content given by the adverb, resembling a somewhat redundant agreement process.

## 4.2 Study 2: Quantitative study on the (im)possibility of acquiring aspectual nuances and possible compensation strategies

In this subsection, we summarise those findings from Diaubalick (2019) that are relevant for the present article. We show that even the most advanced German learners of Spanish continue to struggle with the perfectivity/imperfectivity contrast, and this is especially evident in non-frequent/non-prototypical usages. To compensate for this, they develop a learning strategy based on explicit rules (see chapter 4.1), which seems to help in some cases, but in others it produces deviations from both native speakers and learners of other L1s (especially Romance L1s, such as French and Italian). The aim of this study, therefore, was to tease apart the specific challenges faced by German learners from other difficulties encountered in L2 learning in general. While a number of different compensation strategies were identified in all the groups, a particularly salient one adopted by German learners (but not learners of other L1s) was based on the use of adverbs.

### 4.2.1 Methodology

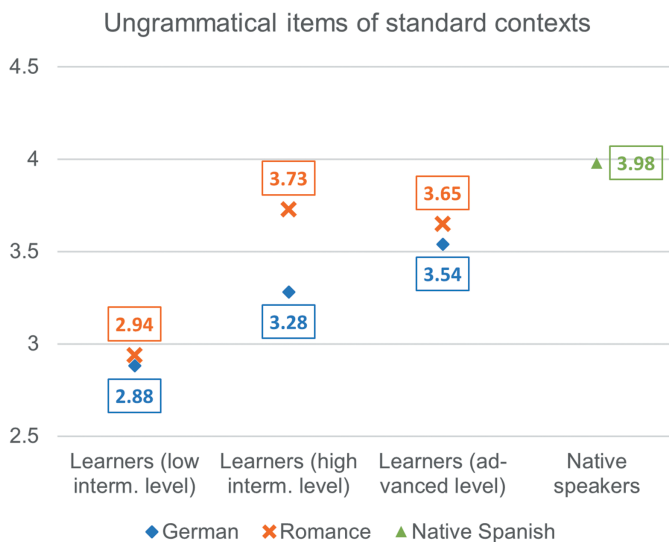
The data summarised here form part of a larger study on the acquisition of the Spanish temporal-aspectual system with the participation of learners from a variety of language backgrounds. The three crucial groups consisted of 206 German learners of Spanish, 145 French-, Italian- and Portuguese-speaking learners, and 83 native speakers as a control group. Following a placement test, the learners were divided into three groups according to their proficiency level: lower intermediate, higher intermediate and advanced. The experiment consisted of several tasks featuring different usages of the past tenses (a total of 145 test items). Here we describe the results from two of them: a grammaticality judgement task and a text completion task.

For the grammaticality judgement task, participants had to assess the level of acceptability of 36 randomised target items (plus distractors), which fell into four categories: (1) so-called “standard contexts” (frequent contexts, such as one-time events vs. habitual actions); (2) coercion contexts (including stative verbs coerced to an eventive meaning); (3) impersonal subject items (inspired by Slabakova/Montrul 2003; 2008), and (4) aspectually conflicting items (non-prototypical usages, such as telic elements in imperfective contexts). For reasons of space, examples are given in the results section below rather than here. Importantly, some of the items included temporal adverbs (the “signal words” presented in section 4.1). The text completion task consisted of a coherent narrative, written specifically by the study’s author, with different combinations of telic and atelic verbs with various adverbs.

## 4.2.2 Results

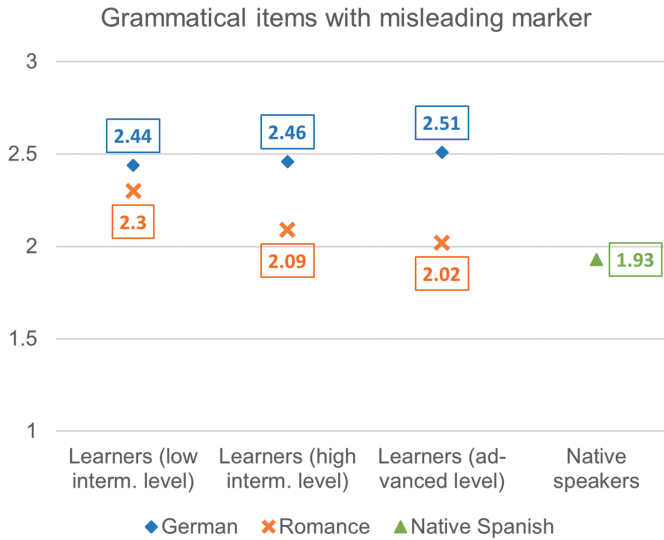
The results of the grammaticality judgement task showed an important effect of the item condition: whereas in the so-called standard contexts all learners came closer to the native control group with increasing proficiency (such that there were no significant differences between the performances of the advanced learners and the native speakers), in the non-frequent/non-prototypical contexts, this was generally only the case for learners with a Romance L1, which meant there were some persistent differences between the German learners and the other groups. The following two figures illustrate this finding (adapted from Diaubalick 2019, 221ss.; presentation modified).

The figures show the mean judgements per group, with items rated on a scale between 1 (completely acceptable) and 5 (completely unacceptable). Focussing first on Figure 1, which summarises the findings for the standard context items, the data show relatively clear tendencies in both learner groups: while the low intermediate level learners start with a mean judgement of around 3 (a sign of uncertainty on the scale used), rising proficiency correlates with stronger certainty and also greater proximity to the judgement of the native control group. In Figure 2, on the other hand, we see the results for one of the non-standard categories showing the different behaviours of the two learner groups. Whereas the Romance learners come



**Figure 1:** Mean judgement on ungrammatical standard context items (expected: 5); the y-axis shows only relevant values.





**Figure 2:** Mean judgements on grammatical items with misleading markers (expected: 1); the y-axis shows only relevant values.

closer to the judgement of the native control group with increasing proficiency, the data of the German group shows no effect of proficiency at all. A detailed analysis of the data showed that this was generally due to overgeneralisation of a learning strategy based on temporal markers. In what follows, we will illustrate this with a few examples.

Although the main task of the experiment was to provide grammaticality judgements, some of the participants annotated the items with corrections, as in the following example (originally item 4, reported here as 9):

- (9) *En el año 1989 la gente solía* <sub>IMP</sub> *quejarse del muro de Berlín.*  
 ‘In 1989, people used to complain about the Berlin Wall.’

What is interesting about this item is that, although no significant differences between the groups in terms of statistical numbers were found (Diaubalick 2019, 236), i.e., generally all participants tended to accept the sentence as grammatical, some participants still suggested corrections or improvements, assuming that the adverbial phrase *en el año 1989* triggers use of the Preterit. Qualitative analysis revealed some interesting insights into how misleading markers can affect learners’ judgements (albeit not discernible on an overall numerical level): out of ten corrections, eight were given by the German learners, all of whom suggested use of the Preterit – either replacing the verbal periphrasis *soler + inf.* with a perfective

verb form (*se quejaron* ‘they complained’, or *la gente se quejó* ‘the people complained’) or even providing the inherently ungrammatical perfective form *solío*. As the verb *soler* ‘use to’ is semantically associated with habituality, a Preterit is *per se* impossible. The other two corrections came from an Italian (who likewise suggested *solío*) and a French student (who suggested *solía quejándose* ‘used to complain’). As the latter is actually also an imperfective form, it means that only one non-German student proposed a perfective form, as opposed to eight German learners, which again is indicative of this group being guided by temporal markers. Much stronger evidence, however, comes from another item (originally item 12, here 10):

- (10) *La semana pasada Pablo sabía<sub>IMP</sub> la respuesta, pero ahora ya no se acuerda.*  
 ‘Last week, Pablo knew the answer, but now he doesn’t remember it anymore.’

The native speakers accepted the item with an average rating of 1.58, similar to the Romance speakers’ ratings (low intermediate: 1.71; high intermediate: 1.72; advanced: 1.80). The German learners, in contrast to the other groups, had a significantly lower tendency to accept the sentence (low intermediate: 2.44; high intermediate: 2.60; advanced: 2.34; Diaubalick 2019, 237). This significant difference arguably stems from the fact that the German learners focussed on the adverbial phrase *la semana pasada* ‘last week’, which they know as a trigger word for the Preterit and therefore tend to use the perfective verb form *supo* instead of the imperfective *sabía*. However, the Imperfect is the required form here as it leaves the verb with its stative meaning (non-coercion). It is again in the corrections provided where the nature of these differences can be seen: several German learners suggested substituting the Imperfect with the Preterit, although this would, in fact, coerce the verb into an eventive meaning, corresponding roughly to the translation *got to know/learned* (see section 3). No such corrections were given by anyone within the other groups.

Taken together with the results of the completion task, which likewise pointed to an overgeneralisation of temporal markers being interpreted as signal words leading to significant differences with misleading triggers, the conclusion drawn from these findings is that German learners appear to have difficulties, especially in the less frequent/non-prototypical cases, that persist even at advanced proficiency levels. To compensate, they develop an explicit learning strategy based on temporal markers as trigger words, which, in contexts where the adverbials are misleading, leads to significantly different judgements from the other groups.

## 5 Discussion and conclusion

Our goal was to show how the analysis of L2 acquisition data can contribute to theoretical discussions on specific linguistic phenomena (in this case, aspect). A summary of the findings from both studies (i.e., Diaubalick 2019; Eibensteiner 2021) reveals that L1 German learners of Spanish (whose L1 does not have grammatical aspect and therefore relies on lexical cues such as temporal adverbs) face important difficulties when acquiring the meanings and uses of Spanish past tenses. As we have argued, these results are, in fact, predictable if aspect is regarded as an inherent property contrasting the Imperfect with the Preterit (see section 2). German-speaking learners have to learn this aspectual contrast as an entirely new concept, which is why they behave differently from learners of Spanish from other language backgrounds.

It is now time to come back to the idea we proposed in section 2: if, for the sake of argument, we consider the Imperfect to be a mere Co-Preterit (i.e., all aspectual values are merely coincidental and arise from particular contexts), only temporal values (e.g., anteriority) would have to be acquired. Moreover, as the German grammar also contains grammaticalised temporal features, relations such as anteriority and simultaneity could be acquired through transfer from the L1. However, this scenario does not fit with the findings presented here as acquisition problems evidently persist. We can therefore discard the assumption that there is merely a temporal contrast between the Spanish past tenses. In essence, the arguments lead to the conclusion that the proper concept of aspect must be acquired.

Firstly, we need to address the possibility of achieving ultimate attainment of aspectual knowledge in an L2. While some authors argue that this is in principle possible in L2 Spanish (e.g., Montrul/Slabakova 2002), others have argued against this claim (e.g., Salaberry 2013; Diaubalick/Guijarro-Fuentes 2016). Distinct outcomes are, however, a methodological artefact given that they arise from distinct conceptualisations of the construct of aspect. Montrul and Slabakova, for example, explicitly leave out non-prototypical contexts and, as a result, their approach to determining whether aspectual knowledge has been acquired differs from other studies. In fact, they cannot effectively answer the question whether the concept of aspect can be acquired in an L2 or not, as their methodology disregards important aspects. In essence, given that the findings from the studies described above show that, at a minimum, the most advanced learners fail to acquire the aspectual meanings of past tenses in Spanish, ultimate attainment of aspect in L2 Spanish seems improbable and the assumption that aspect is not part of Spanish grammar must be considered suspect.

Secondly, as German grammar does not contain aspect as a grammatical category, facilitative transfer of aspectual notions from L1 German to L2 Spanish is impossible. Learners therefore need to employ compensatory strategies in approaching the learning task. In effect, the data from both studies presented in section 4 reveal that L1 German learners use rule-based knowledge to overcome learning difficulties (e.g., reliance on temporal adverbs). More importantly, the use of such learning strategies seems to have a positive influence on the L2 acquisition of aspect in prototypical contexts, but not in non-prototypical contexts. To explain such outcomes, Salaberry (2020) suggests that the distinction between implicit and explicit types of knowledge (Krashen 1985; Paradis 2009; Ullman 2016) parallels the demarcation between non-prototypical and prototypical conceptualisations of aspect, respectively. He argues that “deep” conceptual components of language (non-prototypical) may be representative of the type of implicit language knowledge that can only be attained by L1 acquisition mechanisms. In contrast, prototypical meanings of aspect are learnable by means of explicit learning processes available to L2 learners, often consisting in explicit rule-based strategies taught in Spanish classes. Especially when the linguistic representation of aspectuality differs in the L1 and the L2 (as is the case with German-speaking learners of Spanish), learners may need to focus explicitly on those differences to be able to adjust their linguistic production to the new L2 representations.

Thirdly, on the one hand, explicit instruction on aspect could be a viable approach to enable learners to understand new conceptualisations of aspect, as argued by Concept Based Instruction (e.g., Negueruela/Lantolf 2006; see section 3). On the other hand, explicit knowledge may lead to the construction of a second system based on overgeneralisation, as proposed by the Competing Systems Hypothesis (Rothman 2008), thus negatively affecting acquired implicit knowledge. Contrary to Rothman’s position, however, the analysis of the two main studies reviewed here (i.e., Diaubalick 2019; Eibensteiner 2021) shows that overgeneralisations function as a compensation strategy in the absence of properly acquired aspectual notions. In other words, explicit ruled-based knowledge does not compete with implicit competence but instead compensates for the lack of knowledge. Furthermore, the extent to which awareness-raising strategies – as proposed by Concept Based Instruction – could help learners compensate for the lack of acquired aspectual notions, especially evident in non-prototypical/non-frequent contexts, remains an open question. Further empirical evidence is, therefore, still needed.

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**The functioning of tense and aspect  
in discourse**



Giuliano Armenante

# Sequence of tense as aspectual harmony

**Abstract:** This paper investigates the temporal interpretation of past-tensed complements of propositional attitude verbs in Italian and offers a novel analysis that hinges on the interplay between temporal and aspectual operators at Logical Form. As in many other languages (Ogihara/Sharvit 2012), Italian past-under-past sentences such as *Gianni ha detto che Maria era agitata* ('Gianni said that Maria was nervous') are systematically ambiguous between a backward-shifted (Maria was nervous before Gianni's report) and a simultaneous reading (Maria was nervous at the time of Gianni's report), provided that the embedded verb is imperfective. Given the range of interpretations associated with imperfective embeddings, I will ascribe the source of the ambiguity to the Imperfect's properties of anaphoricity and unboundedness, thus defending a semantic analysis that dispenses with a dedicated tense-agreement mechanism (Sharvit (2018); Ogihara (1995); Kratzer (1998)). In brief, the Imperfect introduces a temporal variable locating the starting point of an eventuality before the reference time. The latter, in return, may be bound by the attitude verb, yielding anteriority, or make reference to a salient time, yielding simultaneity. Most notably, the two interpretations are generated by Imperfective-marked predicates independently of the embedding predicate's tense, pointing to possibly simultaneous interpretations even in non-agreeing configurations in future or present contexts.

**Keywords:** tense, aspect, imperfective, sequence of tense, Italian

## 1 Introduction

This paper<sup>1</sup> offers a novel analysis of Sequence of Tense (SoT) phenomena – i.e., the availability of both a simultaneous (SIM) and a backward-shifted (BACK) interpretation for past-under-past sentences – that rests on the interplay of tense- and aspect-operators at Logical Form (LF). It demonstrates that, contrary to what is generally assumed in the literature (Grønn/von Stechow 2010; Ogihara/Sharvit 2012;

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<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Sarah Dessi Schmid, Vera Hohaus, Alexander Wimmer and to the attendees of Section 12 of XXXVI. Romanistentag for comments and suggestions on earlier versions of this work. All errors remain mine.

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Sharvit 2018), there is no need to posit a tense-agreement mechanism to account for the range of SoT data.

Taking Italian as the starting point of the investigation, I will show that the strong anaphoric properties of the *Imperfetto*, combined with its unboundedness, translate into a systematic ambiguity at LF between a bound and a free variable interpretation,<sup>2</sup> thus explaining the availability of both readings in past as well as in future attitude contexts.<sup>3</sup>

Zooming out to the broader crosslinguistic picture, I hypothesize that what is observed in Romance can be extended to those languages, such as English, which are defective in verb aspect morphology and therefore crucially rely on lexical aspect.

In the remainder of this section, I will outline the puzzle this paper addresses, viewed from a typological perspective. In section 2, I review how existing approaches handle the SoT ambiguity, and point out possible shortcomings. These approaches usually ascribe the source of the ambiguity either to a structural mechanism that transmits tense-features or to the temporal profile of stative and progressive predicates. Section 3 presents data from Romance languages, particularly Italian, that suggest a strong correlation between SoT and the aspectual value of the embedded predicate. Section 4 sets out the analysis and shows how it is able to capture the meaning of SoT constructions in both past and future contexts. In section 5, I provide further crosslinguistic evidence for the suggested aspectual correlation, and attempt an explanation within the model introduced here. Section 6 draws conclusions.

## 1.1 Tense semantics and the SoT puzzle

There is consensus in the literature that speakers use tensed predicates to talk about time in both specific and unspecific ways. Following these views, for example, past tense locates an event at an earlier time, which is either contextually given or indefinite.<sup>4</sup>

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2 In semantic theory, a **bound** variable (or pronoun) interpretation obtains when a variable's value is *constrained* (bound) by a local antecedent that c-commands it at sentence-structure level (e.g. *Don<sub>i</sub> loves himself<sub>i</sub>*). A variable or pronoun that is not bound in the sentence structure is **free** and is usually assigned a value via context (e.g. *He<sub>3</sub> left*, with 3→Don).

3 Attitude contexts occur in the scope of propositional attitude verbs such as *believe*, *hope*, *know*. The truthconditional meaning of a complement selected by a propositional attitude verb must generally be anchored to the attitude worlds (i.e. the belief/hope/know-worlds). For example, in *John believes that the Sun is a planet*, the interpretation of *that the Sun is a planet* cannot be judged in the actual world we live in, but must be confined to the realm of all possible worlds compatible with John's beliefs. This allows the sentence to be judged true despite the belief's falsity.

4 I am assuming a view of tense and aspect meaning roughly based on Reichenbach (1947), according to which tense introduces a (preceding or overlapping) relation between a reference time and

Formal linguistics<sup>5</sup> has taken this dichotomy to signal a dual nature for tense,<sup>6</sup> which may be represented either as a temporal pronoun (Kratzer, 1998; Heim, 1994; Partee, 1973), whose value is contextually assigned, or as an existential quantifier, whose domain ranges over times (Ogihara, 1995; Prior, 1967).

(1) Quantificational tense:<sup>7</sup>

a.  $\llbracket \text{PAST} \rrbracket^8 = \lambda p_{i,t}. \lambda t_i. \exists t' [t' < t \ \& \ p(t') = 1]$

(‘given an untensed proposition  $p$  and an evaluation time  $t$ , **there is some time interval  $t'$**  such that  $t'$  precedes  $t$  and  $p$  is true of  $t'$ .’)

b.  $\llbracket \text{PRES} \rrbracket = \lambda p_{i,t}. \lambda t_i. \exists t' [t' \circ t \ \& \ p(t') = 1]$

(‘given an untensed proposition  $p$  and an evaluation time  $t$ , **there is some time interval  $t'$**  such that  $t'$  overlaps  $t$  and  $p$  is true of  $t'$ .’)

(2). Pronominal tense:

a.  $\llbracket \text{past}_k \rrbracket^9$  is defined  $\Leftrightarrow g(k) < t^*$

When defined,  $\llbracket \text{past}_k \rrbracket = g(k)$

b.  $\llbracket \text{pres}_k \rrbracket$  is defined  $\Leftrightarrow g(k) \circ t^*$

When defined,  $\llbracket \text{pres}_k \rrbracket = g(k)$

(with  $g$  the assignment function<sup>10</sup> and  $t^*$  the utterance time)

Independently of its formal rendition, it has been pointed out that the English past tense is a relative tense, in that its local evaluation time may denote a moment other than the speech time. This becomes clear in future contexts:

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a local evaluation time (in matrix contexts, this would be the time of the utterance), while aspect introduces a relation between the running time of the event and the reference time.

5 The analysis put forward here is situated within a theoretic model of formal semantics (see Heim/Kratzer 1998 for an overview and Von Stechow/Heim 2011 for basic notions of intensional semantics).

6 Simply put, we can speak of time in an indefinite manner (*John visited Harvard, but I don't know exactly when.*) or in a specific manner (*The light was on (when I walked by her place).*). The former appeals to an existential/quantificational view of tense since it merely asserts the existence of some time, the latter to a pronominal/referential view since the temporal reference needs to be salient in the discourse

7  $i$  and  $t$  are semantic types. If  $a$  and  $b$  are semantic types, then  $\langle a, b \rangle$  is a semantic type. Nothing else is a semantic type. Basic semantic types used here are:  $e$ =entities,  $i$ =times,  $s$ =worlds,  $t$ =truth-values,  $v$ =events.

8 Note that under current implementations, quantificational tense may also have a referential component in the form of a contextual restriction of the domain of quantification.

9 In the notation adopted here, lower case is used for pronominal tense, upper case for the quantificational variant.

10 The assignment function  $g$  takes as input the variable index (in this case  $k$ ) and returns the unique value assigned to that index by the context (in this case a specific past time interval).

- (3) a. Context: Mary is planning to go to the beach tomorrow instead of going to school. Her friend warns her though:  
 b. Your mother will find out that you **skipped** school.  
 (Where the skipping-school event takes place after t\*)

More interestingly, past-tensed stative predicates in past attitude contexts give rise to a systematic ambiguity, in that the embedded predicate can stand in a temporal relation of simultaneity (SIM) or anteriority (BACK) with the matrix predicate. Note that a simultaneous interpretation is not possible if the embedded predicate is eventive:

- (4) Jerry **said** that Elaine **was** upset.  
 a. Jerry: 'Elaine was upset.' (BACK)  
 b. Jerry: 'Elaine is upset.' (SIM)
- (5) Jerry **said** that Elaine **slept** on the couch.  
 a. Attested: 'Jerry: "Elaine slept on the couch".' (BACK)  
 b. Not attested: 'Jerry: "Elaine is sleeping on the couch".' (\*SIM)

Languages like English and Italian, in which past-under-past embeddings may have a simultaneous interpretation alongside a backward-shifted one, are labelled **+SoT languages**. Assuming a relative-past semantics along the lines of (1a), the availability of SIM is puzzling: the embedded event is expected to be temporally shifted with respect to the attitude time.<sup>11</sup> If simultaneity in past SoT contexts may still be explained by resorting to a non-relative tense semantics, the fact that the same ambiguity arises in future contexts challenges the view that past tense morphology must be associated with *pastness*:

- (6) a. One week ago, John said that in three weeks he would finally tell Mary that he **loved** her.  
 b. Attested: 'John to Mary in three weeks: "I love you."' (SIM)

In (6a), the most-embedded past tense carries no past reference, since the context is located in the future. Yet, a simultaneous interpretation is possible.

<sup>11</sup> Simplifying, the attitude time is the time at which the attitude holder is speaking.

By contrast, languages like Japanese are considered **-SoT languages**, in that they do not yield SIM for past-under-past embeddings. -SoT languages can usually express simultaneity when the embedded predicate is present-tensed.<sup>12</sup>

(7) *Jerrywa Elaine-ga okot-tei-ta to itteimashi-ta.*  
 Jerry-TOP Elaine-NOM upset-PROG-PAST that say-PAST  
 ‘Jerry said that Elaine was (previously) upset.’ (BACK)

(8) *Jerrywa Elaine-ga okot-tei-ru to itteimashi-ta.*  
 Jerry-TOP Elaine-NOM upset-PROG-PRES that say-PAST  
 ‘Jerry said that Elaine was upset (at that time).’ (SIM)

Crucially, the present tense in English is indexical and, as such, cannot refer to a time other than the utterance time. When in the scope of a past-tensed attitude verb, the running time of the embedded eventuality must overlap the utterance time as well.

(9) a. Jerry said that Elaine is upset. (DAR)<sup>13</sup>  
 b. Intended: ‘Elaine is upset at the time of Jerry’s report & the speaker believes she is still upset at t\*.’

The literature has largely investigated the SoT puzzle from the tense-perspective. More specifically, the ambiguity has been often reduced to a structural ambiguity at LF with the complement clause being either semantically tenseless (SIM) or past-oriented (BACK). However, little attention has been paid to the role played by viewpoint and lexical aspect. In fact, the absence of a simultaneous interpretation for eventive predicates has been widely overlooked or simply reduced to a quirk.

## 2 Previous approaches

This section provides an overview of previous analyses of the SoT ambiguity. Theoretical approaches can usually be divided into two groups: (i) structural approaches,

<sup>12</sup> Glossing abbreviations: COND=Conditional, FUT=Future, IMPF=Imperfect, IPFV=Imperfective, IND=Indicative mood, NOM=Nominative marking, PAST=generalized past morphology, PERF=Perfect, PFV=Perfective, PRES=present/non-past, PRET=preterite, PROG=progressive, SUBJ=Subjunctive mood, TOP=Topic marking

<sup>13</sup> DAR stands for double access reading, in that the embedded reference time has to access both the attitude and the utterance time for the sentence to be felicitous.



which are generally tense-based as they rely on a structural mechanism targeting a tense projection; (ii) non-structural approaches, which are aspect-prominent, with the aspectual value of the embedded predicate playing a key role in the resulting temporal interpretation.

## 2.1 Structural approaches

Structural theories disentangle tense morphosyntax from its semantic representation, thus treating tense morphemes as variables ranging over times and, as such, requiring a suitable antecedent. They all share the view that past-under-past sentences may exhibit a *vacuous* interpretation for the embedded tense due to an agreement-like mechanism. On this view, SIM stems from an LF where one semantic Past operator sets the reference time for both clausal eventualities. One well known implementation goes back to Ogihara's work (Ogihara, 1995), where a so-called SoT rule is responsible for the deletion of the embedded tense at LF.

(10) Deletion rule (after Ogihara 1995: 673)

A tense morpheme  $\alpha$  can be deleted at LF if and only if (i) it is c-commanded by a matching tense morpheme  $\beta$ , (ii) there is no tense morpheme intervening between the two, (iii)  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  are occurrences of the past tense morpheme.

Assuming that deletion is not clause-bound, the rule can generate LFs compatible with both a SIM and a BACK interpretation. Note that the outcome of the deletion is essentially a zero tense (i.e. a bound variable ranging over times).<sup>14</sup>

(11) SoT (past contexts)

- |   |        |
|---|--------|
| a. [ . . . [ <sub>TP</sub> PAST Harry believe [ <sub>TP</sub> PAST Beth be-upset]]]                 | (BACK) |
| b. Deletion: [ . . . [ <sub>TP</sub> PAST Harry believe [ <sub>TP</sub> PAST Beth be-upset]]]       |        |
| [ . . . [ <sub>TP</sub> PAST Harry believe [ <sub>TP</sub> $\lambda_k \emptyset_k$ Beth be-upset]]] | (SIM)  |

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<sup>14</sup> The fact that a zero tense must be bound comes from the semantics of attitude verbs that require a property of times as their first argument. As a consequence,  $\langle i \rangle$ -denoting variables must be abstracted over. This will be shown in greater detail in section 4.

Under the assumption that *would* denotes a past-tensed future modal (i.e., quantifying over future times) *woll-*, the rule in (10) can equally account for SoT phenomena in future contexts.<sup>15</sup>

(12) SoT (future contexts)

- a. [ . . . [<sub>TP</sub> PAST J decide [<sub>TP</sub> PAST WOLL he tell-M [<sub>TP</sub> PAST he love-her]]]]  
(BACK)
- b. Deletion: [ . . . [<sub>TP</sub> PAST J decide [<sub>TP</sub> PAST WOLL he tell-M [<sub>TP</sub> PAST he love-her]]]]  
[ . . . [<sub>TP</sub> PAST J decide [<sub>TP</sub> λ<sub>k</sub> Ø<sub>k</sub> WOLL he tell-M [<sub>TP</sub> λ<sub>j</sub> Ø<sub>j</sub> he love-her]]]] (SIM)

Alternative structural approaches forgo dedicated deletion rules, maintaining that SIM-triggering LFs project only a top-most PAST operator in the first place. Among these, some (Kusumoto 1999; Stowell 2007) assume a global licensing relation between PAST and the tense morphology (as opposed to a local licensing relation deriving BACK), while others (Kratzer, 1998) argue that an in-born zero tense is spelled out as past following phonological agreement. Along those lines, Kauf/Zeijlstra (2018) defend an underspecification-based analysis of SoT constructions and adopt a non-future semantics for past tense morphology: on this view, the two interpretations are truth-conditionally equivalent and only pragmatically strengthened.

Although most of these approaches can correctly capture the meaning of ambiguous past-under-past attitude reports, they fail to explain the aspectual contrast in (5), as they view tense semantic features as the primary locus of variation in SoT phenomena.

## 2.2 Non-structural approaches

In the vein of Kauf/Zeijlstra (2018), non-structural theories adopt a similar underspecification-based approach to handling the SoT ambiguity. However, in contrast to tense-based theories, the flexible meaning obtained is not due to a weakened denotation of past tense, but is tied to the aspectual properties of the predicate. These approaches show that there is a correlation between verb aspect and the temporal interpretation of past-tensed attitude reports, in that only statives and

<sup>15</sup> This would also explain the contrast with . . . *he will tell Maria he loved her*, which does not exhibit a SIM reading. If *will* denotes a present-tensed future modal, the intermediate T-node will constitute an intervener between the matrix and the bottom-most past tense, hence blocking deletion.

progressive eventives give rise to SIM readings in the scope of past-tensed attitude verbs.

More concretely, these approaches regard past-under-past embeddings as unambiguous in the first place, with BACK being the only systematically available interpretation. For Gennari (2003), the fact that a shifted interpretation is felicitous in a simultaneous scenario depends on the so-called superinterval property that progressive/stative predicates possess. The temporal superinterval contains the reference time established by the local embedded tense, but may extend and overlap with the local evaluation time (that is the attitude time introduced by the embedding tense, cf. Gennari, 2003: 52), thus yielding an extended SIM interpretation.

In the same spirit, Altshuler/Schwarzschild (2013) argue that the source of the apparent ambiguity is neither structural nor lexical. Rather, like for Gennari, past tense morphology always expresses a relative past meaning which, in turn, will independently produce a shifted interpretation, regardless of the syntactic environment. It follows that the simultaneous reading is a mere illusion resulting from the lack of a cessation implicature.<sup>16</sup> Altshuler/Schwarzschild (2013) demonstrate that in languages with a relative present tense like Japanese, Gricean reasoning applies to tense competition between present- and past-tensed statives,<sup>17</sup> yielding a cessation implicature when the speaker adopts the weaker past option. In languages with an indexical present such as English, the same competition does not occur, thus no cessation implicature arises for past-tensed eventualities in the scope of an attitude verb, possibly giving the illusion that the event might extend and overlap with the attitude time.<sup>18</sup>

Despite the theoretical appeal, the predictions made by non-structural approaches are hardly compatible with the typological variation observed. For example, they fall short of explaining why SIM readings are sometimes available in past-under-past embeddings in languages such as Russian and Hebrew, which lack an indexical present.<sup>19</sup> In general, these theories suffer from a more fundamental

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**16** An implicature of cessation can be best understood with the following example: assume that your friend Bill hasn't been well lately. Sarah asks you how he's feeling, aware that you visit him daily. You respond *Yesterday he was doing well*. Since you've opted not to provide the more contextually informative *He is doing well*, Sarah will infer that Bill's well-being does not extend to today. Conversely, in contexts where no cessation implicature arises, nothing prevents the reported state from extending to the attitude time.

**17** This competition, derived from Grice's maxim of quantity, only arises if one assumes that present-tensed statives logically entail past-tensed ones. This follows from the fact that statives are temporally homogeneous.

**18** I am glossing over the formal details of the analysis. I refer the reader to Altshuler/Schwarzschild (2013) for a more thorough illustration.

**19** See also the discussions in Ogihara/Sharvit (2012) and Grønn/von Stechow (2010).

problem: they reduce the SoT ambiguity to a single interpretation at the expense of weakening the temporal meaning of attitude reports. On the other hand, structural accounts put forward a theory of SoT based solely on tense and its (grammatical) licensing conditions, thus relegating the predicate's aspectual values to a secondary role.

To sum up, none of the approaches presented here is able to explore the interplay of tense and aspect in the interpretation of past-under-past constructions. If in Germanic languages such a relation is less visible, languages rich in verbal morphology, such as Romance, offer an interesting case-study, as we will see in the next section.

### 3 The data: The view from romance

As previously stated, when it comes to past-under-past embeddings, languages vary with respect to the temporal relation that the embedded past tense form may establish with a subordinating verb.<sup>20</sup> The canonical typological view (Bochnak et al. (2019)) distinguishes between Japanese-like languages (-SoT), which only allow for a backward-shifted interpretation of past-under-past embeddings, and English-like languages (+SoT), where a past tense embedded under a past tense form may have a simultaneous interpretation alongside a backward-shifted one. Crucially, Romance languages pattern with the latter,<sup>21</sup> given the systematic ambiguity triggered by an imperfective past in past-tensed contexts.

#### (13) SoT in French, Spanish and Italian

- |      |   |                 |            |              |                |                  |                |                |              |
|------|---|-----------------|------------|--------------|----------------|------------------|----------------|----------------|--------------|
| a.   | <i>Jean</i>                               | <i>a dit</i>    | <i>que</i> | <i>Marie</i> | <i>dormait</i> | <i>sur</i>       | <i>le</i>      | <i>canapé.</i> |              |
|      | Jean                                      | say.PROX        | that       | Marie        | sleep.IMPF     | on               | the            | couch          |              |
| b.   | <i>Juan</i>                               | <i>dijo</i>     | <i>que</i> | <i>Maria</i> | <i>estaba</i>  | <i>durmiendo</i> | <i>en</i>      | <i>el</i>      | <i>sofá.</i> |
|      | Juan                                      | say.PAST        | that       | Maria        | stay.IMPF      | sleeping         | on             | the            | couch        |
| c.   | <i>Gianni</i>                             | <i>ha detto</i> | <i>che</i> | <i>Maria</i> | <i>dormiva</i> | <i>sul</i>       | <i>divano.</i> |                |              |
|      | Gianni                                    | say.PROX        | that       | Maria        | sleep.IMPF     | on.the           | couch          |                |              |
| (i)  | 'John: "Mary was sleeping on the couch."' |                 |            |              |                |                  |                |                | (BACK)       |
| (ii) | 'John: "Mary is sleeping on the couch."'  |                 |            |              |                |                  |                |                | (SIM)        |

<sup>20</sup> As hinted at before, there is a second dimension of variation pertaining to the interpretation of the embedded present (see Ojihara/Sharvit 2012). The focus of this paper, however, will be on SoT-like phenomena, therefore most of the data presented will concern past-under-past embeddings in complement clauses.

<sup>21</sup> With the noticeable exception of Romanian (Lungu, 2008).

In the remainder of this section, I will present the core data on which the analysis is based.<sup>22</sup> Before looking at the range of interpretations embedded clauses give rise to, I will briefly introduce the Italian tense system.

### 3.1 Past meaning in the Italian tense system

As is well known, Italian morphologically encodes grammatical aspect on the verb. It follows that, when it comes to conveying *pastness*, the speaker has three options:<sup>23</sup> (i) the Preterite (*Passato Remoto*, PRET), which is perfective in aspect, the event being presented as a whole unit, and referential; (ii) the Imperfect (*Imperfetto*, IMPF), which is imperfective in aspect and anaphoric in nature (Bertinetto/Delfitto 2000; Giorgi et al. 1997); (iii) the Present Perfect (*Passato Prossimo*, PROX), which is used to express anteriority.<sup>24</sup>

The Imperfect is generally licensed in contexts where its time of reference is made salient by the context. This is captured by the contrast below:

- (14) *Quando Maria arrivò alla stazione, Gianni faceva uno spuntino.*  
 When Mary **arrived.PRET** at.the station, John **do.IMPF**  
 a snack  
 ‘When Mary arrived at the station, John was grabbing a snack.’

- (15) *?Gianni faceva uno spuntino.*  
 John **do.IMPF** a snack  
 ‘John was grabbing a snack.’

IMPF-marked sentences such as (15), uttered out of the blue, are considered odd (Giorgi et al., 1997), given the unavailability of a suitable antecedent referent. In other words, IMPF seems to share similarities with pronouns in that its interpretation is context-sensitive.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> For simplicity's sake, I use only data from Italian. The sentences presented here were constructed by the author through introspection and the judgments reported were double-checked with native speakers of Italian.

<sup>23</sup> I am disregarding composite forms such as the past progressive and past perfect here.

<sup>24</sup> For a lengthy discussion of past tense forms in Italian and other varieties of Romance, see Bertinetto (1997), Squartini/Bertinetto (2000).

<sup>25</sup> Also, just like pronouns, it carries restrictions on the contextually given reference.

The referential<sup>26</sup> status of the Imperfect leads us to expect that it lacks the purely existential readings generally associated with Present Perfect.<sup>27</sup>

- (16) ??*Marco scalava l'Everest.*  
 Marco climb.IMPF the.Everest  
 (Not attested: 'Marco climbed Mount Everest at some point.')
- (17) *Marco ha scalato l'Everest.*  
 Marco climb.PROX the.Everest  
 (Intended: 'Marco climbed Everest at some point in his life.')

### 3.2 Complement clauses and the SoT data

As already observed, simultaneous interpretations for past-under-past constructions in Italian only arise in the presence of an embedded IMPF-form, regardless of the morphology on the past-tensed attitude verb:

- (18) *Gianni disse che Maria era agitata.*  
 John say.PRET that Mary be.IMPF nervous  
 'John said that Mary was nervous.' (SIM/BACK)
- (19) *Gianni sosteneva che Maria era/fosse triste.*  
 John claim.IMPF that Mary be.IMPF.IND/SUBJ sad  
 'John claimed that Mary was sad.' (SIM/BACK)
- (20) *Gianni ha detto che Maria era agitata.*  
 John say.PROX that Mary be.IMPF nervous  
 'John said that Mary was nervous.' (SIM/BACK)

<sup>26</sup> 'Referential' because it makes reference to a given antecedent. I'll be using the terms *anaphoric* and *referential* almost interchangeably here when referring to IMPF's pronominal properties. Bear in mind that *anaphoric* essentially refers to IMPF's syntactic occurrence in anaphoric chains, while *referential* refers to its semantic representation (the property of referring to a unique individual in the world).

<sup>27</sup> Note that habitual readings of the Imperfect can provide an indefinite interpretation for these sentences. Since habitual aspect is not central to the current investigation, I will leave this issue aside for the moment.

When the embedded past tense is a preterite or a present perfect, the only temporal interpretation available is a shifted one. Importantly, the absence of simultaneity cannot be explained in terms of lexical aspect, in that even embedding a stative predicate will only determine a temporal relation of anteriority.

(21) *Gianni ha detto che Maria fu malata.*  
 John say.PROX that Mary be.PRET sick  
 'John said that Mary had been sick.' (BACK/\*SIM)

(22) *Maria ha detto che Gianni ha vinto la corsa.*  
 Maria say.PROX that Gianni win.PROX the race  
 'Maria said that Gianni won the race.' (BACK/\*SIM)

By contrast, simultaneous interpretations for IMPF-under-past sentences are independent of the embedded verb's actionality.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, contrary to what we observe in English, even eventive predicates may give rise to the SoT ambiguity.

(23) Statives:  
 a. *Gianni disse che Maria era a casa.*  
 John say.PRET that Mary be.IMPF at home  
 'John said that Mary was at home.'

(24) Activities:  
 a. *Gianni disse che Maria leggeva un manuale di chimica.*  
 John say.PRET that Mary read.IMPF a textbook of chemistry  
 'John said that Mary was reading a chemistry textbook.' (BACK/SIM)

(25) Accomplishments:  
 a. *Maria disse che Gianni disegnava un ritratto.*  
 Mary say.PRET that John draw.IMPF a portrait  
 'Mary said that John was drawing a portrait.' (BACK/SIM)

Crucially, the generalisation does not extend to achievements, which seem to only trigger shifted interpretations. These might even be forward-shifted (FORW) where the attitude-holder is making predictions or plans.

<sup>28</sup> Since (Vendler (1957)), predicates have been generally divided into four aspectual classes: statives, activities, accomplishments and achievements.

(26) Achievements:

- a. *Sara ha detto che Luca vinceva la corsa.*  
 Sara say.PROX that Luca **win.IMPF** the race  
 ‘Sara said that Luca was going to win the race.’ (??BACK??SIM/FORW)

It is, however, worth pointing out that sentences containing achievements are independently degraded under progressive aspect, since they denote punctual events which happen instantaneously. I will come back to this issue in section 5.

Finally, turning to future attitude contexts, the same generalisation holds, as only an IMPF-marked predicate can receive a simultaneous interpretation, irrespective of its lexical aspect:<sup>29</sup>

- (27) *Ieri Gianni ha detto che fra una settimana*  
 Yesterday Gianni say.PROX that in one week  
*avrebbe confessato a Maria che la amava*  
 have.COND confessed to Maria that her **love.IMPF**  
 ‘Yesterday Gianni said that in one week he would tell Maria he loved her.’  
 (SIM/BACK)

To sum up, simultaneous readings for past-under-past sentences only arise when the embedded past tense form is imperfective. More importantly, no restriction is imposed by its lexical aspect, with the sole exception of achievements.

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<sup>29</sup> An anonymous reviewer points out that in (27), the love-state cannot have started at some time following now. In fact, it has to overlap with *yesterday*. These judgments are indeed quite challenging, and perhaps the example presented here does not best illustrate the point. Consider, however, the following scenario: Gianni is going on holiday in two weeks and needs someone to water his plants in his absence. For this reason, he will leave a spare key for his neighbour Maria under the front doormat. Gianni has planned to tell Mary only after he leaves. In this context, it should be possible to utter: *Gianni ha deciso che fra due settimane avrebbe detto a Maria che la chiave si trovava sotto lo zerbino* (‘Gianni decided that in two weeks he would tell Mary that the key was under the doormat’). In my view, this sentence can receive a future simultaneous interpretation, even in the given context where the key is not located below the door mat at the speech time. However, not all native speakers agree: some prefer a past conditional form even in the most-embedded sentence. I leave the issue for future empirical research with the support of quantitative data.



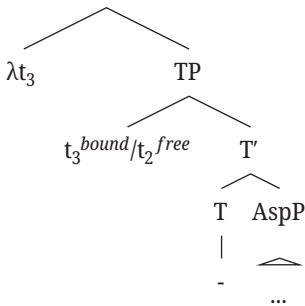
## 4 The proposal

Given the data presented in the previous section, it is clear that a proper treatment of SoT facts in Italian will have to stem from the semantics of the *Imperfetto*. The proposal hinges on two crucial properties of the imperfective tense:

- (i) anaphoricity: IMPF is only licensed in environments where a reference time is made (con)textually salient;
- (ii) ongoingness:<sup>30</sup> the event is presented from an internal viewpoint, with the reference included within the event's temporal boundaries.

Following (i), the reference time of an imperfective predicate must be discourse-given. The anaphoricity condition opens up two possibilities for embedded IMPF-predicates: coreference or binding (for a similar view, see Stowell 2014). If IMPF's antecedent is a sentence-external time made available to the speakers via context, a coreference is established. On the other hand, if no suitable referent is supplied by the context, IMPF's temporal argument is bound by a c-commanding temporal quantifier. Since IMPF cannot receive an indefinite analysis, I will assume that IMPF itself does not (existentially) quantify over a reference time. This will syntactically project as either a free or a bound variable.

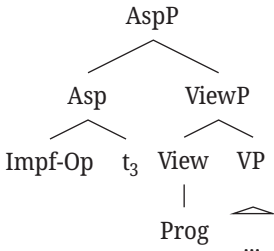
### (28) The T-layer of IMPF



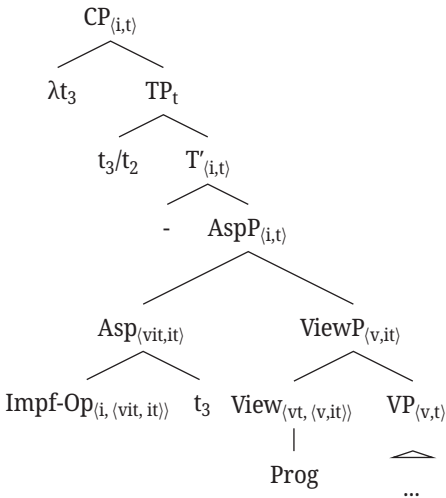
Following (ii), the temporal window provided by the reference time shows the event as happening. This means that its starting point must be located before this window<sup>31</sup> and its running time will have to contain the whole reference time.

<sup>30</sup> Here, I am simplifying and assuming only a progressive meaning for the Imperfect. I will address habituals later on.

<sup>31</sup> This may be too strong, but I am following the well-known property of progressive/imperfective aspect of being a *stativiser* (the original argument goes back to Vlach 1981), for which a state X observed at some t, needs to be true at least of some time t' leading up to t.

(29) The Asp-layer of IMPF

As shown in (29), the aspectual component of *Imperfetto* yields two distinct functional projections: Aspect and Viewpoint. This abstraction is by no means arbitrary, as a finer hierarchical structure for aspectual projections has already been observed in recent typological work (see, among others, Rullmann/Matthewson 2018).<sup>32</sup>

(30) The Architecture of IMPF-marked predicates in Attitude Contexts

<sup>32</sup> This becomes clearer looking at Spanish and old varieties of Italian, where progressive constructions may combine with either a perfective or an imperfective auxiliary.

(31) The Semantics of Impf-Op:

$$[[\text{Impf-Op}]] = \lambda t_3 \lambda p_{v,ib}. \lambda t: \exists e \exists t_{in} [t_{in} \subseteq \tau(e) \ \& \ t_{in} < t \leq t_3 \ \& \ \forall t' [t' \subseteq \tau(e) \rightarrow t_{in} < t']] . p(e)(t)$$

Based on the LF in (30), an IMPF-marked clause is tenseless, in that no precedence relation is explicitly introduced by a tense-like operator. By contrast, the aspect-head locates the initial subinterval of the event  $t_{in}$  prior to two time intervals: a local evaluation time  $t$ , quantificationally bound by the attitude verb, and a reference time  $t_3$ , which can either be *external* (and thus assigned a value via an assignment function  $g$ ) or be bound by the attitude verb.<sup>33</sup> Note that *ongoingness* is still yielded by a progressive viewpoint-head Prog, although existential quantification has been formally built into a higher head.

(32)  $[[\text{Prog}]] = \lambda p_{v,t}. \lambda e. \lambda t. t \subseteq \tau(e) \ \& \ p(e)(t)$

#### 4.1 Solving the SoT ambiguity

Let us now apply the semantics suggested above to an IMPF-under-past sentence to check whether it can successfully derive both existing interpretations.

##### Composition of the Simultaneous Interpretation:

(33) *Gianni disse che Maria era agitata.*

Gianni say.PRET that Maria be.IMPF nervous

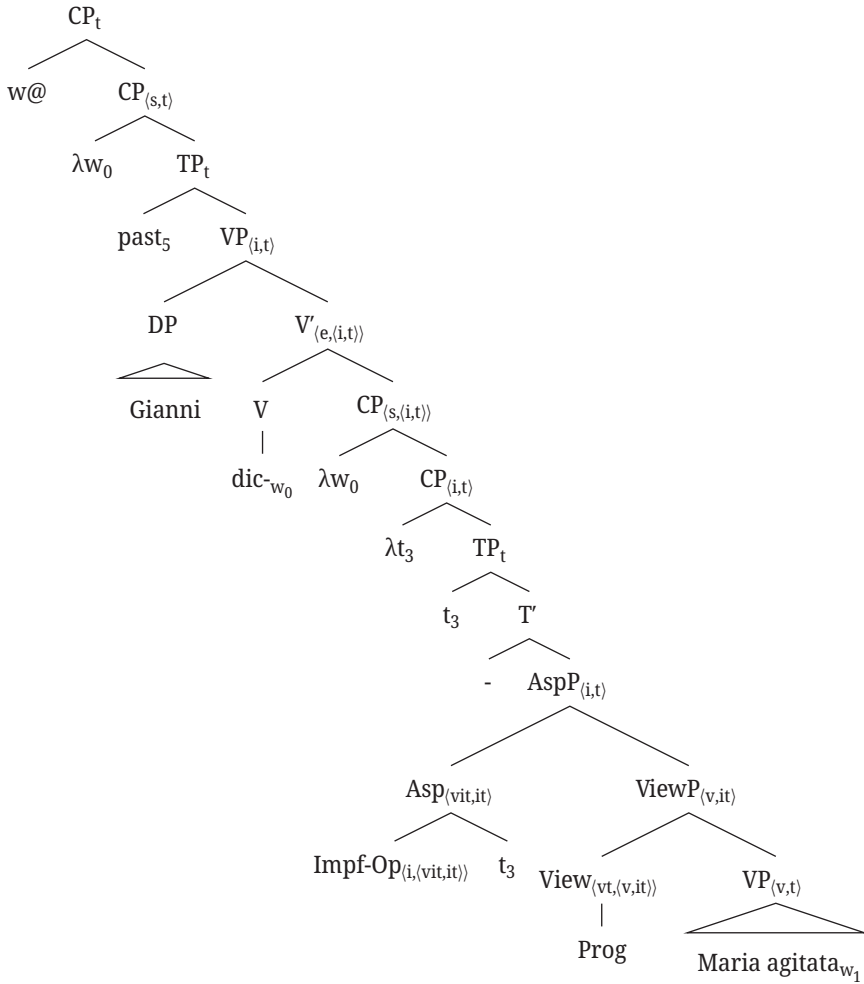
Intended: 'John said: "Mary is nervous."

(SIM)

A SIM-oriented LF will project a bound variable in [spec,TP].

<sup>33</sup> A similar analysis is adopted in Bochnak et al. (2019) and Hohaus (2019) for Samoan, a tenseless, aspect-prominent language. Interestingly, in Samoan, perfective marking strictly yields BACK, whereas imperfective marking strictly yields SIM. This is not surprising if we assume that a free-variable construal for the reference time is not available in this language.

(34) Simplified Logical Form<sup>34</sup> for (33):



I will assume a Hintikka-like (Hintikka, 1969) semantics for the propositional attitude verb *say*, according to which its complement denotes a property of times and worlds:

<sup>34</sup> World variables are here manipulated by intensional operators in the syntax, just like tense variables. For the sake of clarity, the structure of the matrix clause is not shown in great detail.  $Past_5$  is a tense pronoun whose contextually assigned value denotes a time interval  $g(5)$  prior to the utterance time.  $w@$  is an indexical world pronoun referring to the actual world.

$$(35) \llbracket \text{say} \rrbracket = \lambda w_s. \lambda p_{\langle s, i, t \rangle}. \lambda x_e. \lambda t_i. \forall \langle w', t' \rangle \in \text{Say}(x, w, t) \rightarrow p(w')(t')^{35}$$

With all these pieces in place, we compositionally derive truth-conditions compatible with a simultaneous interpretation of the sentence.

- (36) a.  $\llbracket \text{Impf-Op} \rrbracket(t_3)(\llbracket \text{ViewP} \rrbracket)(t_3)$  defined iff  
 $\exists e \exists t_{in} [t_{in} \subseteq \tau(e) \ t_{in} < t_3 \leq t_3 \ \& \ \forall t' [t' \subseteq \tau(e) \rightarrow t_{in} < t']$   
 b.  $\llbracket \text{Impf-Op} \rrbracket(t_3)(\llbracket \text{ViewP} \rrbracket)(t_3) = 1$  iff  
 $t_3 \subseteq \tau(e) \ \& \ \text{nervous}(w_1)(M)(e)$

(37) Simplified truth-conditions:

$$\llbracket \text{say} \rrbracket (@)(\lambda w_1. \lambda t_3. \llbracket (36) \rrbracket)(G)(g(5)) = 1 \text{ iff}$$

In all world-time pairs  $\langle w', t' \rangle$  compatible with what GIANNI says in the actual world @ at  $g(5)$ ,  $e$  is an event of Mary being nervous and the running time of the event **includes**  $t'$ .

(38) Presuppositions (PSPs):

- a.  $g(5)$  precedes the utterance time;  
 b. there is an event  $e$ , such that there is a  $t_{in}$  that marks some initial subinterval of the event.<sup>36</sup>  
 c. the event must start before  $t'$ .

The truth-conditions we derive are compatible with a scenario in which Maria's nervous state overlaps with Gianni's report. Crucially, the embedded reference time collapses into the local evaluation time, namely the attitude time introduced by *say*, generating a simultaneous interpretation of the two eventualities. As previously discussed, this comes with a caveat: the state must be true of Maria already at some time  $t_{in}$  strictly preceding the attitude time. I believe that this condition must always be preserved, as an attitude can only be generated following the observation at some time  $t$  of a certain event believed to have occurred (at least) starting from  $t$ .

<sup>35</sup>  $\text{Say}(x, w, t) = \{ \langle w, t \rangle : \langle w, t \rangle \text{ is compatible with what } x \text{ says in } w \text{ at } t. \}$ , with *Say* introducing the *Say*-alternatives.

<sup>36</sup> The term “event” is used here to denote a generic eventuality denoted by either a stative or an eventive predicate.

Composition of the Backward-shifted Interpretation:

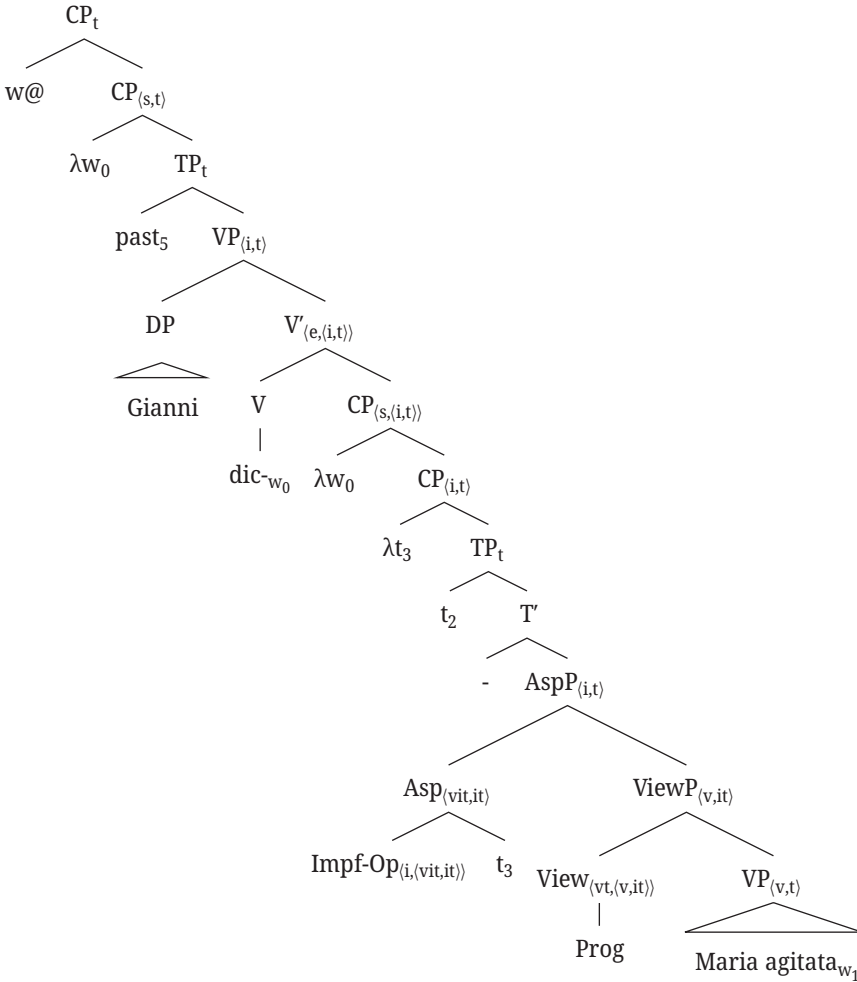
(39) *Gianni disse che Maria era agitata.*

Gianni say.PRET that Maria be.IMPF nervous

Intended: ‘John said: “Mary was nervous (at the party).”’

(BACK)

(40) Simplified Logical Form:



Note that in this case a free variable  $t_2$  will saturate the reference time argument of Impf-Op, such that the starting time of the event  $t_m$  will precede both the reference time and the attitude time (which may coincide, but need not).

- (41) a.  $\llbracket \text{Impf-Op} \rrbracket(t_3)(\llbracket \text{ViewP} \rrbracket)(t_3)$  defined iff  
 $\exists e \exists t_{in} [t_{in} \subseteq \tau(e) \ t_{in} < \mathbf{g}(2) \leq t_3 \ \& \ \forall t' [t' \subseteq \tau(e) \rightarrow t_{in} < t']$   
 b.  $\llbracket \text{Impf-Op} \rrbracket(t_3)(\llbracket \text{ViewP} \rrbracket)(t_3) = 1$  iff  
 $\tau(e) \subseteq \mathbf{g}(2) \ \& \ \text{nervous}(w_1)(M)(e)$
- (42) Simplified truth-conditions:  
 $\llbracket \text{say} \rrbracket(@)(\lambda w_1. \lambda t_3. \llbracket 36 \rrbracket)(G)(\mathbf{g}(5)) = 1$  iff  
 In all world-time pairs  $\langle w', t' \rangle$  compatible with what Gianni says in the actual world @ at  $\mathbf{g}(5)$ ,  $e$  is an event of Mary being nervous and the running time of the event **includes**  $\mathbf{g}(2)$ .
- (43) Presuppositions (PSPs):  
 a.  $\mathbf{g}(5)$  precedes the utterance time  
 b. there is an event  $e$ , such that there is a  $t_{in}$  that marks some initial time of the event.  
 c. the event must start before  $\mathbf{g}(2)$ , which may precede or coincide with  $t'$ .

The truth-conditions differ from the SIM reading only in one key aspect: Maria's nervous state must start before a contextually salient time  $\mathbf{g}(2)$ , which is prior to or coincides with the attitude time.

One obvious objection is that these semantics yield a possibly weaker rendition of the backward-shifted interpretation, since BACK may extend to incorporate SIM in case  $\mathbf{g}(2) = t'$  (that is, if the reference time and the attitude time coincide). As far as I can see, this result is not undesirable. In fact, shifted interpretations are not required to be strictly shifted (that is, with an asserted break between the cessation of the event and the time it is reported). Think of a context where Maria has been sleeping for hours. Gianni had already seen her sleeping at 5pm. In this scenario, the continuation of (44a) in (45) is perfectly acceptable and does not lead to any contradiction.

- (44) I talked to Gianni at 7 and. . .  
 a. *Gianni ha detto che Maria alle 5 dormiva.*  
 Gianni say.PROX that Maria at.the 5 sleep.IMPF  
 'Gianni said that Mary was sleeping at 5.'
- (45) *..Di fatti, alle 7 stava ancora dormendo!*  
 ..Of facts, at.the 7 be.IMPF still sleeping  
 '...In fact, at 7 she was still sleeping!'

## 4.2 Extending the Theory: Non-Past Attitude Contexts

We will now turn to future contexts, which traditionally constitute a challenge for non-deletion theories. Recall that an imperfective predicate can be embedded under a perfect conditional to yield a simultaneous reading in the future.

- (46) *Ieri Gianni ha detto che fra una settimana*  
 Yesterday Gianni say.PROX that in one week  
*avrebbe confessato a Maria che la amava.*  
 have.COND confessed to Maria that her love.IMPF  
 ‘Yesterday Gianni said that in one week he would tell Maria he loved her.’  
 (SIM/BACK)

The sentence in (46) is compatible with a SIM scenario where Gianni will make a present-tensed confession to Maria in one week’s time. Under the current approach, this reading is unproblematic if we assume a bound-variable LF for the most-embedded clause.

- (47) Simplified LF for (46) under SIM:<sup>37</sup>  
 $[ \dots [_{VP} \text{Gianni dic-} [_{CP} \dots [_{TP} \text{FUT}_{+past} [_{VP} \text{confess-Maria} [_{CP} \lambda t_3 [_{TP} t_3 \dots [_{AspP} \text{Impf-}$   
 $\text{Op}_{t_3} [_{ViewP} \text{Prog} [_{VP} \text{la-amava} ]]]]]]]]]]]]]]$

From (47), we derive the following truth-conditions, which are compatible with a simultaneous interpretation (occurring at some time following the utterance time).

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<sup>37</sup> The conditional perfect here projects a future modal FUT, which quantifies over times following a local evaluation time (in our case *yesterday*). As is well known, the conditional mood in Romance languages developed from the Latin preterite of the deontic auxiliary *habere*, carrying future meaning, which the conflated with the main verb. For this reason, I am assuming here that the projected FUT can only be licensed in past contexts (hence the subscript *+past*). Analogously, the future form is derived from a present-tensed deontic *habere* and must occur in present-oriented contexts. It remains to be explained what the contribution of the perfect would be, as no past-shifting occurs in these cases. Given the fact that Italian is an isolated case in the Romance family, in that French, Spanish and Portuguese resort to a simple present conditional to express future-in-the-past, I will argue that the past participle in this case does not bear any aspectual value; rather, its form is semantically inert.



- (48) a.  $\llbracket(47)\rrbracket$  is defined iff
- (i) there is an event  $e$ , such that there is a  $t_{in}$  that marks some initial time of the event.
  - (ii) the event must start before  $t'$ .
- b.  $\llbracket(47)\rrbracket = 1$  iff
- There is some time  $t^5$  **before now**, within *yesterday* such that:  
 for all world-time pairs  $\langle w^4, t^4 \rangle$  compatible with what G says at  $t^5$  in @,  
 there is some time  $t^3$  **following**  $t^4$  and within *next week* such that:  
 for all world-time pairs  $\langle w^2, t^2 \rangle$  compatible with what G confesses to M  
 at  $t^3$  in  $w^4$ ,  
 $e$  is an event of G loving M in  $w^2$  and the running time of  $e$  includes the  
 confessing-time  $t^2$ .

As seen earlier, if the attitude holder refers to a time  $g(2)$  preceding the one at which they are speaking,  $\tau(e)$  will end up including  $g(2)$ , yielding BACK.

We have thus far looked at ambiguous attitude reports (in past and future contexts), where the availability of bound-variable and free-variable LFs is welcome, as it allows us to successfully derive two attested interpretations. However, one potentially problematic prediction this analysis makes is the existence of simultaneous readings, even for IMPF-marked clauses in the scope of present- or future-tensed matrix verbs.

(49) IMPF-under-Pres:

- a. *Gianni sostiene che Maria dormiva sul divano.*  
 Gianni claim.PRES that Maria sleep.IMPF on.the couch  
 ‘Gianni claims that Maria was sleeping on the couch.’
- b. Attested: ‘Gianni (now): “Maria was sleeping on the couch.”’ (BACK)
- c. Not attested: ‘Gianni (now): “Maria is sleeping on the couch.”’ (\*SIM)

(50) IMPF-under-Fut:

- a. *Gianni dirá che Maria dormiva sul divano.*  
 Gianni say.FUT that Maria sleep.IMPF on.the couch  
 ‘Gianni will say that Maria was sleeping on the couch.’
- b. Attested: ‘Gianni (tomorrow): “Maria was sleeping on the couch”.’ (BACK)
- c. Marginally attested: ‘Gianni (tomorrow): “Maria is sleeping on the couch”.’ (??SIM)

This is of course an undesirable outcome: how can we prevent our system from deriving SIM in those environments where such an interpretation is not salient?

Although some speakers seem to accept (50c), BACK is arguably the most salient reading. Moreover, a SIM interpretation is definitely not readily available when the embedding attitude verb is present-tensed, as in (49a).

I will tentatively provide a possible explanation tied to two constraints, one cognitive and the other grammatical-pragmatic. Given the fact that IMPF-under-Fut and IMPF-under-Pres sentences, as opposed to IMPF-under-Past, sound odd when uttered out of the blue, it is possible that these environments independently admit only a free-variable construal for IMPF. More convincingly, SIM-readings may be excluded for both constructions because they can be obtained by embedding a present-tensed predicate in a future or present attitude context. The competition between present and imperfective marking might have led to a strengthening operation, making the redundant option (the bound-variable reading) marginal or completely unavailable for IMPF-under-Pres/Fut.<sup>38</sup> Obviously, there might be a third possibility: similarly to FUT<sub>+past</sub> IMPF may only be licensed in the scope of some past operator. On this view, the resulting analysis won't differ too much from an agreement-based approach.<sup>39</sup> Tying SoT to a grammatical rule, however, runs into the previously discussed issue: why should a tense agreement mechanism be triggered only in case of an imperfective past tense form?

## 5 Aspectual harmony in attitude contexts

The proposal builds on the well-known semantic components of the *Imperfetto*, incorporating elements from both its purely aspectual properties and its pronominal nature. By doing so, it contrasts with structural approaches and avoids using an ad-hoc grammatical mechanism to account for simultaneous interpretations. At the same time, in contrast to non-structural theories, it strictly derives two readings, thereby avoiding the conflation of simultaneity with an extended anteriority relation.

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<sup>38</sup> Note that the same blocking effect cannot occur in the case of IMPF-under-Past or IMPF-under-Cond since the competing Pres-under-Past/Cond can only give rise to a double access interpretation (see (9)) rather than to a strictly simultaneous one.

<sup>39</sup> This line of analysis, however, runs into other issues, mostly due to the *Imperfetto*'s versatile meaning, often almost interchangeable with a modal (see, among others, Ippolito 2004). Also, there is some evidence that a bound-variable interpretation is available even in IMPF-under-Pres/Fut sentences. Think of habitual scenarios where the IMPF-marked event used to hold at some time in the past. For reasons of space, I will not go into the compositional details of what such a reading would have to look like.

**Table 1:** Aspect classes and semantic features.

	Stativity	Durativity	Telicity
<b>Statives</b>	+	+	-
<b>Activities</b>	-	+	-
<b>Accomplishments</b>	-	+	+
<b>Achievements</b>	-	-	+

However, it remains silent on the role played by actionality. As observed in section 3, lexical as well as grammatical aspect can affect the temporal interpretation of an embedded sentence. More specifically, we have seen that: (i) SoT in Italian arises for embedded statives, activities and accomplishments, but not for achievements; (ii) SoT in English only arises with embedded stative (and progressive) predicates.

Following Smith (1991), we can characterise Vendler's classes based on their semantic features.

As is shown in Table 1, statives, activities and accomplishments, but not achievements, share a durative feature. The fact that durativity correlates with simultaneity is not surprising, since overlapping interpretations can only be generated via temporal overlap of the two events. However, I argue that durativity alone is not sufficient to make a simultaneous interpretation salient. A second semantic feature must also be present: atelicity. This follows naturally from the temporal profile of the *Imperfetto* which imposes an unboundedness requirement on the predicate:<sup>40</sup> if a predicate is telic, then it tends to its endpoint, violating the unboundedness requirement.

If this is on the right track, we face a fundamental problem: accomplishments are telic, yet they can yield simultaneous interpretations, as show in (25) repeated below:

- (51) *Maria disse che Gianni disegnava un ritratto.*  
 Mary say.PRET that John draw.IMPf a portrait  
 'Mary said that John was drawing a portrait.' (BACK/SIM)

What is superficially puzzling can, however, receive a simple explanation: accomplishments can be viewed as telicized activities. In other words, they can be decomposed into two sub-events: the main activity (in (51) that would be the drawing activity in its unfolding), which is durative and atelic, and its telos (the moment the portrait is finished). Arguably, Impf-Op would only apply to the atelic component,

<sup>40</sup> That is, IMP-marked predicates must denote events with open temporal boundaries.

making a simultaneous interpretation available. By contrast, achievements are entirely telic, hence Impf-Op cannot target any suitable (sub-)part of the eventive predicate.<sup>41</sup>

In some cases, even achievements may be detelicised and coerced into durative predicates. As expected, these exceptional uses ultimately display the SoT ambiguity.

- (52) *Sara ha detto che Luca non trovava le chiavi.*  
 Sara say.PROX that Luca not find.IMPF the keys  
 ‘Sara said that Luca could not find his keys.’  
 a. Possible: ‘Sara: “Luca can no longer find his keys!”’

The achievement predicate *trovare* in (52) can undergo aspectual coercion and be reclassified as an atelic, durative predicate, thus becoming a suitable argument for the Impf-Op head.<sup>42</sup>

Finally, turning to English, we are now able to explain the aspectual contrast between statives and eventives:

- (53) Julia said that Alex **loved** her. (Stative)  
 a. Attested: ‘Julia about Alex: “He loves me.”’ (SIM)
- (54) Julia said that Alex **slept** on the couch. (Activity)  
 a. Not attested: ‘Julia about Alex: “He’s sleeping on the couch.”’ (\*SIM)

The fact that in English no simultaneous interpretations arise for eventive predicates (activities and accomplishments included) is not surprising: English does not have aspectual marking on the verb in the first place. This means that no dedicated morpheme can project Impf-Op at LF. If the English Preterite (the so-called Simple Past) is aspectually neutral, that does not entail a lack of aspectual interpretation for English sentences. I argue that this can be achieved in three different ways: via the progressive form, lexical aspect or pragmatic reasoning. As previously remarked, statives and progressives have similar semantic properties: they are both *stativisers* (Vlach, 1981), hence they support overlapping interpretations in attitude contexts. Why does the same interpretation not arise with Preterite-marked activities or accomplishments? If a Preterite is used in lieu of a past progressive, the speaker

<sup>41</sup> For reasons of space, I leave aside a possible formal implementation. This would require decomposing the VP into different sub-event projections.

<sup>42</sup> Note that the use of negation here is not accidental, as achievements are typically detelicised under negation: assuming that negation takes high scope at LF, the finding event will lack an endpoint.

is not depicting the event as ongoing (otherwise, they would have used a progressive form), thus forcing a perfective interpretation of the sentence. Assuming that Impf-Op is only licensed in non-perfective environments, the competition between preterite and progressive produces a blocking effect on SIM. This naturally follows from the architecture proposed here for verb morphology, where imperfective/perfective aspect scopes over viewpoint aspect.

One obvious consequence of this theory is that languages with non-imperfective progressive forms cannot allow simultaneous interpretations. This is borne out if we look at Spanish:

- (55) *Juan dijo que Maria estaba durmiendo*  
 Juan say.Pfv.Past that Maria stay.IPFV.PAST sleeping  
*en el sofá.*  
 on the couch  
 Attested: ‘John: “Mary is sleeping on the couch.”’ (SIM)

- (56) *Juan dijo que Maria estuvo durmiendo*  
 Juan say.PFV.PAST that Maria stay.Pfv.Past sleeping  
*en el sofá.*  
 on the couch  
 Not attested: ‘John: “Mary is sleeping on the couch.”’ (\*SIM)

Recall that PRET-marked stative predicates could not yield a simultaneous interpretation in past-underpast embeddings:

- (57) *Gianni ha detto che Maria fu malata.*  
 John say.PROX that Mary be.PRET sick  
 ‘John said that Mary had been sick.’ (BACK/\*SIM)

This falls out naturally under the assumption that a perfective aspect-head sits above a lexical aspect stative head, blocking the stativising effect of the latter. In other words, a harmonic aspectual bond between higher aspect operators and lower lexical operators must be established for an overlapping interpretation to arise. When this bond is disrupted by a non-durative head, or pragmatically hindered, a shifted interpretation occurs. One interesting future line of research could involve languages such as German and Dutch, which do not possess dedicated aspect morphology or a progressive construal, with the expectation that even eventive predicates would be compatible with simultaneous readings.

## 6 Conclusion

This paper defends a theory of Sequence of Tense that emphasizes the role played by aspect in deriving the attested temporal interpretations for past-under-past attitude reports. For this reason, I have focused on Romance languages, which encode aspectual information morphologically.

What emerges is that simultaneous interpretations in Romance languages are confined to imperfective embedded predicates, independently of their lexical aspect. It has therefore been suggested that a dedicated aspectual operator is responsible for the availability of shifted and simultaneous interpretations, based on whether the predicate's reference time is contextually provided or bound by the local attitude verb. Since the *Imperfetto* does not express any absolute pastness, this analysis can account for simultaneous interpretations in future contexts as well. Moreover, extending the analysis to +SoT languages, such as English, it can explain why Sequence of Tense only correlates with stative or progressive predicates.

The proposal put forward here is grounded in the aspectual and temporal (pro-nominal) properties of the *Imperfetto*. It does not rely on a stipulative structural rule, nor does it weaken the truth-conditions under which a simultaneous interpretation comes about. What becomes clear is that a more nuanced approach to the investigation of temporal dependencies is needed, in that crosslinguistic variation points to the co-influence of tense and aspect categories on the SoT facts. To this end, typological investigations may shed further light on these phenomena and contribute to a proper assessment of the universality of the SoT parameter.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> This work was supported by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Research Foundation, DFG) -SFB 833 – Project ID 75650358.

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# On tense usage in Italian free indirect discourse

**Abstract:** This paper is devoted to the analysis of tense usage in Italian free indirect discourse (FID). In contrast to some recent proposals, it claims that, in terms of aspectual features, there is nothing particular in FID. The most frequently used tenses adhere to a strict semantic logic: their selection is a natural consequence of the retrospective temporal orientation of this stylistic device. However, the paper points out a fact so far unnoticed, namely that the inventory of tenses also includes those that are normally considered to be deictically anchored. Their occasional use in FID is licensed by a mechanism of “covert backshifting”. Thus, as long as the fundamental constraint of anaphorical retrospectivity is satisfied, Italian FID can host a wide range of aspectual and modal values, occasionally even including the stylistically archaic “narrative” Infinitive. Finally, the paper sets out a detailed comparison between FID and indirect discourse, pointing out crucial similarities and differences.

**Keywords:** free indirect discourse, indirect discourse, reported discourse, TAM values, tense backshifting, deictic centres

## 1 Outline

This paper focusses on the TAM (Tense-Aspect-Mood) properties of free indirect discourse (FID) in Italian. It starts by describing (section 1) the basic features of “reported discourse”, both in general terms and with regard to FID. This discourse type is contrasted with the two major types of reported speech, i.e., direct and indirect discourse (DirD/IndD), and also with free direct discourse (FDD). Of special importance in the present case is the contrast between FID and IndD. The comparison is pursued throughout the paper and becomes the special focus of section 6, which summarises and integrates the preceding analysis. Section 3 addresses the temporal orientation of FID, substantiating the fundamental role of “backshifting” (i.e., retrospective anaphoric orientation), with obvious consequences for tense selection in a *consecutio temporum* language such as Italian. In addition, in contrast

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This paper is dedicated to Giampaolo Salvi.



to some recent proposals suggesting the special contribution of aspect in Italian FID, section 3 argues that all tenses essentially preserve their usual TAM values. Hence, FID has no special prerogative in this respect. In particular, the wide use of the Imperfect is a mere effect of the frequent need to express simultaneity in the past. Section 4 pursues the topic of retrospectivity, showing that FID may occasionally exhibit a kind of “covert backshifting”, whereby tenses normally anchored in the speaker’s *hic et nunc* (hence, deictically oriented) are used anaphorically relative to a past situated anchor. This appears to be an unprecedented observation, which invites further exploration in other Romance languages. Section 5 completes the analysis of TAM features and shows that FID exploits mood in a highly predictable way, just as it does with regard to aspect. In addition, this section highlights the “narrative” Infinitive as a further expressive device of Italian FID, reflecting an archaic syntactic usage that survives marginally in modern writers. Finally, section 6 details the respective features of FID and IndD, drawing attention to their similarities and differences.

## 2 Characterising reported speech

FID is an expressive device that stands, so to speak, between DirD and IndD, sharing its intermediate status with other types of (variously labelled) reported discourse.<sup>1</sup> Simplifying the matter somewhat, FID may be regarded as a kind of interpolation of “mimesis”, as in DirD, and “diegesis”, as in IndD (Mortara Garavelli 1985, 105). The label FID was first introduced by Bailly (1912) and in the course of time has won out over various competitors (Mortara Garavelli 1985, 19): “verschleierte Rede” (Kalepky 1913), “pseudo-objektive Rede” (Spitzer 1921), “represented speech” (Jespersen 1924), “semi-indirect style” (Kruisinga 1925), “Rede als Tatsache” (Lerch 1928), “substitutionary narration” (Fehr 1938), “discours directe impropre” (Kalik-Teljatnicova 1965/66), “oratio reflexa” (Hilty 1973), “narrated monologue” (Cohn 1978). The only other surviving label – common among German scholars – is “erlebte Rede”, as introduced by Lorck (1921).<sup>2</sup> Although in principle one could construct a FID in spoken language, in practice it is only found in literary texts, where it plays a substantive role in livening up the narrative by highlighting the characters’ words. Indeed, Becker/Egetenmeyer (2018) point to “salience” as a

<sup>1</sup> Mortara Garavelli (1985, 32–34, 91–92, 111) cites the classifications proposed by Bachtin (1963), Doležel (1964), Genette (1972) and Page (1973).

<sup>2</sup> On FID in Italian, see in particular Herczeg (1963), Cane (1969), Mortara Garavelli (1985; 1995a; 1995b), Calaresu (2004), Cimaglia (2008).

distinctive feature of FID, inasmuch as it gives prominence to the characters' psychological states.

Any reported discourse presupposes no less than two participants, variously named in the literature. In the absence of standard labels, these two roles will be called the Reporting- and the Reported-Speaker. Needless to say, the word *speaker* should not be understood literally, because a reported discourse may consist in a thought, rather than a speech act.

Corresponding to the two speakers are two deictic centres. This is especially notable in FID, where the communicative intention belongs to the Reported-Speaker, like in any other kind of reported discourse, while verbal tenses and pronominal reference draw their anaphoric orientation from the Reporting-Speaker. However, spatio-temporal indexicals hinge on the Reported-Speaker: thus, one regularly finds adverbs such as *tomorrow* instead of *on the following day*. In practice, FID implements a kind of “dual voice” that features the characters' thoughts as an autonomous “focus of awareness” over and above the mental attitudes that omniscient writers can assign their characters (Doron 1991, 55–57). This duality is behind the semantic formalisations of Doron (1991), Schlenker (2004) and Eckardt (2015). Adopting Schlenker's convention, this paper will contrast upper-/lowercase (i.e., *NUNC/nunc*) to distinguish the two spatio-temporal deictic centres respectively linked to the Reporting- and Reported-Speaker. This underlines the hybrid nature of FID: it resembles IndD with respect to the Reporting-Speaker-oriented treatment of pronominal reference and (limited to past-oriented IndD) tenses, but is like DirD as far as spatio-temporal indexicals are concerned.

The peculiarity of FID, *vis-à-vis* IndD, is highlighted in particular by the use of syntactic devices that are typically found in the oral register: interjections, exclamations, interrogative structures, as well as all types of disrupted syntax (repetition, hesitation, displacement, suspended sentences, anacoluthon). These forms of expression allow FID to reveal the characters' mental attitude and convey their emotional (e.g., joy, regret), epistemic (e.g., doubt), or evidential perspective (e.g., lack of information). Such devices are also obviously found in DirD, but are banned from IndD owing to its paraphrastic nature, which coerces any kind of illocutive act into a declarative mould. FID differs, however, from both DirD and IndD in that it dispenses with any introductory *verbum dicendi/cogitandi/sentiendi*. This is consistent with the first adjective in its denomination (“free”). However, absence of syntactic subordination does not entail absence of introductory elements of any kind. These may be missing, as in (1a) below, which can be defined as an *ex abrupto* FID (i.e., out of the blue). Alternatively, they can variously emerge in the adjacent co-text, as shown by the underlined part of (1b). As these examples show, identification of a FID requires active interpretation by the reader, since it is impossible to isolate con-

stant syntactic features. Note that in this paper the sections of reported discourse are introduced and closed by the appropriate super-/subscript (e.g., <sup>FID</sup> . . . <sub>FID</sub>).<sup>3</sup>

(1) a. Capuana, *Profumo* (p. 162)

Chiusi i vetri e la imposta, cominciò a togliersi, davanti lo specchio, le forcine dai capelli. Si vedeva pallida, un po' dimagrita, con occhi straniti. <sup>FID</sup> Sì, Patrizio e il dottore avevano ragione: era malata tuttavia. Perché voleva nascondere? <sub>FID</sub> I suoi nervi fremevano. Pure — e si annusava ripetutamente le mani — <sup>FID</sup> nessuna traccia di odor di zàgara! Ma non voleva dir nulla! <sub>FID</sub> Abbassò il lume, si spogliò frettolosamente, ed entrata nel letto, cacciò la testa sotto la coperta per addormentarsi più presto. 'Once she had closed the window and the shutter, she began to remove the pins from her hair in front of the mirror. She looked pale, somewhat thin, with bewildered eyes. <sup>FID</sup> Yes, Patrizio and the doctor were right: she was still ill. Why did she want to hide it? <sub>FID</sub> Her nerves twitched. Yet — and she sniffed her hands over and over — <sup>FID</sup> no trace of orange blossom smell! But that didn't mean anything! <sub>FID</sub> She lowered the light, undressed hastily, and once in bed she stuck her head under the blanket to fall asleep more quickly.'

b. Quarantotti Gambini, *Le redini bianche* (p. 36)

<sup>FID</sup> Quanto sarebbe stato bello poter un giorno (a questo pensiero il cuore gli sobbalzava, e sentiva attrazione e paura) dormire con Falco. E quanto gli sarebbe piaciuto già adesso dormire una notte abbracciato con la pecorella Liletta. <sub>FID</sub>  
'<sup>FID</sup> How nice it would have been to be able one day (his heart leapt at the thought, and he felt attraction and fear) to sleep with Falco. And how much he would have liked right now to sleep one night hugging the little sheep Liletta. <sub>FID</sub>'

### 3 Temporality and aspect

FID implies a mechanism of tense backshifting (as in 3) with respect to the tenses used in the supposedly corresponding DirD. This also occurs in past-oriented InDD, as in (2b) *vis-à-vis* (2a). In Italian – a *consecutio temporum* language – backshifting normally involves, in contrast to DirD, the Imperfect for the Present, the Plu-

<sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, the Italian literary examples are taken from a corpus of 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup>-century literary fiction (see Bertinetto 2003).

perfect for a Past, and the Future-in-the-Past for the Future.<sup>4</sup> These three tenses presuppose a “relative”, i.e., anaphoric, time anchor (Pluperfect and Future-in-the-Past), or at least they do so in the most common usage (Imperfect). Thus, they can be anchored in the reference time provided by the Reported-Speaker’s *nunc* to convey the three basic “relative time” orientations: retrospectivity, simultaneity, prospectivity.

- (2) a. DirD: Teo disse: “Sono stanco; ho lavorato molto e lavorerò ancora fino a tarda notte”.  
 ‘Teo said: “I’m tired; I have worked a lot and will still work until late at night”.’
- b. IndD: Teo disse <sup>IndD</sup>che era stanco; aveva lavorato molto e avrebbe lavorato ancora fino a tarda notte.<sub>IndD</sub>  
 ‘Teo said <sup>IndD</sup>that he was tired; he had worked a lot and would still work until late at night.’<sub>IndD</sub>
- (3) FID: Tomasi di Lampedusa, *Il Gattopardo* (p. 33)  
 Ripiegò il biglietto, se lo pose in tasca e si mise a ridere forte. <sup>FID</sup>Quel Málvica! Era stato sempre un coniglio. Non aveva compreso niente, e adesso tremava. E lasciava il palazzo in balia dei servi: questa volta sì che lo avrebbe ritrovato vuoto!<sub>FID</sub>  
 ‘He folded up the letter, put it in his pocket and began laughing out loud. <sup>FID</sup>That fool Málvica! He had always been a rabbit. He hadn’t understood a thing, and now he was panic-stricken. And he was abandoning his palace to the mercy of his servants: this time he would definitely find it empty on his return!’<sub>FID</sub>’

Besides localising the event on the timeline, the three above-mentioned tenses also convey aspectual values. This is the ultimate reason for the frequent use of the Imperfect in the FID of Romance languages, since this tense expresses temporally-undefined simultaneity in the past, i.e., it designates events that are in progress – or else situations that hold – at *nunc*. However, some authors suggest that the Imperfect has semantic properties that make it especially suitable for FID. Becker (2021), emphasising the aspect component, writes that FID events are “un(der)specified” with respect to their temporal extension, and this indeed is one of the most characteristic values of the Imperfect. Giorgi (2015) highlights instead the modal values

<sup>4</sup> In modern Italian, the Future-in-the-Past morphologically coincides with the Compound Conditional. However, until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the preferred option was the Simple Conditional, and this can still be observed in 20<sup>th</sup>-century writers with an eye to tradition.

of the Imperfect, typically found in its “ludic” (e.g., *facciamo che tu eri un principe* ‘let’s pretend that you are a prince’), “oneiric” (e.g., *ho sognato che ero un principe* ‘I dreamed that I was a prince’) or “hypothetical” uses (e.g., *se eri onesto. . .* ‘had you been honest. . .’). This led Giorgi to identify counterfactuality (or, more exactly, a so-called “anti-speaker requirement”) as the Imperfect’s deep nature, which supposedly explains its propensity to be linked to the Reported-Speaker’s *nunc*.

The flaw in Giorgi’s proposal is that, in FID, the Imperfect does not normally contain modal values, but rather canonical imperfectivity. The frequency with which it appears in FID is a mere consequence of the frequency with which the Reported-Speaker refers to an imperfective event whose temporal trace includes her/his experiential *nunc*. In addition to the already quoted examples, consider the following:

(4) D’Arzo, *Casa d’altri* (pp. 31–32)

Stavan lì ad aspettarmi due dirigenti delle Figlie di Maria, di Grappada, giù a valle. Erano venute su a monte per una storia più vecchia di me: un pellegrinaggio ad Oropa o a Loreto o magari anche in tutti e due i posti, che un po’ per mia colpa si rimandava sempre a un altr’anno, e che ormai bisognava pur fare. <sup>FID</sup>Oramai bisognava pur fare,<sup>FID</sup> ripetevano senza guardarmi, <sup>FID</sup>questo era fuor discussione, si sa. . . Tutte le quote erano già state raccolte. Veramente non tutte: il mio elenco, per esempio, mancava. La montagna cominciava già a mormorare. . . niente di grave: mezze voci soltanto. . . Almeno per ora, intendiamoci. Mi rendevo ben conto? Capivo?<sup>FID</sup>

‘Two directors of the Daughters of Mary from Grappada, down in the valley, were waiting for me. They had come up the mountain for a story older than me: a pilgrimage to Oropa or Loreto or maybe even to both places, which, partly my fault, had been endlessly postponed from year to year, and which now had to be faced. <sup>FID</sup>It should finally be done,<sup>FID</sup> they repeated without looking at me, <sup>FID</sup>there was no way round it, it was clear . . . All the money had already been collected. Actually, not all: those on my list, for example, were missing. The mountain was beginning to talk . . . nothing serious: only rumours . . . At least for now, mind you. Did I realise? Did I understand?<sup>FID</sup>’

In fact, in FID one can even find (albeit rarely) the habitual Imperfect, namely another prominent imperfective value, but quite distinct from the largely prevalent continuous/progressive value (Bertinetto/Lenci 2012).<sup>5</sup> This is the case with *assassinava* ‘murdered’ and *istudiava* ‘studied’ in the following passage. The remaining

5 Progressive and continuous aspect should actually be kept separate (Bertinetto 1986; 1997). This is, however, irrelevant to the present discussion, as they both express simultaneity in the past.

Imperfects, built on stative verbs, designate instead a condition that the Report-ed-Speaker considers permanent and characterising.

(5) Piazza, *L'attrice* (pp. 50–51)

Cominciò a parlarmi de' suoi compagni e loro fece una raccomandazione, che non mancava di alcun requisito. <sup>FID</sup>L'impresario era un picchiapetto che mangiava orazioni, ma aveva un core di pietra e assassinava ne' conti que' ch'erano nella impresa seco lui interessati; la seconda donna, una stupida nella sua indolenza ingrassata, che mai non istudiava una parte, buona soltanto per la tavola e il gotto; la serva, una sfacciata che aveva l'applauso di tutti i lacché di Milano, perché la sua casa serviva lor di riposo dopo le corse.<sub>FID</sub>

'He began telling me about his companions and gave them a warning, leaving no detail out. <sup>FID</sup>The impresario was a zealot who prayed a lot, but had a heart of stone and swindled those who were interested in doing business with him; the second woman, an overweight indolent fool, who never put her mind to her part, and only cared about eating and drinking; the servant, an insolent thing who had the approval of all the lackeys in Milan, because they used her house to take a rest after all their running around.<sub>FID</sub>'

In addition, the Imperfect in FID and IndD can, albeit only very occasionally, convey prospectivity, thereby unusually expressing a perfective value. This is, so to speak, the exception that proves the rule. The prospective Imperfect is a typical colloquial use, which replaces the stylistically more austere Future-in-the-Past. The English Past Progressive, as shown in the translations below, shares this semantic value.

- (6) a. IndD: Luca ha detto <sup>IndD</sup>che veniva un paio d'ore dopo. <sub>IndD</sub>  
 'Luca said <sup>IndD</sup>that he was coming a couple of hours later.'<sub>IndD</sub>  
 b. FID: Pino si soffermò a riflettere. <sup>FID</sup>Luca veniva tra un paio d'ore. Che fare?<sub>FID</sub>  
 'Pino pondered the situation. <sup>FID</sup>Luca was coming in a couple of hours. What to do?'<sub>FID</sub>

What (4–6) show is that the FID Imperfect preserves its canonical aspectual values, with no need to activate the relatively marginal modal values which are a possible, but by no means necessary, component. This disconfirms Giorgi's claim, and rather seems to support Becker's notion of "un(der)specification", which also seems to be supported by the observation that the Simple Past is ruled out of FID unless it receives a Pluperfect reading, like *fece* 's/he did' in (7). This is, however, a very marginal possibility in modern Italian.

- (7) Matteo Villani, *Cronaca* (first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century; quoted by Mortara Garavelli 1985, 130)

[la reina] s'ingnocchiò davanti al re, dicendo come quei cavalieri non aveano colpa di quello accidente. <sup>FID</sup>Ma se colpa c'era, era sua, però che per femminile consiglio, volendo più attrarre a sé il suo amore, non credendo fare cosa che offendere lo potesse, li fece dare quella cosa a bere, ovvero a mangiare: e però se giustizia se ne avea a fare, ella era degna per la sua ignoranza d'ogni pena, e non coloro ch'erano innocenti.<sub>FID</sub>

'[the queen] knelt in front of the king, saying that those knights were not to blame for the accident. <sup>FID</sup>But if there was any fault it was hers, because, on feminine advice, wanting to draw his love closer to her, and not believing she was doing anything that could offend him, she had made them give him that thing to drink, or to eat: and so if justice had to do be done, she was deserving of any punishment because of her ignorance, and not them who were innocent.<sub>FID</sub>'

According to Becker (2021), the ban on the Simple Past casts doubt on the hypothesis that, in FID, “tense is interpreted with respect to the speaker’s [i.e. the Reporting-Speaker’s (PMB)] *NUNC* as claimed in the literature on Germanic languages”. However, the very nature of FID requires a double anchoring in both *NUNC* and *nunc*; the Reporting-Speaker refers to a past moment at which the Reported-Speaker expressed his/her thought. This is the real reason why the Italian Simple Past is excluded from such contexts, since this tense is alien to any sort of “relative (or anaphoric) time” semantics (unless, as previously mentioned, it is unconventionally read as a functional equivalent of the Pluperfect, as in 7). In other words, the ban on the Simple Past depends on its inherent-aspectual nature as a strictly deictic perfective Past. By contrast, the three tenses most frequently used in Romance FID – Imperfect, Pluperfect, Future-in-the-Past – are structurally suitable to fulfil the three basic combinations of “relative time” and aspect: imperfective simultaneity (Imperfect), perfective retrospectivity (Pluperfect), and perfective prospectivity (Future-in-the-Past).

As a matter of fact the very use of the Pluperfect and the Future-in-the-Past disconfirms Becker’s claim. It is not the case that FID events are inherently un(der)specified: although this fits with the imperfective view prototypically conveyed by the Imperfect, it is incompatible with the perfective view expressed by the other two tenses. To avoid any misunderstanding, it is worth clarifying that the un(der)specification at stake here should not be understood as a mere lack of specification of the event’s temporal boundaries. These may remain implicit, and indeed they often are. However, a Pluperfect minimally implies the speaker’s assumption that the given event came to an end before the contextual reference time, even though the exact temporal localization remains vague. Similarly, a Future-in-the-Past implies that the prospective event is perceived by the speaker as one that will unfold in its entirety

(and possibly already has). By contrast, any Imperfect expressing simultaneity in the past presupposes, owing to its imperfective nature, the speaker's assumption regarding the non-visualisation of the event's terminal boundary, hence its indeterminate duration. Even admitting that speakers may be aware of the subsequent course of events, as they often are, in using a simultaneity-in-the-past Imperfect they commit themselves to present the state of affairs as it appeared to the event participants at the crucial moment, namely characterised by an undecidable temporal development.

In conclusion, the Imperfect has no privileged status in FID, apart from mere statistical prominence. Yet, the special position of the Imperfect in FID is also highlighted by Doron (1991, 60–61), who unexpectedly speaks of “imparfait” with reference to the English FID. What she presumably had in mind was tense usage in the French FID. This is at any rate surprising, given that Giorgi (2015, 242ss.) contrasts the Romance Imperfect with the English Simple Past.<sup>6</sup> Most likely, the reason for Doron's unconventional labelling of the English Simple Past is that, with stative verbs, this tense can express imperfectivity, as in (8a). Besides, under negation, even an eventive verb can receive a stative and imperfective reading, as shown by (8b).

- (8) a. <sup>FID</sup>Tomorrow was Monday, Monday, the beginning of another school week!<sub>FID</sub>  
[Lawrence, *Women in Love*; example quoted by many authors since at least Banfield 1982]
- b. <sup>FID</sup>The new ration did not start till tomorrow and he had only four cigarettes left.<sub>FID</sub>  
[from Giorgi 2015, 244]

Furthermore, the English Simple Past can also express habituality, another imperfective value (see example (5) above). Finally, with stative verbs the English Simple Past exhibits the same flexibility as the Romance Imperfect, as far as the so-called “double access reading” is concerned (Ogihara 1995). This is shown in (9a), where *was ill* may have a simultaneous and a retrospective interpretation at *nunc*, just like *era malato* in (9b).

- (9) a. ‘Mary said <sup>IndD</sup>that (at that moment / the week before) Peter was ill.<sub>IndD</sub>
- b. Maria disse <sup>IndD</sup>che (in quel momento / la settimana precedente) Pietro era malato.<sub>IndD</sub>’

<sup>6</sup> Giorgi (2015, 244–245) only mentions the Imperfect and Pluperfect as FID tenses in Italian, but the choice of admissible tenses is much larger, as discussed in this paper.



This possibility does not extend to the corresponding German tense (Eckardt 2015, 190). In this language, the two readings must be appropriately expressed as in (10). Note, however, that Eckardt (2015, 91, *passim*) implicitly hints at imperfectivity in her treatment of the German Praeteritum (corresponding morphologically to the English Simple Past) as used in FID. Indeed, she contrasts “simple aspect” (Praeteritum) vs. “perfect” (Pluperfect), where “simple aspect” supposedly refers to the inherent aspectual ambivalence of the German Praeteritum.

- (10) a. Marty hörte, <sup>IndD</sup>dass Sam krank war.<sub>IndD</sub>  
 ‘Marty heard <sup>IndD</sup>that Sam was ill.’<sub>IndD</sub>  
 b. Marty hörte, <sup>IndD</sup>dass Sam krank gewesen war.<sub>IndD</sub>  
 ‘Marty heard <sup>IndD</sup>that Sam had been ill.’<sub>IndD</sub>

A similarity between the Romance Imperfect and the English and German Simple Past is their ability to express prospectivity in FID. The Praeteritum *sang* in (11a; from Plank 1986, 300) corresponds to the Present “pro futuro” *sing* of its DirD equivalent in (11b), while the Italian version in (11a’) features the Imperfect (see also Eckardt 2015, 101).

- (11) a. FID: <sup>FID</sup>Morgen war Dienstag und da sang er wieder einmal dort in Oberuzwil.<sub>FID</sub>  
 ‘Tomorrow was Tuesday and he was singing again there in Oberuzwil.’  
 b. DirD: Er dachte: “Morgen ist Dienstag und da sing ich wieder einmal dort in Oberuzwil”.  
 ‘He thought: “Tomorrow is Tuesday and I’ll be singing there again in Oberuzwil”.’  
 a’. FID: <sup>FID</sup>Ieri era martedì e lui cantava nuovamente là, a Oberuzwil.<sub>FID</sub>

By contrast, the so-called “quotative” use of the Spanish and Italian Imperfect (Leonetti/Escandell-Vidal 2003) is totally alien to English and German.<sup>7</sup> See, for instance: *Franco veniva stasera* ‘Franco was expected to come tonight’. Actually, such sentences do not necessarily presuppose the quotation of something previously said, for they can also express an offhand thought. Hence, a more comprehensive label might be “potential” Imperfect.

<sup>7</sup> This use is apparently not found in French (Becker 2021). Leonetti/Escandell-Vidal consider it an instance of coercion. Conte (1998, 71) and Bazzanella (1994, 101–105) call it “epistemico-doxastico”, and Calaresu (2004, 198) “evidenziale citativo”. According to Leonetti/Escandell-Vidal, it requires telic verbs; but consider, by contrast, the stative predicate in: *Non credo che Gianni verrà; questa notte era di guardia al Pronto Soccorso*.

## 4 Covert backshifting

Vandelanotte (2005, 62) writes that “relative” tenses are the unmarked tenses in IndD and therefore play the same role as “absolute” (or deictic) tenses in DirD. Indeed, a past-oriented IndD projects a time reference (*nunc*) that is distinct from the utterance time (*NUNC*), be the latter real (as in oral narratives) or fictitious (as in written narratives). However, “absolute” tenses are not at all infrequent in IndD, as shown by Vandelanotte’s own sample of COBUILD texts (p. 67). When this occurs, the tense is directly anchored in the Reporting-Speaker’s *NUNC*. Thus (12) is equivalent to saying that Jill is currently at work.

(12) IndD: Phil says <sup>IndD</sup>that Jill is at work.<sub>IndD</sub>

This highlights a crucial difference between IndD and FID: while the latter can only be past-oriented, inasmuch as it is part of a narrative, an IndD can also be found in spontaneous conversation and may therefore directly hinge on the Reporting-Speaker’s deictic centre. An IndD tense can thus have a temporal anchoring that is independent of the introducing predicate. This is shown in (13a), where the Present Progressive and the spatio-temporal adverbs are deictically linked to the *NUNC* of the Reporting-Speaker. In contrast, the tenses and the spatio-temporal adverbs of a past-oriented IndD like (13b) are anaphorically linked to the Reported-Speaker’s *nunc*.

(13) a. IndD: Vin said/says/will say <sup>IndD</sup>that you are working here today.<sub>IndD</sub>  
 b. IndD: Vin said <sup>IndD</sup>that you were working there that very day.<sub>IndD</sub>

To sum up: in FID, tenses and spatio-temporal adverbs are both *nunc*-anchored, but with the difference that the former anchor anaphorically, the latter deictically (as a kind of “displaced” deixis). In IndD, by contrast, tenses and spatio-temporal adverbs can anchor either deictically in *NUNC* (present-oriented IndD), or anaphorically in *nunc* (past-oriented IndD). Thus, IndD has additional possibilities in terms of tense selection for it does not obey the backshifting constraint. Does this imply that FID can only make use of the three canonical backshifting tenses? The answer to this question is twofold. On the one hand – as shown in (14c, 15a, 16) – FID does indeed have further options; on the other hand, there are crucial structural differences *vis-à-vis* IndD.

Let us first consider the Compound Past. Although much less frequent than in IndD, it can be found in FID (see Kronning 2011, 286) provided the relevant portion of the narrative is built on the “historical” Present, as in (14c). IndD, by contrast, is not subject to such a constraint, as shown in (14a–b). Besides, in (14b) a kind of “double access” can be observed, with double localisation of the reference time, since the resulting state (the market collapse) is regarded as relevant at both the past *nunc* and

the (obviously current) *NUNC*. This is a logical possibility, because the relevance of a result may be evaluated at different reference points and by different individuals. If it were not so, namely if the resulting state were only at stake at *nunc*, one would find the Pluperfect. This differs from canonical instances of “double access” such as in (9), where it concerns the event localisation rather than the reference time, and where the two temporal indications are alternative rather than both relevant.

- (14) a. IndD: Lara remarks<sup>IndD</sup> that the market has collapsed.<sup>IndD</sup>  
 b. IndD: Lara remarked<sup>IndD</sup> that the market has collapsed.<sup>IndD</sup>  
 c. FID: Maraini, *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucria* (p. 35)

I disegni sono arditi e fantasiosi, rigorosi nelle forme, rispettosi della tradizione ma come abitati da un pensiero notturno, malizioso e sfolgorante. Marianna aveva ammirato le teste delle chimere che non avevano forma di leone, come vuole il mito, ma portavano sul collo una testa donna. Osservandole una seconda volta si era accorta che assomigliavano stranamente a lei e questo l’aveva un poco stupita; <sup>FID</sup>come ha fatto a ritrarla in quelle strane bestie mitiche avendola vista una volta sola e nel giorno del suo matrimonio, cioè quando lei contava appena tredici anni?<sup>FID</sup>

Sotto quelle teste bionde dai larghi occhi azzurri si allunga un corpo di leone coperto di riccioli bizzarri [ . . ]

‘The drawings are bold and imaginative, with rigorous shapes, respectful of tradition but as if inhabited by mischievous and radiant nocturnal thoughts. Marianna had admired the heads of the chimeras that did not take the form of a lion, as myth would have it, but bore a woman’s head on their necks. While observing them a second time, she realised that they strangely resembled her and this had surprised her a little; <sup>FID</sup>how has he managed to portray her in those strange mythical beasts having seen her only once and on her wedding day, that is, when she was just thirteen years old?’<sup>FID</sup>

Below those blond heads with big blue eyes, extends a lion’s body covered with bizarre curls [ . . ].’

The Italian Compound Past can preserve its original aspectual value as “perfect” also in FID, just as in IndD. This value persists in modern Italian, in the relevant contexts, despite the “aoristic drift” this tense has undergone (Squartini/Bertinetto 2000). There is, however, a substantial difference between IndD and FID. Although both presuppose two deictic centers, as noted in section 2, a FID Compound Past necessarily anchors in the Reported-Speaker’s deictic centre (*nunc*), whereas an IndD Compound Past hinges on the Reporting-Speaker’s deictic centre (*NUNC*) even though the refer-

ence time has a double anchoring, as argued for (14b). As observed, a FID Compound Past can only be triggered by a “historical” Present in the adjacent co-text, as argued for (14c). In practice, it corresponds functionally to a canonical FID Pluperfect.

Equally rare, the Present too can appear in FID, once again within a Present-based co-text, as in (15a). Here the Present *aime* corresponds to the Imperfect (*aimait*) that would be expected in a Past-based narrative. The same backshifted interpretation would, of course, apply to a Present used in an IndD embedded in a “historical” Present narrative, as in (15b). Example (15c), on the other hand, is less interesting because it merely features the “omnitemporal” Present, denoting events regarded as a universal truth, and therefore under no syntactic obligation. More interesting, but equally rare, is the insertion of a “historical” Present in a FID, as noted in fn. 8 relative to example (17).

- (15) a. Pierre est en pleine déprime. <sup>FID</sup>Personne ne l'aime. Déjà, quand il allait à l'école maternelle, il sentait que tout le monde le détestait. <sub>FID</sub>  
 'Pierre is very depressed. <sup>FID</sup>Nobody likes him. Even when he was at nursery school he felt that everybody hated him' <sub>FID</sub>  
 (Kronning 2011, 291)
- b. Il est près de six heures, et ma Femme de chambre dit <sup>IndD</sup>qu'il faut que je m'habille. <sub>IndD</sub>  
 (Kronning 2011, 291; from Laclós, *Les liaisons dangereuses*)  
 'It is nearly 6 o'clock, and my chambermaid says <sup>IndD</sup>that it is time for me to get dressed.' <sub>IndD</sub>
- c. Sciascia, *Il contesto* (p. 13)  
 Ma l'ipotesi resisteva, Rogas trovava gli elementi per non abbandonarla: [. . .] <sup>FID</sup>l'assassino poteva aver commesso, per una delle sue due vittime, un errore: una informazione sbagliata, un inganno della memoria, un caso di omonimia (fonogramma: c'era stato o c'era un altro procuratore Varga, un altro giudice Sanza? - ché a certi uffici, si sa, sono votate famiglie intere, e per generazioni) [. . .] <sub>FID</sub>  
 'Yet the hypothesis held up, Rogas found reasons for not abandoning it: [. . .] <sup>FID</sup>the murderer could have made a mistake in the case of one of his two victims: erroneous information, a lapse of memory, a case of homonymy (phonogram: had there been or was there another district attorney Varga, another judge Sanza? - for, as everyone knows, entire families dedicate themselves generation after generation to certain public offices) [. . .] <sub>FID</sub>'

A similar observation applies to the Simple Future, which once again occurs relatively frequently in IndD and is definitely rare in FID. The event is deictically

anchored in the Reporting-Speaker's *NUNC* in (16a) and anaphorically in the Reported-Speaker's *nunc* in (16b).

- (16) a. InDD: Le ho chiesto <sup>InDD</sup>dove andava<sub>InDD</sub> e mi ha detto <sup>InDD</sup>che non lo sapeva; mi telefonerà.<sub>InDD</sub>  
 'I asked her <sup>InDD</sup>where she was going<sub>InDD</sub> and she said <sup>InDD</sup>that she didn't know; she will call me.'<sub>InDD</sub>
- b. FID: Maraini, *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucria* (p. 25)  
 Voltando la testa fa in tempo a scorgere un pezzo della gonnella di Agata che scompare dietro la "casena" fra gli spunzoni delle agavi.  
<sup>FID</sup>Ora come farà a continuare il quadro? dovrà pescare nella memoria, tanto sa già che non torneranno mai a raggrupparsi davanti a lei come hanno fatto oggi dopo tanto insistere e aspettare.<sub>FID</sub>  
 'Turning her head she is just in time to glimpse a part of Agata's skirt disappearing behind the hut between the spikes of the agaves.  
<sup>FID</sup>Now how will he continue the painting? he will have to rifle his memory, since he already knows that they will never come back to gather before her as they did today after so much insisting and waiting.'<sub>FID</sub>

To sum up, the Present, the Compound Past, and the Simple Future may be found in Italian FID, albeit rarely. These instances may be regarded as a kind of "covert backshifting" licensed by the "historical" Present of the adjacent co-text. As far as the present author is aware, this is an unprecedented observation. Whether or not such an exceptional tense usage is limited to Italian, or may be found in other Romance languages, must be left to future investigations. The results reported here offer a useful hint: one should look for instances of FID embedded in "historical" Present co-texts.

## 5 Mood

Equally rare in Italian FID is the use of the "narrative" Infinitive (as it might be called). This should not be confused with the standard uses of the Infinitive, which is in most cases a dependent tense (e.g., controlled by a modal verb). The "narrative" Infinitive was fairly widespread among pre-modern Italian writers, quite independently of FID. Mortara Garavelli (1985, 140) cites the following passage by Daniello Bartoli (late 16<sup>th</sup> century).<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Example (17) also shows a "historical" Present (*vuole*) inserted into a FID, with the introductory context couched in the Simple Past.

- (17) Il re, avvisatone, mandò loro un dispettoso Via di colà: <sup>FID</sup>vadano e non tornino: ché non vuole udirli ora né mai: perché, quanto a coscienza, governarsi con chi ne sa quanto essi e più d'essi.<sub>FID</sub>  
 'The king, having been warned, gave them a vindictive dismissal: <sup>FID</sup>they were to go and not come back: for he does not want to listen to them now nor ever: because, as far as conscience is concerned, they had to deal with those who knew as much as them and more than them.<sub>FID</sub>'

This stylistic device is clearly inspired by classical models. It was favoured by writers of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century (e.g., Guerrazzi), but can occasionally be found in stylistically elaborate 20<sup>th</sup>-century authors. There is a markedly archaic flavour to this usage, which shows that attempting to mimic the spoken language is not an essential feature of FID, although emphasis has sometimes been put on this feature (Cimaglia 2008). Example (18b) shows a clear division of labour between the Simple and the Compound Infinitive: the former subsumes the imperfective values that would normally be conveyed by the Imperfect, while the latter expresses the perfective retrospective meaning normally conveyed by the Pluperfect.

- (18) a. Tommaseo, *Fede e bellezza* (p. 111)  
 Rispose del no ringraziando: <sup>FID</sup>la sua vita essere omai sacra al vero, e alle traversie che attendono gli amici del vero; non volere i proprii tedii addossare a donna cresciuta nella serena solitudine della domestica pace.<sub>FID</sub>  
 'He answered no, offering his thanks: <sup>FID</sup>his life was now consecrated to truth, and to the hardships that await the friends of truth; he did not want to burden with his own irritations a woman who was raised in the calm solitude of domestic peace.<sub>FID</sub>'
- b. Tarchetti, *Fosca* (p. 105)  
 Un giorno — mi s'era mostrato già da tempo agitatissimo — entrò improvvisamente nella mia camera col volto estremamente turbato; mi disse non aver mai avuto il coraggio di confidarmelo, <sup>FID</sup>ora essere necessario, benché troppo tardi; aver egli contratto da celibe alcuni debiti ascendenti a somme enormi, più di metà la fortuna della mia casa, aver sperato poterli pagare coi capitali che il sequestro impreveduto rendeva ora inalienabili, e aver perciò firmato cambiali la cui scadenza imminente gli apriva le porte del carcere: preferire uccidersi.<sub>FID</sub> E levata una pistola, fece atto di esplodersela al viso.  
 'One day — he had appeared very agitated for some time now — he suddenly entered my room with an extremely troubled face; he told me he had never had the courage to confide it to me, <sup>FID</sup>now it was necessary, although too late; when a bachelor, he had contracted several debts

amounting to enormous sums, more than half the value of my house, he had hoped to be able to repay them with the capital that the unforeseen seizure now made inalienable, and had therefore signed bills of exchange whose imminent expiry was opening the doors of prison for him: he preferred to kill himself.<sup>FID</sup> And having raised a gun, he made the gesture of firing it in his face.'

Needless to say, not all the Infinitives to be found in FID should be so interpreted. To illustrate, those in (19a) are implicitly governed by a deontic obligation verb, while the independent Infinitives in (19b) are shaped according to a type of exclamative construction used in colloquial Italian.

(19) a. Imbriani, *Dio ne scampi dagli Orsenigo* (p. 31)

Così, sciolto l'imbroglione con Maurizio, sarebbe finita la peggior causa di disperazione per l'Almerinda.<sup>FID</sup> Quanto a' garbugli finanziari, anche li, tagliar netto. E, prima di tutto, rifiutare qualunque altro nuovo prestito a' fratelli, qualunque altra firma alle loro cambiali. [. . .] Poi, senza indugio, reformare l'andamento della casa; richiamar la bambina dall'educatorio; dirigere e sorvegliare ogni cosa; smettere la servitù superflua. . .<sup>FID</sup>

'Thus, having resolved the misunderstanding with Maurizio, the worst cause of despair would end for Almerinda.<sup>FID</sup> As for financial entanglements, there too, one should cut clean. And, first of all, refuse to make any more loans to his brothers, sign any more of their bills of exchange. [. . .] Then, without delay, reform the running of the house; call the child back from boarding-school; direct and supervise everything; dismiss unnecessary servants. . .<sup>FID</sup>'

b. Aleramo, *Una donna* (p. 102)

Il sito era meraviglioso, una stretta valle rimbombante di cascate, verde d'abeti e di pini, incorniciata di gigantesche cime candide. La mia infanzia, la mia infanzia che tornava coi paesaggi severi, coi profumi selvaggi, cogli ampi suoni semplici! Da quanto tempo sepolta nella memoria?<sup>FID</sup> Oh, poter essere sola col mio figliuolo fra quei boschi, educarlo alla scuola della natura, fare che nel lontano avvenire l'onda dei ricordi infantili non giungesse mai a lui così straziante come a me in quel punto [. . .]!<sup>FID</sup>

'The site was wonderful, a narrow valley filled with the noise of waterfalls, green with fir and pine trees, framed by gigantic white peaks. My childhood, my childhood that returned with austere landscapes, wild scents, broad simple sounds! How long has it been buried in my memory?<sup>FID</sup> Oh, if I could only be alone with my son in those woods, educate him in nature's school, ensure that in the distant future the wave of childhood memories would never reach him as heartrending as it reached me at that point [. . .]!<sup>FID</sup>'

Unsurprisingly, fully-fledged dependent Infinitives, both Simple and Compound, can be found in FID, and obviously in IndD (see example 20a), when the subject of the reported dependent clause is coreferent with the Reported-Speaker. This is a standard rule of Italian syntax, where the alternation finite vs non-finite follows the “switch reference” logic.

- (20) a. IndD: Leo affermò/afferma/affermerà <sup>IndD</sup>di avere/aver avuto molta sfortuna.<sub>IndD</sub>  
 ‘Leo claimed/claims/will claim <sup>IndD</sup>to have/have had a lot of bad luck.’<sub>IndD</sub>
- b. IndD: Leo affermò/afferma/affermerà <sup>IndD</sup>che Maria ha/ha avuto molta sfortuna.<sub>IndD</sub>  
 ‘Leo claimed/claims/will claim <sup>IndD</sup>that Maria has/has had a lot of bad luck.’<sub>IndD</sub>

Both the “narrative” Infinitive (see 18) and the Conditional in its purely temporal function as a Future-in-the-Past show that the Indicative is not the only mood to appear in Italian FID. In fact, the quotations reported above also feature some Subjunctive mood forms. Further illustrations of standard modal uses of the Subjunctive and the Conditional are provided here.

Firstly, we find canonical hypothetical constructions with the Subjunctive in the protasis and the Conditional in the apodosis. The compound forms often transpose the simple forms of the corresponding DirD, unless they convey counterfactuality.

- (21) Vassalli, *La chimera* (p. 100)

<sup>FID</sup>In quel frattempo,<sub>FID</sub> spiegò — e gli occhi gli si dilatavano parlando, la voce gli tremava di collera — <sup>FID</sup>la scomunica si sarebbe estesa a chiunque li avesse aiutati ed ospitati; [. . .] Quando poi uno scomunicato fosse morto, non sarebbe stato sepolto in terra consacrata, vicino ai suoi genitori e ai suoi parenti che erano vissuti nella grazia e nel timore di Dio, e nel rispetto delle sue leggi; ma si sarebbe dovuto interrare alla bell’e meglio in un luogo qualsiasi, senza rito funebre e senza preghiere, perché i vermi si cibassero del suo corpo e i Diavoli della sua anima. [. . .]<sub>FID</sub>

<sup>FID</sup>In meantime,<sub>FID</sub> he explained — and his eyes widened as he spoke, his voice trembled with rage — <sup>FID</sup>the excommunication would extend to anyone who had helped and hosted them; [. . .] And when one these excommunicated persons would die, he would not be buried in consecrated land, close to parents and relatives who had lived in the grace and fear of God, obeying his laws; he had to be buried in any place whatsoever, without any funeral rite and without prayers, so that worms would feed on his body and Devils on his soul. [. . .]<sub>FID</sub>



secondly, we find a wide array of Subjunctive and Conditional forms expressing various modal nuances, with backshifted compound forms in the relevant cases. Although not exhaustive, the following examples illustrate a range of meanings: exhortative (22a), concessive (22b), evidential (22c), attenuative (22d).

(22) a. Pirandello, *Il fu Mattia Pascal* (p. 70)

Eppure, forse, non sarebbe accaduto nulla di grave, se una mattina Romilda [. . .] non m'avesse buttato le braccia al collo, scongiurandomi tutta tremante che avessi pietà di lei; <sup>FID</sup>me la togliessi comunque purché via lontano, lontano dalla sua casa, lontano da quella sua madraccia, da tutti, subito, subito, subito. . .Lontano? Come potevo così subito condurla via, lontano? <sub>FID</sub>

Dopo, sì, per parecchi giorni, ancora ebbro di lei, cercai il modo, risoluto a tutto, onestamente.

'Yet, perhaps, nothing serious would have happened, if one morning Romilda [. . .] hadn't thrown her arms about my neck, begging me all atremble to have pity on her; <sup>FID</sup>would I take her away, no matter where as long as it was far away, far from her house, far from that degenerate mother of hers, from everyone, right now, right now, right now . . .

Far away? How could I take her far away so quickly? <sub>FID</sub>

Afterwards, yes, for several days, still under her spell, I looked for a way, determined to do anything, honestly.'

b. Cassola, *La casa di via Valadier* (p. 65)

"Balle" disse ad alta voce Leonardo. <sup>FID</sup>Ci credessero quegli altri scalzacani che formavano la ristretta cerchia delle sue amicizie milanesi. Nessuno di loro aveva talento. Nessuno di loro aveva la benché minima probabilità di riuscire. Erano tutti condannati al fallimento. <sub>FID</sub>

"Bullshit," Leonardo said aloud. <sup>FID</sup>Let them believe it, those other useless people who formed his close circle of Milanese friends. None of them was talented. None of them had even the slightest chance of succeeding. They were all doomed to failure. <sub>FID</sub>'

c. Vittorini, *Il garofano rosso* (p. 120)

Il padre Caffaro del greco e latino, con la sua voce dolente, mi aveva detto che facevo miracoli. La Sempresei anche mi aveva fermato e chiesto con chi avessi studiato: <sup>FID</sup>era straordinario come avessi appreso tanto se non si trattava d'un trucco. . . <sub>FID</sub> E c'era stata la Bermùda un giorno ai giardini, tanto cara, avrebbe parlato, mi promise, per non farmi pesare troppo gli esami di chimica che temevo.

- ‘Father Caffaro, the Greek and Latin teacher, with his mournful voice, had told me that I was working miracles. Pasette everyone had also stopped me and asked who I had studied with: <sup>FID</sup>it was extraordinary how I had learned so much, if it wasn’t a trick. . .<sub>FID</sub> And there had been Bermùda one day in the gardens, so kind, she would talk, she promised, so that the chemistry exams that I feared would not weigh on me so much.’
- d. Tabucchi, Piccoli equivoci senza importanza (p. 61)  
 Dissi che sì, che pareva anche a me, che non sospettava niente, <sup>FID</sup>ma insomma, forse era il caso di ripensarci, era così simpatico lo zio Tullio, il nostro gioco ora stava diventando una cosa. . . una cosa cattiva, che mi scusasse ma era quello che pensavo.<sub>FID</sub> Clelia mi guardava e taceva.  
 ‘I said yes, that it seemed to me too that he didn’t suspect anything, <sup>FID</sup>but after all, it was maybe time to think it over again, uncle Tullio was so nice, our game was now becoming something . . . something bad, she had to forgive me but that was what I thought.<sub>FID</sub> Clelia looked at me and was silent.’

## 6 Indirect discourse vs. free indirect discourse: A comparison

The preceding sections have outlined a number of similarities and divergences between IndD and FID. This section will recapitulate the issue with some additional details.

There are, of course, major syntactic differences. IndD requires an introducing predicate to establish close dependency, i.e., a *verbum cogitandi/putandi/sentiendi*. By contrast, FID does not need any introduction, and when there is one, it does not create any kind of syntactic dependency (see 1b). However, some scholars have entertained the idea that FID is embedded under a silent propositional attitude predicate. This view is shared by Giorgi (2015, 251), who claims that FID “is embedded as a complement of the introducing predicate”, but who nonetheless offers (p. 252) the examples in (23a-b), which rather suggest that FID is independent of any kind of syntactic dependency. While (23a) is a possible FID, (23b) is infelicitous, as opposed to (23c). Hence, by “embedding” Giorgi presumably means a rather abstract and syntactically fuzzy relation between a FID and the surrounding context, which often merely presupposes an act of speech/thought without explicit mention.

- (23) a. FID: <sup>FID</sup>Sarebbe partita domani,<sub>FID</sub> pensò.  
<sup>FID</sup>She would leave tomorrow,<sub>FID</sub> she thought.’

- b. ??FID: ??Pensò, <sup>FID</sup>sarebbe partita domani.<sub>FID</sub>  
 ‘She thought, <sup>FID</sup>she would leave tomorrow.<sub>FID</sub>’
- c. FID: Sara meditò. <sup>FID</sup>Sarebbe partita domani.<sub>FID</sub>  
 ‘Sara thought it over. <sup>FID</sup>She would leave tomorrow.<sub>FID</sub>’

Further arguments against the presence of an implicit propositional attitude predicate in FID comes from Russian, a *consecutio*-free language (Abrusán 2021, 864–866, quoting Sharvit). Abrusán points out that in this language there is an overt contrast between an IndD based on a *verbum dicendi/cogitandi* and a FID. In the former case, the dependent clause contains the Present (24a), whereas in the latter case it contains the Past (24b). Note that in a *consecutio* language like English a Past tense is found in both cases (see 24a’, 24b’).

- (24) a. IndD: Ivan snal, <sup>IndD</sup>čto Ol’ga rabotaet i ne stoit bespokoit’.<sub>IndD</sub>  
 a’. ‘Ivan knew <sup>IndD</sup>that Olga was working and no-one should disturb her.<sub>IndD</sub>’
- b. FID: Rassuždal pro sebja Ivan. <sup>FID</sup>Ol’ga rabotala, i eë nel’zja bylo bespokoit’.<sub>FID</sub>  
 b’. ‘Ivan reasoned within himself. <sup>FID</sup>Olga was working and no-one should disturb her.<sub>FID</sub>’

As for the convergence of IndD and FID, consider the frequent reorientation of pronominal reference, with shifting of the DirD first/second persons to the third person. This, however, should not be intended as an absolute ban on the deictic persons, which are not only easily accessible to IndD, but are also possibly found in FID under special circumstances. Since this detail falls outside the topic of the present paper, it will not be discussed further here.

Another major convergence is tense backshifting in past-oriented reported discourse. Tense backshifting and pronominal reference reorientation are direct consequences of the bivalent nature of IndD and FID, whereby the Reported-Speaker’s *nunc* is deictically anchored (as past) in the Reporting-Speaker’s *NUNC* but operates as an anaphoric anchor for the reported discourse. However, IndD and FID may diverge in the domain of temporality. As examples (12–16) show, in IndD the Present, Compound Past and Simple Future preserve their deictic orientation with respect to the utterance time (coinciding with the Reporting-Speaker’s *NUNC*). In FID, instead, the interpretation of these tenses is licensed at the Reported-Speaker’s *nunc* in order to express, respectively, simultaneity, retrospectivity and prospectivity in the past. Indeed, this kind of covert backshifting only occurs when the surrounding co-text is built on the “historical” Present (unless the FID Present is itself a “historical” Present anchored in a Past-based co-text, as noted in fn. 8 relative to 17). By contrast, the embedding co-text of an IndD may be built on any deictically-oriented tense (see

13a-b and 14a-b). Thus, the different interpretations of the Present, Compound Past and Simple Future in IndD *vis-à-vis* FID highlight a salient structural discrepancy.

A notable divergence is that IndD may not feature illocutive acts other than declaratives, owing to its paraphrastic nature. For instance, if a direct question is reframed as an indirect one, it becomes a declarative act. As an illustration, the first question in (25) would be reshaped as: ‘People were asking themselves whether it was really possible to defy public opinion to that extent’. Furthermore, the paraphrastic nature of IndD makes it alien to any kind of disrupted syntax, which is instead accessible to FID so as to mimic the spontaneity of colloquial speech. No wonder, then, that FID can include, as it often does, questions and exclamations, as shown in (25).<sup>9</sup>

(25) De Roberto, *I vicerè* (p. 229)

Gl'increduli, i curiosi, fecero capo alla polizia, ma lì furono mandati a spasso. E quel giorno stesso tutti videro il contino Raimondo al Casino dei Nobili dove giocò e chiacchierò del più e del meno, come di consueto. <sup>FID</sup>Possibile che sfidasse fino a questo punto l'opinione pubblica? O non era piuttosto da dubitare della storia che si narrava? . . . Già correvano le versioni favorevoli a donna Isabella. Era levata, a mezzanotte? Non aveva sonno! La finestra aperta? Per il gran caldo. Il cappello per terra? Un vecchio cappello del cocchiere, il quale s'era divertito, nel pomeriggio, a buttarlo per aria! . . . Se tutte queste cose non s'erano messe in chiaro sul momento, bisognava incolpare quella furia di donna Mara. Non poteva soffrire la nuora, tutti sapevano come l'aveva maltrattata! Chi parlava del conte? Che c'entrava il conte? Chi l'aveva visto? [. . .]. . . <sup>FID</sup> E a poco a poco quelle voci acquistavano credito.

‘The incredulous, the curious, they all headed to the police, but there they were sent away. And that same day everyone saw Count Raimondo at the Casino dei Nobili where he played and chatted about this and that, as usual. <sup>FID</sup>Could he defy public opinion to that extent? Or rather should the truth of the story that was being told be doubted? . . . Versions in favour of Donna Isabella were already spreading. Was she up at midnight? She couldn't sleep! The window was open? Because of the heat. The hat was on the ground? It was an old hat belonging to the coachman, who had amused himself, in the afternoon, throwing it in the air! . . . If all these things had not been immediately clarified, one had to blame that fury Donna Mara. She couldn't stand her daughter-in-law, everyone knew how she had mistreated her! Who was talking about the count? What did the count have to do with it? Who had seen him? [. . .]. . . <sup>FID</sup> And little by little those rumours were gaining credence.’

9 The text in (25) features an instance of “choral” FID, reporting the voice of an anonymous crowd.

IndD and FID are alike in being inaccessible to vocatives and imperatives (Mortara Garavelli 1995a, 449; Eckardt 2015, 235), which are instead freely available to DirD and FDD. Such expressive devices are excluded from IndD for obvious reasons, since an injunctive or exhortative speech act cannot be part of a declarative illocution. Furthermore, the imperative is incompatible with any kind of backshifting, and this also accounts for its absence from FID. As for the vocative, it presupposes that the addressee is in the speaker's immediate experiential sphere. It cannot occur in FID, because the Reported-Speaker's words can only percolate (so to speak) through the mediation of the Reporting-Speaker. In fact, the following example can only be interpreted as a FDD, where the Past tense *did*. . . *miss* does not refer to a backshifted event preceding with *nunc*, but rather to a past event deictically anchored in *NUNC*. Note that the second clause would remain unchanged even if it were inserted between quotes in a plain DirD.<sup>10</sup> Note, also, that the Italian translation of the FDD in (26) might host a Simple Past, i.e. a tense alien to FID, as observed in Section 3.

(26) FDD: Pino felt depressed. <sup>FDD</sup>O Tess, why did you miss the rendez-vous?<sub>FDD</sub>

The divergence between IndD and FID is also shown by the fact that in the former, but not the latter, the judgements of the Reporting-Speaker and the Reported-Speaker can be independent of each other, i.e., their evaluations of the truth content may differ (Schlenker 2004, 7–8). In this respect, FID resembles DirD. The following examples are taken from Eckardt (2015, 198) with some modification: the negative evaluation *boring* in (27a) may belong to both speakers or just one of them (no matter which), whereas in (27b) the Reported-Speaker is entirely responsible for the the positive evaluation revealed by *alas*.

- (27) a. IndD: Aunt Betsy called yesterday and said <sup>IndD</sup>that the boring birthday party tomorrow will be cancelled, due to bad weather.<sub>IndD</sub>  
 b. FID: Aunt Betsy was desperate. <sup>FID</sup>The weather report for tomorrow was so bad. Her birthday would have to be cancelled, alas.<sub>FID</sub>

However, according to Plank (1986, 296), if the Reporting-Speaker of an IndD intends to express mental reservation with respect to the reported assertion, s/he must make it explicit in the surrounding co-text. For instance, in (27a) the Reporting-Speaker might qualify his/her view by saying: . . . *and said that what I consider a boring birthday party*. . . Alternatively, one can imagine that the Reporting-Speaker's

<sup>10</sup> Eckardt's (2015) explanation of the ban on the vocative in FID is, in the view of the present author, unnecessarily elaborated.

negative evaluation is a previously known fact. Thus, this particular discrepancy between IndD and FID appears to be subtler than is usually assumed. Although the negative evaluation in (27a) can belong to either of the speakers, out of the blue it would preferably be assigned to the Reported-Speaker.

## 7 Conclusion

This paper addressed the issue of the tenses used in Italian FID. It shows that the statistically robust presence of the Imperfect does not imply that it is any special property of FID. The Imperfect conveys its inherent tense-aspect values, most often expressing imperfective simultaneity with respect to a past reference time. More generally, this paper argues that in FID all TAM values are essentially preserved, temporal backshifting being the only requirement. This also accounts for the ban on the Simple Past, which is completely at odds with anaphoric anchoring. The only exception concerns the tenses that are normally used deictically with respect to the utterance time (i.e., Present, Compound Past, Simple Future). This appears to be a new finding: in FID, such tenses convey a kind of covert backshifting, in agreement with the required past-orientation of this type of discourse. Their usage presupposes a “historical” Present in the adjacent co-text, which makes them functionally equivalent to the three canonical backshifting tenses (Imperfect, Pluperfect, Future-in-the-Past). This highlights a major structural difference with respect to IndD, which is not limited to expressing retrospectivity.

The last section of the paper compared the main features of IndD and FID, highlighting their similarities and differences. The divergences ultimately stem from basic syntactic differences, which also have crucial semantic and pragmatic consequences.

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# Textual development beyond temporality and interactions between the adversative connector *pero* and the *indefinido*

**Abstract:** This paper investigates temporal and textual structure and focusses on textual development. It aims to show that the typical bipartite opposition between temporal update in narrative constellations and the lack of update in stative contexts is too simplistic. What we find, rather, is a gradable scale between two poles. The first pole is that of a typical narrative development, where the reference time is updated, but the textual development may be strengthened further by argumentative means. The other pole concerns stative constellations, where the text develops through a motivated ordering that successively adds information to a whole (furnishing update). Between the two poles there is a further kind, which may or may not correlate with an update of the reference time. In this case, the text develops through the opposition between sets of propositions (argumentative update). Points on the scale may also overlap. In addition to introducing the scale, the paper shows the explanatory power of the argumentative update with respect to the use of perfective tense-aspect forms in contexts where the reference time does not shift.

**Keywords:** textual development, argumentative update, furnishing update, adversative connector

## 1 Introduction

A standard conception of narrative texts is that their narrative parts should develop according to temporal principles, while the descriptive parts are understood to be

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**Acknowledgements:** The research was funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) as part of the Collaborative Research Center 1252 *Prominence in Language*, Project-ID 281511265, which is gratefully acknowledged. An earlier version of the paper was presented as a talk at the 36<sup>th</sup> Romanistentag “Wiederaufbau, Rekonstruktion, Erneuerung” at the University of Kassel in October 2019. We thank the audience for their feedback. Thanks also to Zoë Braven-Giles for proof-reading an earlier version, to Tessa Say for proof-reading the final version and to Barbara Zeyer and David Wick for practical assistance. Finally, we thank a reviewer for helpful insights. Any remaining errors are ours.

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static (cf. Kamp/Rohrer 1983). In this contribution, we argue that this conception is too simplistic as other kinds of text structuring mimic the temporal ordering of eventualities. In order to show this, we will exploit the concept of textual development, which is basically understood as the motivated and necessary ordering of a text. We aim to show that there are different types of textual development, which may be understood as forming a scale ranging from a narrative pole to a seemingly stative pole. The two literary extracts (1) and (2) exemplify the two poles, respectively.<sup>1</sup>

- (1) [1] *Le jeune marin sauta<sub>ps</sub> dans le canot*, [2] *alla<sub>ps</sub> s'asseoir à la poupe*, [3] *et donna<sub>ps</sub> l'ordre d'aborder à la Canebière*. [4] *Deux matelots se penchèrent<sub>ps</sub> aussitôt sur leurs rames*, [5] *et l'embarcation glissa<sub>ps</sub> aussi rapidement qu'il est<sub>pres</sub> possible de le faire au milieu des mille barques [ . . . ]*. (Frantext: Dumas, *Le Comte de Monte-Cristo*, 1846, 13, taken from Egetenmeyer 2021b)

'[1] The young sailor leapt into the boat, [2] seated himself in the stern [3] and gave the order to row across to the Canebière. [4] Two sailors immediately bent over their oars [5] and the vessel proceeded as fast as it could, among the thousand small boats [ . . . ]' (Dumas, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, 2003, 15, taken from Egetenmeyer 2021b).

In example (1), reference is made to several events. The order in which they are mentioned – [1] to [5] – corresponds to the order in which the events referred to may be taken to have occurred in the fictional world. Two important linguistic properties contribute to the eventive character of the passage.<sup>2</sup> First, the verb meanings (*Aktionsart*) include dynamicity. Second, the inflected main verbs are marked by the *passé simple*, the French past tense form marked for perfective aspect. In a discourse model such as discourse representation theory (DRT), the tense form is considered an indicator of narrative development (cf. Kamp/Rohrer 1983, 251s.; see Section 3 for an overview and the theoretical terminology).

1 In the Romance examples, we use simplified tense-aspect abbreviations to facilitate reading (see also Becker/Egetenmeyer 2018, 31, n. 10; Egetenmeyer 2021a, 1066, n. 7): PRES for présent/présente (present tense), PC for passé composé/pretérito perfecto compuesto (compound past), IMP for imparfait/imperfecto (imperfective past), PS for passé simple/pretérito simple or indefinido (simple past, i.e., the perfective past), PQP for plus-que-parfait/pluscuamperfecto (pluperfect), CONDI for conditionnel présent (present conditional) and IMP.SUBJ for imperfecto de subjuntivo (imperfect subjunctive).

2 The last inflected verb is in the present tense. It does not occur in a main clause and does not express an event of the main storyline, so we exclude it from our description.

By contrast, example (2) from Tolkien's *The Hobbit* features not perfective, but imperfective past tense-aspect forms. According to Kamp/Rohrer (1983, 253), this should exclude temporal development.

- (2) [1] *En un agujero en el suelo, vivía<sub>IMP</sub> un hobbit.* [2] [. . .] *era<sub>IMP</sub> un agujero-hobbit,* [3] *y eso significa<sub>PRES</sub> comodidad.*  
 [4] *Tenía<sub>IMP</sub> una puerta redonda, perfecta como un ojo de buey, pintada de verde [. . .].* [5] *La puerta se abría<sub>IMP</sub> a un vestíbulo cilíndrico, como un túnel: un túnel muy cómodo, sin humos, con paredes revestidas de madera y suelos enlosados y alfombrados, provisto de sillas barnizadas, y montones y montones de perchas para sombreros y abrigos [. . .].* [6] *El túnel se extendía<sub>IMP</sub> serpeando,* [7] *y penetraba<sub>IMP</sub> bastante, pero no directamente, en la ladera de la colina [. . .],* [8] *y muchas puertecitas redondas se abrían<sub>IMP</sub> en él, primero a un lado y luego al otro.* (Tolkien, *El Hobbit*, 2010)
- ‘[1] In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit. [2] [. . .] it was a hobbit-hole, [3] and that means comfort.  
 [4] It had a perfectly round door like a porthole, painted green [. . .]. [5] The door opened on to a tube-shaped hall like a tunnel: a very comfortable tunnel without smoke, with panelled walls, and floors tiled and carpeted, provided with polished chairs, and lots and lots of pegs for hats and coats [. . .]. [6] The tunnel wound on and on, [7] going fairly but not straight into the side of the hill [. . .], [8] and many little round doors opened out of it, first on one side and then on another’ (Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, 2011, 3).

Example (2) can be classified as descriptive. In descriptions, verbs are often stative (cf. Weinrich 1982, 171s.). Some of the verbs in example (2) would be dynamic in other contexts, namely, when selecting [+animate] subjects (or at least subjects belonging to a [+motion] class, cf. Dowty 1991, 572). However, in the example, they are combined with [–animate] and, partly, [–motion] subjects, which clearly attenuates the dynamicity.<sup>3</sup> Still, the components of the descriptions are presented in a certain order.<sup>4</sup> Curiously, in the example, the order of sentences [4] to [7] (and of the relevant components within [8]) corresponds to the spatial order of the described

3 The verbs in question are *extenderse serpeando* in [6] and *penetrar* in [7]. The argument with respect to *abrirse* in [8] is that it expresses the potential to be opened rather than habitual opening, while a specific opening event is to be discarded altogether. In contrast, *abrir(se) a* in [5] is understood to lack movement and therefore there is no residue of dynamicity, as discussed in footnote 7.

4 The fact that a text is presented in a certain order is necessary due to the linear nature of (written and spoken monological) language (cf. also Wandruszka 2015, 55ss.).

places. This kind of motivated ordering is not infrequent in descriptions, be they literary or non-literary.

In example (3) a fictional character reflects upon his potential acts.

- (3) [1] *Avait-il donc résolu<sub>PQP</sub> de tuer Roubaud, puisqu'il disposait<sub>IMP</sub> déjà de sa femme et de son argent ?* [2] *Non, certes, il n'avait rien décidé<sub>PQP</sub>, il ne se précautionnait<sub>IMP</sub> sans doute ainsi, que dans le cas où il se déciderait<sub>COND</sub>.* (Zola, *La Bête Humaine*, 305, taken from Landeweerd/Vet 1996, 158)

'[1] Had he, then, resolved to kill Roubaud, since he was already arranging what to do with his wife and his money? [2] No, of course he had made no such decision, he was only taking these precautions in case he did decide.' (Adapted from Landeweerd / Vet 1996, 158)

In (3), we also see a highly fixed sentence order. Two sets of propositions ([1] and [2]) are opposed, as indicated by the negation (*non*, 'no', *n'avait rien décidé*, 'hadn't decided anything') and the correction (*ne . . . que*, 'only'). They cannot be inverted, although they do not express a sequence of events as in example (1).

The basic idea of the present contribution has similarities to Stalnaker's (2002) belief changes (see Section 4). However, we refine the concept of textual development differently and distinguish certain kinds with the aim of establishing a scale. The scale ranges from the typical temporal update in narrative contexts to the potentially motivated ordering in descriptions. Between these two poles the argumentative update is located (cf. Hanke 1995 for the relationship between narratives and argumentation, which conflicts, in a way, with Riegel et al. 1994, 623). It should be mentioned that we do not intend to analyse different genres. The research on argumentation often focuses on a certain text type (cf. Doury/Plantin 2015, 9, but also Smith 2003). This basic conception also leads Lo Cascio (1999) to describe the interaction of narration and argumentation as an interaction between two opposed linguistic devices delimited at least on the clause or sentence level. Rather, we follow the idea "that every form of language use has an argumentative aspect" (van Eemeren et al. 2014, 490, with reference to Ducrot 1980 and others). In this respect, we also take into account meaning components and linguistic indicators of one text type which occur in another text type, for instance, argumentative connectors occurring in narrative passages. Thus, after introducing the scale of textual development, we show how it may be applied to capture the use of perfective tense-aspect forms in contexts where the reference time does not shift. Such constellations pose special problems to traditional accounts of temporal discourse structure.

We proceed as follows: in Section 2, we discuss the textual properties that form the point of departure for the concept of textual development. In Section 3, we

introduce the relevant elements from the account of temporal discourse structure as presented by Becker/Egetenmeyer (2018), which will allow us to determine the properties of different cases that need a more precise analysis. In Section 4, we go into the details of textual development and introduce two types which have not yet been given sufficient consideration in the literature, namely, furnishing update and argumentative update. Then, in Section 5, we refine the scale of textual development and show how it can be applied. Section 6 sums up our insights regarding the scale and its explanatory power.

## 2 Textual properties and the role of events

We focus on the properties of texts and basically abstract away from potential speaker-hearer discrepancies. However, application of the points we raise to an interactional or a knowledge-based framework should not pose major problems. We leave this important enterprise aside at this point because it complicates the description and may cloud our focus. What becomes especially important as a result of this simplification is a linear conception of text. In this respect, we draw on ideas going back to de Saussure (1995, 102) on the linearity of the linguistic sign. Wandruszka (2015, 81; the emphasis is his) extends the concept of linearity beyond the word level to the phrase and clause levels (and simple combinations of them):

“[. . .] die Sprache [ist] als *linearisierte Struktur in Bewegung* zu verstehen [. . .], das hei[ß]t als eine stets in Aufbau und Entfaltung begriffene Struktur, deren Produktion und Realisierung, so wie ihre Rezeption, in einer raumzeitlich linearen Bewegung abläuft.”

‘Language is to be understood as a *linearised structure in motion*, i.e., as a structure that is constantly being built and developed, whose production and realisation, like its reception, takes place in a spatio-temporal linear movement.’

The spatio-temporal linear order is thus a basic property of language. This holds true not only for the inner-sentential relationships that Wandruszka (2015) focuses on, but also for sentences in sequence. An important effect of this property is the default sequential reading for events referred to in sequence. It is especially strong when the events are referred to with verbs with perfective morphology, which is available in Romance languages (cf. Kamp/Rohrer 1983, 251s.). In English, the tense-aspect system does not have the same distinctive functions as the Romance system, and yet we are inclined to interpret the first two sentences of (4) in the order in which they occur.

(4) [1] *He bought bread.* [2] *He bought flowers.* [3] *He returned home.*

While world knowledge tells us that the third sentence should refer to an event posterior to the first two (in 2023, despite other possibilities, it is still common to buy bread and flowers in shops outside one's home), there is no strict objective reason to buy first bread and then flowers, except for possible practical reasons or perhaps an individual's habit. Still, the interpretational effect of the linearity of language cannot be abstracted away from. This means that when we invert sentences [1] and [2], the expected reading deviates from the original one and the buying of the flowers is understood to take place before the purchase of the bread (see ex. 5).

(5) [1] *He bought flowers.* [2] *He bought bread.* [3] *He returned home.*

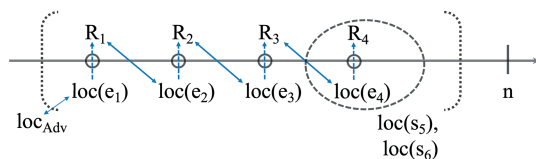
In the present contribution, we do not seek to dwell on exceptions of this tendency in the realm of events (cf. the role of the explanation relation as discussed in Becker/Egetenmeyer 2018, 40, with reference to Vet 1996, 154). Rather, we are interested in how linear textual development comes about, beyond narrative relations. As we will show, a correlation between the linear order of a text and the content presented is also possible when there is no, or no clear, temporal development. We will refine the problem in Section 4 and introduce our analysis in Sections 4.1 and 4.2. Still, temporal discourse structure is the basis from which other kinds of textual development need to be distinguished. Therefore, in the following section we discuss how temporal discourse structure can be properly accounted for.

### 3 Accounting for temporal updates in narrative contexts

In most publications on temporal relations in narrative texts, two opposing constellations are mentioned (cf. Weinrich 1982; Kamp/Rohrer 1983, and, among those accounts not focussing on discourse, e.g., Comrie 1976; 1985). Either the narrative is temporally developed further, or time seems to stand still. A simple made-up example is (6), which we will use to provide a basic introduction to the account of temporal discourse structure presented by Becker/Egetenmeyer (2018).

(6) *Yesterday, [1] Jane stepped out of the front door. [2] She walked to the park. [3] She entered it [4] and looked around. [5] The grass was green [6] and little flowers were blooming.*

Becker/Egetenmeyer's (2018) visualisations help elucidate the problem we are interested in. Figure 1 represents the temporal structure of (6).



**Figure 1:** Visualisation of example (6) following Becker/Egetenmeyer (2018).

The adverbial expression *yesterday* sets the time frame within which the asserted events occur or states are given. Clauses [1] to [4] express events in the sense of bounded and dynamic eventualities and form part of the ongoing storyline. Thus, the respective location times introduce reference times (cf. Becker/Egetenmeyer 2018, 37, for this conception). The reference time is central to the account. Simply put, it “measures” the temporal development and, more specifically, it indicates the time point “to which the story has so far advanced” (cf. Kamp/van Genabith/Reyle 2011, 199). It is an abstract concept which also serves to describe anchoring relations properly (cf. Becker/Egetenmeyer 2018, 32, for an extensive discussion). This is shown in Figure 1, where the location times  $loc(e_2)$  to  $loc(e_4)$  are anchored to the respective preceding reference times.

By contrast, clauses [5] and [6] express states. States alone typically do not further develop the story temporally, rather they maintain an already introduced reference time (cf. Kamp/Reyle 1993, 523ss.). In the example the corresponding location times ( $loc(s_5)$  and  $loc(s_6)$ ) include the reference time  $R_4$ , which is intuitive, as the event of looking around ( $e_4$ ) allows the individual referent to perceive the states expressed in [5] and [6]. Finally, as the past tense indicates, the eventualities are asserted to occur at a time before the speaker’s now ( $n$ ).

All in all, this is a typical constellation. In addition, however, what we have seen is also the typical conception in current accounts of temporal discourse structure. In Sections 4 and 5 we present examples that do not adhere to this standard case and discuss how we can account for them.

To complete the picture, Becker/Egetenmeyer’s (2018) account articulates two dimensions of textual structure. On the one hand, it considers the linear relationships between times, i.e. the level of chronological relations (sequence, overlap, inclusion etc.), the level of perspective, and the level of structuring into foreground and background (cf. Weinrich 1964). On the other hand, it focusses in particular on hierarchical relationships, which are determined in terms of prominence. Becker/Egetenmeyer (2018, 44) follow Himmelmann/Primus (2015, 42), who define a prominent entity as one that stands out from a set of equal entities. The property of being prominent also allows an entity to serve as an anchor for others (cf. Himmelmann/Primus 2015, 44). It is due to this property that prominence is of paramount importance in the description of temporal structuring. In the realm of tem-



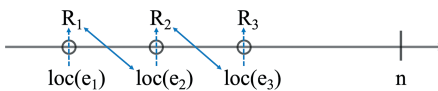
poral discourse structure, the entities analysed are eventualities and time points (cf. Becker/Egetenmeyer 2018, 41). However, in discourse analysis, the concept also applies to the category of propositions. As Becker/Egetenmeyer (2018, 47ss.) argue, a potentially prominent time point is, for instance, the first time point of an episode, because it is typically this time point upon which the other time points in the episode will depend. We will come back to the property of prominence in Section 5.

## 4 Textual development with non-typical updates

In the preceding sections, we introduced the relevant elements we need in order to describe textual development more accurately. In Section 1, we defined it as a motivated and necessary ordering. At the heart of this lies a correlation between the textual structure and a non-linguistic structuring. Temporal updating is the prototypical type of textual development. In this case, a correlation holds between the order in which the events are mentioned in the text and the order in which they are given in the narrated world. We repeat example (7) from Section 2, where we saw that a simple sequence of events brings about textual development. The order of the event expressions corresponds to the order of the events in the narrated world. Neither can be altered independently of the other.

(7) [1] *He bought bread.* [2] *He bought flowers.* [3] *He returned home.*

Based on Becker/Egetenmeyer's (2018) account, example (7) can be visualised as in Figure 2.



**Figure 2:** Visualisation of example (7).

The visualisation in Figure 2 shows the standard temporal anchoring of location times ( $loc(e_n)$ ) to the preceding reference times ( $R_{n-1}$ ). This is the unmarked case in narrative sequences, i.e., an ongoing story line. The temporal development is expressed by means of tense-aspect and *Aktionsart* features (cf. Weinrich 1982, 169). Because of the explicitness of the formal and lexical marking and the relatively stable functioning (see Section 2 for a note on exceptions), and in agreement with wide acceptance in the scientific community, we take temporal update as the prototypical case of textual development. However, as already mentioned, it is not

the only one. In the following subsection, we will discuss cases which, in a standard account, would be determined as stative. This entails a seeming clash. Therefore, we need to discuss refinements and present linguistic evidence.

In his research on common ground, Stalnaker (2002, 708ss.) mentions the temporal properties of belief states in an ongoing discourse. His account is partly in line with ours. Importantly, he also supports the conception that belief states develop along with the discourse: “As the conversation proceeds, beliefs [ . . . ] will normally be constantly changing” (Stalnaker 2002, 708). However, his idea of change is very broad. Adding information to the common ground is sufficient for a change to take place. Furthermore, the information does not have to be accommodated since recognition of an utterance event as such already constitutes change in his terms (cf. Stalnaker 2002, 708). As we will see below, our account is more restrictive. But first, we should add that Stalnaker (2002, 709) also determines a time for the change of the belief state: “Not before the occurrence of [ . . . ] the making of the assertion, but after it ha[s] occurred” (Stalnaker 2002, 709). If we abstract away from processing, we can determine this time more precisely as the time when the assertion is made. This is in line with our account.

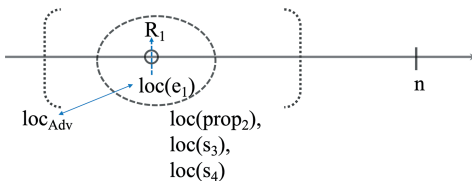
As indicated above, we diverge from Stalnaker not only in that we leave aside interactional and processing characteristics, but, more importantly, we do not adhere to his generalisation of change. The kind of textual development we focus on is not a general phenomenon. In fact, we agree with the research literature on discourse that many, or even most, cases of stative description do not produce any textual development.<sup>5</sup> The standard account (cf. Kamp/Rohrer 1983) is therefore mostly right. This can be shown with the made-up example (8).

- (8) [1] *À huit heures, le gangster entra<sub>PS</sub> dans le restaurant.* [2] *Il était<sub>IMP</sub> grand.* [3] *Il portait<sub>IMP</sub> des lunettes de soleil.* [4] *Il avait<sub>IMP</sub> un revolver dans la main droite.*  
 ‘[1] At 8 o’clock, the gangster entered the restaurant. [2] He was tall. [3] He was wearing sunglasses. [4] He had a gun in his right hand.’

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5 We want to mention two interesting diverging cases discussed in the literature. First, von Stutterheim/Klein (1989, 50) also share the standard view, but they add the option of “dynamic descriptions”, which are habitual series of events, such as the daily routine of a protagonist in a story. However, these do not fall under our classification of descriptions. Second, a very interesting constellation is lists, which have also been discussed in the context of narrative texts (cf. Goody 1977, 74ss.). According to Schaffrick/Werber (2017, 305, with reference to von Contzen 2016, 241, and others), they are localised at the limits of narrativity. However, Voghera (2018, 194) takes an interactional stance and attributes to them the potential to advance a text in the sense that they are devices that display information in a way that is easy to construct and to follow. Her concept of text progression appears to be different from ours.

In (8), an eventive sentence ([1]) is followed by a property description concerning the previously introduced character ([2]). Sentences [3] and [4] express states which also describe the character physically. Only the location time of the verb in sentence [1] introduces a reference time ( $R_1$ ). The other location times merely include  $R_1$ . This is visualised in Figure 3.



**Figure 3:** Visualisation of example (8).

The order of the sentences is only partly inflexible.<sup>6</sup> For referential and presentational reasons, sentence [1] has to come first, which, as said, makes reference to an event. In addition, we might think that in this kind of mini-episode sentence [4] should really be presented last, the reason being that it acts as a kind of climax. This is a well-entrenched narrative principle, but the corresponding ordering is not a prerequisite for the passage to be understood correctly. Finally, [2] and [3] are interchangeable. Neither the information concerning the whole person nor that with respect to the adornment on his face have properties which would make one or the other order necessary. This is also true if we keep in mind sentences [1] and [4]. Neither [2] nor [3] have a specific relationship to [1] or [4], which would make an adjacency between the respective sentences necessary. Thus, the example diverges from the example pair (4) (repeated as example 7) and (5) (see Section 2), where a change in the order of the event expressions results in two different sets of situations. The only possible factor which might disallow a change of the order in (8) would be stylistics. Importantly, however, the necessary ordering we will focus on is not based on stylistics. Rather, in this kind of ordering, we find clear-cut linguistic indicators of different sorts.

Aside from the standard temporal update, we consider two different types of textual development. The first, which is located at the stative pole, is the motivated ordering of descriptions, which we call furnishing update. We find adverbials emphasising the order, but also other lexical material that creates a correspondence with the physical constellations in the described world, and perspective phenomena in a broad sense of the word. The second type comes about through

<sup>6</sup> At this point, we do not take perspective into account. We come back to it below.

meaning oppositions between sets of propositions. We call it the argumentative update, where typical indicators are connectors.

## 4.1 Furnishing update

As we have already mentioned, non-narrative text passages may also have a motivated and necessary ordering. First, we discuss descriptions which exhibit a kind of textual development. We call this “furnishing update” (see the definition below).

In Section 1, we saw the case of an ordered description. We repeat this example in (9) and discuss in greater detail how the ordering effect comes about.

- (9) *En un agujero en el suelo, vivía<sub>IMP</sub> un hobbit. [. . .] era<sub>IMP</sub> un agujero-hobbit, y eso significa<sub>PRES</sub> comodidad.*

*Tenía<sub>IMP</sub> una puerta redonda, perfecta como un ojo de buey, pintada de verde [. . .]. La puerta se abría<sub>IMP</sub> a un vestíbulo cilíndrico, como un túnel: un túnel muy cómodo, sin humos, con paredes revestidas de madera y suelos enlosados y alfombrados, provisto de sillas barnizadas, y montones y montones de perchas para sombreros y abrigos [. . .]. El túnel se extendía<sub>IMP</sub> serpeando, y penetraba<sub>IMP</sub> bastante, pero no directamente, en la ladera de la colina [. . .], y muchas puertecitas redondas se abrían<sub>IMP</sub> en él, **primero** a un lado y **luego** al otro. (Tolkien, *El Hobbit*, 2010)*

‘In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit. [. . .] it was a hobbit-hole, and that means comfort.

It had a perfectly round door like a porthole, painted green [. . .]. The door opened on to a tube-shaped hall like a tunnel: a very comfortable tunnel without smoke, with panelled walls, and floors tiled and carpeted, provided with polished chairs, and lots and lots of pegs for hats and coats [. . .]. The tunnel wound on and on, going fairly but not straight into the side of the hill [. . .], and many little round doors opened out of it, **first** on one side **and then** on another’ (Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, 2011, 3).

Example (9) combines properties and generalised statements to create a complete picture of the place where the hobbit lives (*tenía una puerta redonda, la puerta se abría,*<sup>7</sup> *el túnel se extendía*, etc.). The description is presented in what we might call

<sup>7</sup> As an anonymous reviewer reminds us, the basic meaning of *abrir* ‘to open’ is dynamic and the imperfective tense-aspect form plays an important role in producing a stative reading. Although

“stages”. The term “stage” is intended as an abstract way of referring to specific parts of the text. It is vague in respect of syntactic structure, as possible instantiations may be the clause, the sentence, or several sentences together, and also in respect of propositional content. In the example, the stages correspond to the described places in the fictional world. After a general statement about the whereabouts and the quality of the place where the hobbit lives, the first relevant stage is the description of the door from the outside (*tenía una puerta redonda*). The second stage describes the place behind the door (*vestíbulo*, ‘hall’), which is also the beginning of the corridor (*túnel*, ‘tunnel’), and stage three presents the course of the corridor. World knowledge and certain parts of the lexical information indicate that the stages are locally apart (but adjacent). A standard mental representation involves mutual exclusion of the places. Simply put, the described place is either outside the hall (and, thus, the home) or inside it, or behind it, along the length of the tunnel. The order of presentation (cf. Wandruszka 2015, 81; see Section 2) corresponds to the physical ordering of the places. The ordering becomes part of the corresponding mental representation. For instance, the door is not adjacent to the tunnel as the hall intervenes between them. In addition to a partly world knowledge-based ordered representation, there are two important linguistic factors which specifically contribute to the ordering effect in the example. First, the author makes use of transitions between the stages. This is the case with the formulations *La puerta se abría a . . .* ‘The door opened on to . . .’, which connects stages one and two, and *El túnel se extendía . . .* ‘The tunnel wound on . . .’, where stage two is moved on to stage three. This strongly emphasises the effect of a development. Second, the adverbials *primero* ‘first’ and *luego* ‘then’ make an ordering explicit, which is further supported by the conjunction *y* ‘and’ introducing *luego*. Thus, even though the example clearly presents a description, and makes use of states and properties (see also Section 1), it saliently presents textual development. The development is produced by a combination of different means involving the order of presentation, lexical material expressing transitions, as well as adverbials and connectors. In summary, the text fragment displays a motivated and necessary ordering and therefore nicely exemplifies the case of textual development at the stative pole.

A further factor is perspective. A marked perspective, or in Genette’s (1980) terms, a type of “focalisation” that is not neutral, is a powerful structural means (see example 10). So, if we take perspective into account, example (9) becomes

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we do not want to deny this general principle, we instead assume that what we find in the example is actually intransitive *abrir(se) a* ‘to open (itself) to’ and that it has undergone a change in meaning similar to the locally used intransitive *dar a* ‘to face’, ‘to give onto’. If this is correct, the use of the verb is stative independently of grammatical aspect.

even more interesting. In (9), we may suppose a neutral narrator presenting the description of the hobbit's hole. The passage is "nonfocalised" (Genette 1980, 189). Still, as the example shows, a furnishing update is possible. By contrast, the counter-example (10) shows that a marked perspective may support the furnishing update.

- (10) *We were in an impressive and beautiful situation on a rocky plateau. It was too high for grass, there was very little earth and the place was littered with boulders, but the whole plateau was covered with a thick carpet of mauve primulas. There were countless thousands of them, delicate flowers on thick green stems. Before us was the brilliant green lake, a quarter of a mile long, and in the shallows and in the streams that spilled over from it the primulas grew in clumps and perfect circles.* (Smith 2003, 29, our emphases)

Smith (2003, 29) uses the passage in (10) specifically as an example of a description. She notes that in descriptions "[t]ime is static or suspended", even though "[d]escriptive passages progress spatially through a scene" (Smith 2003, 28). While she is clear about the property of "spatial advancement" (Smith 2003, 28), she leaves room for interpretation with respect to the temporal properties: "Time doesn't advance, at least not significantly" (Smith 2003, 29). However, with regard to traditional accounts of discourse structure based on reference times, the case of (10) is unequivocal: we do not find any kind of temporal advancement (cf. also Smith 2003, 95). In other words, the state introduced in the first sentence presupposes a reference time which is included in the location time corresponding to the state. More importantly, the sentences that follow introduce seven states (we leave aside the relative clause), all of which hold true at that very same reference time. Nonetheless, the mini discourse has a particular ordering, which cannot be altered easily. The important difference, with respect to the preceding example, is that (10) is a case of internal focalisation, as emphasised by the ego-narrator. The description is determined by a "restriction of field", in the words of Genette (1980, 189); the descriptive structure depends on the ego-narrator's field of vision and follows its shift along the described order. Fleischman (1991, 88) compares this shift to the movement of a camera focus. Interestingly, Fleischman (1991, 88 and 91) also distinguishes between temporal updates and a way of visualising objects sequentially.

In the present contribution, we focus on textual development. We account for example (10) in a similar way to (9). The basic idea can also be found in Smith (2003, 95), who notes that in descriptions, "[t]here is a sense of progression [. . .], spatial in nature". We intend to refine this and map it onto stages. The first sentence sets the scene; it determines the location of the ego-narrator and presents the first stage,

the *rocky plateau*. After further descriptions of the plateau, a shift is made to the second stage, the *lake*. The shift between these stages corresponds to a change in the ego-narrator's field of vision. This is also the case with the shift to the third stage, *the shallows* and *the streams*, which is a shift from an overall view of the lake to certain details of its shores. As we have seen, the example has a specific ordering which cannot be changed easily, as the stages represented crucially depend on each other. The passage in (9) is presented as a non-focalised narrative, where the stages are not only ordered in parallel with the fictional physical structure they refer to, they are also connected with transitions. By contrast, in (10) the shift between the stages corresponds to the changing field of vision of a perspectivising ego-narrator.

We subsume both examples under the term “furnishing update”. The term articulates the fact that the text develops through the addition of information that contributes to a described whole. The fact that the linguistic units are ordered is a result of the linearity of language (cf. Wandruszka 2015, 55ss.). Importantly, in this kind of textual development the order of the text's informative units, the “stages” (see above), is motivated by the contribution of the order; in other words, the order itself is relevant for the content. Conversely, the order of the informative units is necessarily determined by the described content. This strong correlation is made, or may be made explicit with linguistic means.

#### **Definition of furnishing update**

A furnishing update is a kind of textual development where the narrative time (determined by means of the reference time *R*) does not advance, but where the order of the textual units (“stages”) is motivated and necessary. It is motivated because the order itself contributes to the meaning of the respective passage. It is necessary because the information unit of one stage crucially depends on another information unit having been given at a previous stage.

As we have already stated, this type of update lies at the stative pole of the scale of textual development. It may be, but is not necessarily determined by an explicit perspectiviser. In the following subsection, we present a further type of textual development which is located between the stative and narrative poles of textual development.

## **4.2 Argumentative update**

The second kind of non-narrative textual development is what we call an “argumentative update”, following Egetenmeyer (2021a, 1092, n. 35). Interestingly, while Smith (2003, 13) classifies descriptions as stative, she determines the argumentation text mode as being atemporal. However, we believe this conception to be too simplistic. As we will see, the argumentative update is located somewhere

between the furnishing update and the typical temporal update. Similar to the furnishing update, objective time does not have to advance, although this kind of textual update may correlate with an update of the reference time. What is of most importance is that we find clear oppositions, which can only be licensed by sequentiality.

Example (11) is an instance of free indirect discourse (FID). FID is a kind of represented speech or thought which has no lexical or formal marking to indicate that it is a character within the story who speaks or thinks and not the narrator (cf. Banfield 1982; Eckardt 2014; and for the temporal relations involved, Egetenmeyer 2021a). The properties of FID are not central to the discussion of the example in terms of the interests of the present contribution.

- (11) [1] *Avait-il donc résolu<sub>POP</sub> de tuer Roubaud, puisqu'il disposait<sub>IMP</sub> déjà de sa femme et de son argent ?* [2] *Non, certes, il n'avait rien décidé<sub>POP</sub>, il ne se précautionnait<sub>IMP</sub> sans doute ainsi, que dans le cas où il se déciderait<sub>CONDI</sub>.* (Zola, *La bête humaine*, 305, taken from Landeweerd/Vet 1996, 158)

'[1] Had he, then, resolved to kill Roubaud, since he was already arranging what to do with his wife and his money? [2] No, of course he had made no such decision, he was only taking these precautions in case he did decide' (adapted from Landeweerd/Vet 1996, 158)

In (11), the protagonist thinks about his situation and this is expressed by means of FID (cf. Landeweerd/Vet 1996, 158). What is of interest for us is that the content of sentence [2] is in direct opposition to the content of sentence [1]. This is indicated most clearly by the adverb *non* 'no' (cf. Egetenmeyer 2021a, 1092). According to Egetenmeyer (2021a, 1092), this is a clear indication of a temporal update, because the protagonist to whom the speech or thought representation is attributed is the same in both sentences. A set of two opposing propositions cannot be expected to be uttered by one person at the same time. Even more fundamentally, it is an important property of argumentative discourse to develop an argument step by step (cf. the definition in van Eemeren et al. 2014, 7).<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the order of sentences [1] and [2] needs to be a reflection of some non-linguistic (fictional) reality.

In order to arrive at a more general conception of argumentative update, we also need to take into account non-FID cases, as shown in example (12).

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<sup>8</sup> The definition in van Eemeren et al. (2014, 7) reads as follows: "Argumentation is a communicative and interactional act complex aimed at resolving a difference of opinion with the addressee by putting forward a constellation of propositions the arguer can be held accountable for to make the standpoint at issue acceptable to a rational judge who judges reasonably".



- (12) [1] *Pocas novedades, por no decir ninguna, aportó<sub>ps</sub> ayer la sesión bursátil.* [2] *El mercado más bien se dedicó<sub>ps</sub> a vegetar, a la espera de noticias que lo puedan sacar del marasmo en que se debatió<sub>ps</sub>.* (CREA: *La Vanguardia*, 16.06.1995: Joan Jordi Cliville)

‘[1] Yesterday’s trading session produced little, if any, news. [2] The market was rather vegetating, waiting for news that could bring it out of the morass against which it was fighting.’

Example (12) features two main verbs marked by the *indefinido*, the simple past form marked for perfective aspect (*aportó* ‘contributed’, and *se dedicó* ‘dedicated itself’).<sup>9</sup> According to traditional accounts of temporal discourse structure, we would expect a temporally sequential relation (cf. Kamp/Rohrer 1983, 253ss.), but that is not the case here. The assertions concern the same time; more concretely, the corresponding location times share one reference time. Despite this “stativity”, we encounter a kind of textual development parallel to the one in (11). The second sentence corrects the evaluation asserted in the first sentence. Due to their opposition and the fact that they share an uttering source, they cannot hold true at the same time. More precisely, they are not part of the same stage, that is, the same informative unit (see Section 4.1). Thus, as the example shows, the argumentative update does not depend on temporal development. Finally, we may note that self-correction (cf. Martín Zorraquino/Portolés Lázaro 1999, 4165) is a textual function which exhibits a strong correlation with the argumentative update.

Egetenmeyer (in prep.) discusses summarising statements and makes use of anchoring relations to show that there are different degrees of textual development. According to this analysis, it is only in cases which lack textual development that a following proposition may be equally anchored to the summarised statement or the summarising statement. The anchoring will also play a major role in Section 5.

We are now ready to formulate a tentative definition.

#### **Definition of the argumentative update**

An argumentative update is a kind of textual development which comes about through an argumentative relation between propositions. The second proposition in this relationship is opposed to the first one, or modifies the content at stake in such a way that the two propositions cannot be asserted simultaneously in the text. This may correlate with, but does not depend on, an update of the reference time (*R*).

<sup>9</sup> In the example, *aportó* is translated as ‘produced’, and *se dedicó* is left without a translation except for the progressive mark on *was vegetating*.

In the present and preceding subsections we have presented two different kinds of non-typical textual development. As we have argued, they are both non-narrative (in terms of rhetorical relations, cf. Asher/Lascarides 2003). They represent two degrees of textual development, where the first one, the furnishing update, is located at the very pole of stativity, while the second one (argumentative update) is not restricted to stativity and may even correlate with an update of the reference time. Because of this correlation and because of the mutual exclusion of the stages involved, the argumentative update is taken to be located between the stative and the narrative poles of the textual development scale. This classification contradicts Smith's (2003, 13) assessment that argumentation is atemporal in nature. In the following section, we present an analysis of corpus data to further motivate the characterisation as a scale. We show that there are more than just the three discrete points we have considered so far, and that the scale is, in fact, further diversified.

## 5 Refining the scale of textual development with an analysis of *pero* + *indefinido*

So far, we have determined three steps on the scale of textual development: the typical narrative update, the argumentative update and, at the stative pole, the furnishing update. However, we have abstracted away from further textual properties of the propositions involved. One of them is prominence, a concept which articulates the hierarchical structuring of a text. As we will see, it allows us to distinguish a further sub-type of textual development.

In what follows, we present an exemplary analysis of structures featuring the connector *pero* 'but' (cf. Fuentes Rodríguez/Alcaide Lara 2007, 26, for the argumentative function of the connector in terms of orientation, and Maričić/Đurić 2011 for a differentiation of meanings) and the perfective past tense-aspect form (*indefinido*). The examples we will analyse are taken from Ruiz Zafón's *La sombra del viento* ([2001] 2004, 'The Shadow of the Wind'). The aim of this section is three-fold. Apart from refining the scale of textual development, we seek to show how argumentative effects and textual development interact. Furthermore, we intend to highlight the utility of the account, which is able to explain "non-updating" uses of perfective tense-aspect forms.

Example (13) belongs at the narrative pole, although it may even be located beyond the typical narrative update, which we exemplified in Section 1.

- (13) – [1] *Mi tío me ha dicho*<sub>PC</sub> [2] *que te ofreció*<sub>PS</sub> *una buena suma por el libro de Carax*, [3] **pero** *que tú la rechazaste*<sub>PS</sub> [. . .]. [4] *Te has ganado*<sub>PC</sub> *su respeto*. (Ruiz Zafón, *La sombra del viento*, 2004, 26)  
 “[1] My uncle said [2] he offered you a good sum of money for the Carax, [3] but you refused it [. . .]. [4] You have earned his respect” (Ruiz Zafón, *The Shadow of the Wind*, 2004, part 1, chapter 2).

The passage in (13) is an instance of direct discourse, within which we find two clauses of indirect discourse ([2] and [3]) embedded under a speech verb (from sentence [1]). The temporal sequence between [2] and [3] is indisputable because it is determined lexically that [3] is a reaction to [2]. This constellation is independent of the connector *pero* ‘but’. However, as *pero* specifically expresses the adversative relation, it strengthens the temporal update even further.

We have mentioned the role of anchoring when it comes to determining prominence relations (see Section 3). This can be shown in sentence [4], which expresses a consequence of the oppositive point made in [3] (cf. Fuentes Rodríguez/Alcaide Lara 2007, 33). This is especially interesting as [3] is syntactically (and contextually) embedded, which is not the case with the main clause [4]. The anchoring of the proposition expressed in [4] to that in [3], despite [3] being embedded, is a clear indication of the elevated prominence of the proposition [3].

Example (14) is another example of an argumentative update. It contains a remnant of temporality, but we cannot argue for a temporal update on the grounds of a traditional conception of the reference time (*R*).

- (14) [1] *Me tendí*<sub>PS</sub> *en la penumbra azulada del alba con el libro sobre el pecho* [2] *y escuché*<sub>PS</sub> *el rumor de la ciudad dormida goteando sobre los tejados salpicados de púrpura*. [3] *El sueño y la fatiga llamaban*<sub>LIMP</sub> *a mi puerta*, [4] **pero** *me resistí*<sub>PS</sub> *a rendirme*. [5] *No quería*<sub>LIMP</sub> *perder el hechizo de la historia ni todavía decir adiós a sus personajes*. (Ruiz Zafón, *La sombra del viento*, 2004, 13)  
 ‘[1] I lay in the bluish half-light with the book on my chest [2] and listened to the murmur of the sleeping city. [3] My eyes began to close [*literally*: tiredness and exhaustion knocked on my door], [4] but I resisted [*literally*: resisted surrendering]. [5] I did not want to lose the story’s spell or bid farewell to its characters just yet’ (Ruiz Zafón, *The Shadow of the Wind*, 2004, part 1, chapter *Julian Carax*).

In Section 4.2, we saw a case which lacked temporal updates despite the use of perfective tense-aspect forms. Example (14) presents an interesting constellation

in clauses [3] and [4]. Between the two, there is an argumentative update. The verb *llamaban* ‘knocked’/‘were knocking’ is semelfactive (or iterative, see below) and has an imperfective tense-aspect marking. The verb *resistí* ‘resisted’ expresses an ingressive state, though, importantly, it is marked as perfective. Therefore, it could refer to an eventuality posterior to [3], but the semantic properties seem to preclude such an interpretation. Instead, [3] may be interpreted as still holding true at the time of [4]. The clash between a sequential and an inclusion relation is resolved through an iterative reading of [3], which also allows for a reinterpretation of [4] as potentially iterative. Again, the following sentence [5] is anchored to [4] as it presents an explanation of it. This is a subordinating rhetorical relation (cf. Asher/Lascarides 2003; Jasinskaja/Karagjosova 2020, 14), which is expected to correlate with low prominence. However, the availability of the proposition as an anchor presupposes a certain amount of prominence (cf. Egetenmeyer 2020). To complete the picture, this only locally relevant prominence value (cf. Egetenmeyer submitted) is lower than the value exemplified in the preceding example.

Our last example (15) shows a further kind of argumentative update.

- (15) [1] *Satisfecho con mi elección, rehíce<sub>PS</sub> mis pasos en el laberinto portando mi libro bajo el brazo con una sonrisa impresa en los labios.* [2] *Tal vez la atmósfera hechicera de aquel lugar había podido<sub>POP</sub> conmigo,* [3] *pero tuve<sub>PS</sub> la seguridad de que aquel libro había estado<sub>POP</sub> allí esperándome durante años, probablemente desde antes de que yo naciese<sub>IMP.SUBJ</sub>* (Ruiz Zafón, *La sombra del viento*, 2004, 12)

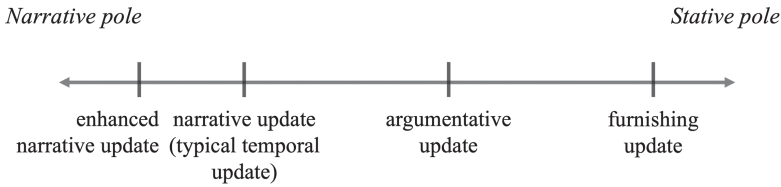
{[1] Pleased with my choice, I tucked it under my arm and retraced my steps through the labyrinth, a smile on my lips. [2] Perhaps the bewitching atmosphere of the place had got the better of me, [3] but I felt sure that The Shadow of the Wind had been waiting there for me for years, probably since before I was born’ (Ruiz Zafón, *The Shadow of the Wind*, 2004, part 1, chapter Julian Carax).

In (15), sentence [1] presents an event as part of a narrative relation and introduces a proper reference time ( $R_T$ ). With respect to [1], [2] presents a background relation (cf. Apothéloz/Combettes 2016, 53), which makes an inference explicit. Finally, [3] does not express a temporal update, in so far as there is at least an overlap with  $R_T$ . Instead, [3] expresses a prominent property, namely, the protagonist’s state of mind. Still, as in the preceding example, there is textual development as the content is altered with argumentative means.

## 6 Conclusions: A scale of textual development

As we have seen, the temporal distinction between updating events and non-updating descriptions is too simplistic. Our investigation combines insights into temporal structuring and the relationships between propositions. Its contribution is two-fold. On the one hand, we have shown that textual development cannot be reduced to temporal development and that it is, in fact, scalar in nature. The text does not only develop in narrative contexts, but may also develop in stative descriptions and “atemporal” (according to Smith 2003, 13) argumentations. On the other hand, we have collected evidence that the understanding of the argumentative update has explanatory power with respect to non-temporally updating uses of perfective tense-aspect forms. In what follows, we sum up the discussion of both topics.

In Sections 1, 4 and 5, we discussed four different steps on the scale of textual development. These are visualised in Figure 4.



**Figure 4:** Scale of textual development.

The prototypical updating type is the narrative update. As expected, it is located at the narrative pole. Importantly, it involves a shift in the reference time (cf. Becker/Egetenmeyer 2018 with reference to Reichenbach 1956 and following Kamp/Rohrer 1983). Still, this kind of update may be strengthened with argumentative means, or, more specifically, with a temporal update combined with an opposition between the two propositions involved. This type sets the leftmost position on the scale, beyond even the standard narrative update. On the far right of the scale, at the stative pole, is the furnishing update. In this case, the reference time is not updated. Still, the order of the textual stages (propositions or sets of propositions, see Section 4.1) is motivated as it sets out the details of a situation step by step. The text develops in an irreversible and necessary fashion. At the point on the scale between the two poles is the argumentative update. An update of the reference time may co-occur, but not always. Central to this kind of textual development is a mutual exclusion of two textual stages. Although the scale in Figure 4 is displayed as having discrete points, there are interactions and overlaps between these points (cf. the relationship between the enhanced narrative update and the typical tempo-

ral update, and also the discussion of the examples in Section 5). Thus, the figure is to be understood as an abstraction of a more continuous scale.

Finally, we discussed a set of examples where our concept of the argumentative update may explain the use of a perfective tense-aspect form, despite the lack of a narrative update. In these cases, the adversative connector *pero* ‘but’ is combined with verbs marked by the Spanish *indefinido* form. Still, the eventualities which *pero* is used to oppose may be asserted for the same reference time, which is not to be expected from a traditional discourse structural perspective on tense use. In the examples, perfectivity is licensed by the assertion of completed eventualities (cf. Comrie 1976, 3) in combination with an opposition in content, which is the argumentative update.

The account thus offers insights into the relationships between different kinds of discursive structuring. As we have seen, non-narrative kinds of discursive structuring take the textual structuring produced by temporal development as a model and may also develop texts further. In Section 5, we illustrated how the account can be taken as a basis for further integration of different modes of discourse (in the sense of Smith 2003), thereby going beyond the interaction between narrative and argumentative clauses discussed by Lo Cascio (1999). As we have shown, the integrative view on discourse modes has explanatory value with respect to the linguistic means involved. However, future work should test other classes of connectors and their interaction with tense-aspect forms. An example of such a study is Egetenmeyer (in prep.), where the role of summarising connectors is analysed.

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# Analysis of imperfective verb forms in a perfective context. A comparative study of French and Russian aspectuality

**Abstract:** This paper analyses the aspectual traits and textual function of the French *imparfait in a perfective context* (IPC) and how it can be translated into Russian, an aspectual language. Prototypically the *imparfait* expresses states of affairs without initial and final boundaries, offering a perspective of ongoingness and immediacy. Appearing in contexts marked as perfective by adverbs of sudden accomplishment or inchoativity and prototypically reserved for perfective past forms, the *imparfait* conflicts with the perfective contextual information. This conflict is resolved by reanalysing the IPC as part of a new aspectual structure in which the imperfect no longer operates in the background but, as the perfective forms, takes on a role in the narrative foreground. The French analysis is conducted with examples from the literary corpus “Frantext”, a French and Russian contrastive analysis with examples from a parallel corpus from “Sketch Engine”, the search criteria being perfective adverbs cooccurring with imperfects. This paper follows a unidimensional approach to aspectuality, considering all aspectual means as formally different realisations of the same semantic category. Application of an onomasiological model extended from sentence to textual level allows to analyse all aspectual means of the IPC. Due to Russian’s grammaticalised aspectual system, a direct IPC translation is unlikely and other translation strategies will be examined.

**Keywords:** aspect, *imparfait*, French, Russian, contrastive corpus analysis

## 1 The *imparfait* in a perfective context

The imperfect in the French language is prototypically characterised by an ongoing perspective enabling the reader to participate in the expressed event and to perceive it in its unfolding (“L’*imparfait* montre un fait en train de se dérouler”, Grevisse 2016, 1188; cf. Riegel/Pellat/Rioul 2009, 541). In contrast to the *passé simple*, the

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*imparfait* does not consider an event's initial or final boundaries<sup>1</sup> and is therefore compatible with semantically unbounded verbs, such as state verbs, and expressions of durativity ("Par opposition au passé simple, l'imparfait n'envisage pas les limites du procès, auquel il n'assigne ni commencement ni fin. [. . .] s'accorde avec le sémantisme des verbes imperfectifs [. . . et] avec l'expression de la durée",<sup>2</sup> Riegel/Pellat/Rioul 2009, 540–541). Hence, the perspective of the French *imparfait* is indefinite or non-delimited, denoting not the entire event but only a section of it as it develops. By not including the beginning or end of the event, the prototypical *imparfait* focuses on the course of the action or the duration of an event in itself (1).

- (1) *Elle lisait*<sub>IMPF.</sub> *le livre pendant deux heures*<sub>DURATION.</sub>  
'She has been reading the book for two hours.'

The first example shows the prototypical combination of the imperfect with contextual elements (*pendant deux heures*) that convey similar aspectual information, namely duration, as the action of reading is specified as continuing for two hours.

- (2) *Il était*<sub>IMPF.</sub> *sept heures du matin, quand Phileas Fogg, Mrs. Aouda et Passepartout prirent*<sub>PERF.</sub> *pied sur le continent américain* [. . .]. (Verne, *Le tour du monde en 80 jours*, 167)  
'It was seven in the morning when Phileas Fogg, Mrs. Aouda and Passepartout set foot upon the American continent [. . .].'  
(Verne, *Around the World in 80 Days*, 167; Lit2Go).

Co-occurring with perfective past tenses such as the *passé composé* and the *passé simple*, the French *imparfait* prototypically forms the background while the perfective tenses denote clearly delimited events in the foreground (2). This is why the one-time action of setting foot somewhere at a precise point in time is expressed with the *passé simple* and the temporal background information with the *imparfait* and the

<sup>1</sup> In this, the *imparfait* is similar to the present tense, which is by definition ongoing and not delimited.

<sup>2</sup> *Verbes imperfectifs* (imperfective verbs) here refers to the verb semantics. The term might seem misleading as it is commonly associated with verb morphology. However, its use by Riegel/Pellat/Rioul (2009, 540–541) reflects the unidimensional approach this paper subscribes to (see §2), and highlights the fact that the universal content category of aspectuality can be expressed through different linguistic means. Semantically imperfective verbs, which are prototypically state verbs, share the semantic qualities of the *imparfait* in that they are also unbounded. Hereinafter the bidimensional terminology will be used to refer to the verb semantics as it allows for a finer aspectual distinction (see §2–§2.2, §4); an onomasiological terminology will be used to summarise the new aspectual combinations created by the IPC (§4).

state verb *to be*. As these examples show, the perfective and imperfective past tense forms prototypically appear in contexts that match their aspectual information.

In contrast to the prototypical occurrences described above, an imperfect occurring in a context with aspectually perfective elements, such as adverbs that express accomplishment or singular punctual events (e.g., *soudain/soudainement*, ‘suddenly’), creates a conflict between the imperfective aspectual meaning and the context’s demand for a perfective verb form. This aspectual conflict exposes changes in the functioning and meaning of the imperfect. This paper argues that the imperfect combined with perfective contextual elements, such as perfective adverbs or aspectually relevant object complements (see §2.1), creates a new aspectual structure where the imperfect no longer operates in the background but instead plays a role in the narrative foreground. From this first hypothesis it follows that such an *imparfait* takes the position of the two perfective past tense forms which prototypically occur in the foreground with perfective contextual elements. We will argue that the imperfect will maintain its aspectual properties in the foreground and that it will also adopt some of the characteristics of the perfective verb forms prototypically appearing in a perfective context, thereby creating a new aspectual perspective. The aim of this paper is to identify the unique aspectual qualities of the foregrounded *imparfait* or the *imparfait in a perfective context* (hereafter referred to as IPC) and its function and effect in a text. In addition, we will investigate whether the IPC and its particular aspectual combination can be translated into other languages, for instance into so-called aspectual languages that have a grammaticalised aspectual system, taking Russian as our example.

Comparison with the Russian aspectual system is of particular interest as this system differs significantly from that of the Romance and Germanic languages with respect to the obligatoriness of the expression or marking of verbal aspect. The Russian verbal system is organised in pairs, a perfective form and an imperfective form, between which the speaker has to choose in every utterance. As in French, aspectual means expressing similar aspectual information co-occur in Russian, with certain exceptions that create a set of sub-meanings (cf. Bondarko 1971). In contrast to French, the obligatory aspectual marking of the verb in Russian means that the combinatory patterns of aspectual expressions are highly fixed and allow for little or no variability. Hence, the second hypothesis this paper will explore is that a non-prototypical combination of imperfective and perfective aspectual means, as is the case with the *imparfait in a perfective context*, is not possible in Russian. Furthermore, we assume that the aspectual effect and perspective the IPC adds to the text in French will be translated through other means. The Russian translations of the French examples are therefore expected to contain perfective verbs in the given perfective context, while the non-prototypical *imparfait* meaning is conveyed with the help of compensatory modifications which we will analyse in §5.

The first part of the paper will deal with the functional category of aspectuality and then focus on a comparison of the French and Russian aspectual systems (§2). This will be followed by an introduction to Dessì Schmid's (2014) onomasiological model of aspectuality (§3), which offers a number of advantages for intra- and interlingual analyses. A modification of the model that allows the analysis to be extended from the sentence to the textual level will be presented. The main part of the paper will test the two hypotheses proposed through analysis of a French corpus example (§4) and comparison of the entries in a bilingual French-Russian corpus (§5).

## 2 The concept of aspectuality

Analysis of the *imparfait* in a perfective context is situated in the framework of aspectuality, a “universal content category through which speakers linguistically structure the manner of the development and the distribution of a state of affairs in time [. . .]” (Dessì Schmid 2019, 81) that can be expressed differently across languages. French and Russian have a variety of grammatical and lexical aspectual means and our focus here will be on the three main types: 1) verbal or grammatical aspect, expressed through verb morphology, 2) lexical aspect or *Aktionsart*, referring to the semantics of a verb, and 3) contextual elements, for example, adverbs with aspectual meaning (cf. Bondarko 1971, 4–5; Riegel/Pellat/Rioul 2009, 519; Dessì Schmid 2014, 43–45, 100). Dessì Schmid (2014, 99–100) adds elements that do not express, but rather interact with aspectual information, e.g., non-aspectual adverbs, quantification, negation and word order. In Russian, conjunctions can also convey aspectual meaning (cf. Bondarko 1971, 5). This paper will focus on these three aspectual realisations and their interaction in the case of an IPC, taking perfective adverbs as the starting point of the research.

Before the in-depth discussion of aspectuality, attention needs to be drawn to the following concerning the relationship between tense and aspect: in French, tense and aspect are closely morphologically interlinked in the past forms;<sup>3</sup> in Russian, the connection between the two categories is less evident as there is no identity between the respective morphemes, although it is discernible as certain verbs lack

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<sup>3</sup> Another way of seeing this relationship is that tense is expressed grammatically and overtly while aspect emerges on a secondary level as a covert category. Considering the aspectual and stylistic differences between the *imparfait*, the *passé composé* and the *passé simple*, however, the above-described approach, which posits a dual function of the aspecto-temporal morphemes, is preferred as an explanation for the co-existence of the three past tense forms.

either a perfective or an imperfective form in some tenses (e.g., *победит*<sub>PERF.</sub><sup>4</sup> (pobedit'), to defeat someone). Tense situates an event as retrospective, simultaneous or prospective relative to the moment of speaking and is commonly referred to as *past*, *present* or *future*. Aspect focusses on the internal temporal structuring or representation of an event at a given point in time and presents it as accomplished or ongoing. Tense and aspect thus complement each other in the linguistic representation of events in time (cf. Riegel/Pellat/Rioul 2009, 517–518).

This paper follows the unidimensional approach to aspectuality, according to which all aspectual means belong to the same semantic category and their differences are only of a formal nature (cf. Dessi Schmid 2019, 50–51). It should be added that French and Russian aspectual means display hierarchical differences, the verb being the syntactic and aspectual centre with more or less grammaticalised aspectuality (cf. Haßler 2016, 191–197). This means that while on the onomasiological level the aspectuality of a sentence or a passage results from the interaction of all available aspectual means, the verb as the syntactic centre will impact strongly on the overall aspectual and stylistic effect in an individual language.

## 2.1 Aspectuality in the French language

In French, an aspectual opposition only exists in correlation with the past tense, between the *imparfait*, the *passé composé* and the *passé simple* forms. Other tenses also carry aspectual qualities (see the distinction between compound/accomplished and simple/ongoing forms in Riegel/Pellat/Rioul 2009, 520), but do not systematically form oppositions between perfective and imperfective forms.

The *imparfait* has previously been defined as a form with an indefinite, internal and part-of-a-whole perspective. In addition to the prototypical use described above, grammars also list an imperfect of the foreground, which has different names, e.g., *imparfait narratif* (IN), *de rupture*, *de clôture*, *imparfait historique*, etc. (cf. Tasmowski-De Ryck 1985; Veters 1996; Bres 1999; 2005; Schrott 2011; Grevisse 2016, 1188–1189). These different terms show that the *imparfait* is a flexible form that accomplishes a variety of functions in the text structure. The approach to the IPC in this paper differs from previous literature in that it consists in a corpus analysis that uses an adverb with a perfective meaning as its starting point. As the adverb is already given and the research focus is on the

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<sup>4</sup> *Победить* (pobedit'<sub>PERF.</sub> = to defeat someone) has no present tense forms and no 1<sup>st</sup> person future tense forms (see also: <https://udarenieru.ru/index.php?doc=%D0%BF%D0%BE%D0%B1%D0%B5%D0%B4%D0%B8%D1%82%D1%8C>; [https://udarenieru.ru/index.php?article=\\_1](https://udarenieru.ru/index.php?article=_1)).

*imparfait*, these two constants enable us to study the variables, which are all the other aspectual elements, among them the *Aktionsart*. The constants allow for greater comparability, both intralinguistic, so that different semantic nuances in French can be identified, and interlinguistic, with a focus on alternative ways to express a particular aspectual content. The analysis of the French example (§4) will focus on the combination of the aspectual means and the IPC's function in the textual ensemble.

In contrast to the imperfective internal and immediate viewpoint, the two perfective forms offer external perspectives. For the *passé simple* (PS) this means that all phases belonging to an action expressed by the verb are presented as accomplished and the action is envisioned globally, in its entirety, with a beginning and an end (“Le procès au PS est vu comme un accomplissement de toutes les phases impliquées par le sémantisme du verbe [...]”, Confais 1990, 154; “vision synthétique et compacte du procès [...], une vision globale”, Riegel/Pellat/Rioul 2009, 537). With these qualities, the *passé simple* expresses clearly delimited events in the past, can introduce new temporal reference points, and is used in chronological sequences to create dynamic progression in the narration (cf. Grevisse 2016, 1189–1190). The *passé simple* differs stylistically from the *passé composé* as it shows the event from a narrative distance, often expressed by a third-person narrator, and is disconnected from the speaker's present time (“coupé [...] du présent de l'énonciateur”, Riegel/Pellat/Rioul 2009, 538).

The *passé composé* (PC) also presents an event from an external point of view, meaning that it is seen as accomplished. This perspective, however, is partially defined and non-global, in contrast to that of the PS, because the *passé composé* is never completely disconnected from the moment of speaking. “Cependant, ces deux temps ne sont pas interchangeables: avec le passé composé, l'événement passé n'est pas coupé du présent, mais il est envisagé [...] avec une certaine proximité psychologique” (Imbs 1960 in Riegel/Pellat/Rioul 2009, 536). It is this psychological connection or proximity to the moment of speaking that differentiates the two forms, though the PC tends to replace the PS in written and especially in spoken language to the extent that the PS is considered no longer in use or to have disappeared from orality (Grevisse 2016, 1889). The non-globality of the PC, which also gives it the name *passé indéfini* (cf. Grevisse 2016, 1889), and the connection to the moment of speaking make the PC a past tense form with a focus that shifts from the event towards its result.

An *imparfait* that appears in place of the perfective aspectual forms will most likely take over some of their characteristics, such as globality, resultativeness, narrative distance or psychological proximity.

Continuing with the aspectual means, *Aktionsart* or lexical aspect is implied in the lexical meaning of a verb independently of its grammatical realisation (cf.

Confais 1990, 148; Riegel/Pellat/Rioul 2009, 524). Verbs with similar semantics form groups that range from telic (including an inherent end point, such as *s'endormir* 'to fall asleep') to atelic (lacking an inherent end point, such as *dormir* 'to sleep'), dynamic to static, durative to non-durative or punctual, and others. These semantic differences are expressed by either the verb, prefixes or sometimes the presence of an object (cf. Verkuyl 1972; Comrie 1976).

Contextual elements that express aspectuality are objects and adverbs. An object can modify a verb's telicity (*reading vs. reading a certain novel*) while adverbs express the semantic polarities mentioned above.

This paper focusses on the combination of a perfective adverb, the imperfective grammatical aspectual form, i.e., the French *imparfait*, and a variable lexical aspect. A perfective *Aktionsart* works together with the perfective adverb to intensify its meaning and the contrast with the imperfect, whereas stative non-delimited verbs highlight durativity. The different effects the *Aktionsart* has on the IPC will be looked at in the main part.

## 2.2 Aspectuality in the Russian language

Aspectuality in Russian comprises the same three main categories as in French, but with a major difference in the aspectual centre (cf. Bondarko 1971, 4): the morphological or grammatical verbal aspect (*vid/вид*) in Russian consists of verbal pairs with one form being perfective<sup>5</sup> (*soveršennij vid/совершенный вид*) and the other imperfective (*nesoveršennij vid/несовершенный вид*). The opposition between the two aspectually marked forms constituting a verbal pair pervades all tenses – past, present and future (cf. Bondarko 1971, 61–62). The Russian verbal system thus always requires a choice to be made between the two aspectual forms.

This aspectual opposition is based on either morphologically distinct forms such as *писать*<sub>IMPF.</sub> – *написать*<sub>PERF.</sub> (*pisat'* – *napisat'*, 'to write') or on two verbs with different roots that form an aspectual pair, e.g., *говорить*<sub>IMPF.</sub> – *сказать*<sub>PERF.</sub> (*govorit'* – *skazat'*, 'to say') (cf. Bondarko 1971, 4; Rosental/Telenkova 1976). There are also perfective and imperfective verbs that have no pair (cf. Bondarko 1971, 4).

The dominant semantic feature of the perfective forms is their global perspective or *globality* (*celostnost'/целостность*, cf. Bondarko 1971, 12), denoting events

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<sup>5</sup> For reasons of clarity, the English aspectual terminology of *perfective* and *imperfective* forms of a given verbal pair will be used in describing Russian morphological aspect (*совершенный/несовершенный вид*). As in some cases the verbal pair consists of two morphologically distinct aspectual forms and in others of two different verbs with a perfective and an imperfective aspectual perspective, we will refer to the two realisations of a verbal pair as "forms".



in their entirety from beginning to end. In addition, perfective forms are characterised by inherent telicity, which in Russian, in contrast to French, is seen as part of the grammatical, not lexical aspect (cf. Bondarko 1971, 18). The reason telicity is associated with grammatical aspect in Russian is the fact that the very essence of perfectivity is considered to be the accomplishment of an event (cf. Rasmussen in Bondarko 1971, 18). A perfective verb form thus needs to be inherently telic to express that an event is reaching its end point. Perfective verb forms are compatible with adverbs denoting a singular occurrence, such as *odnaždy/однажды* or *kak-to raz/как-то раз* ‘one day’, ‘once’ (cf. Bondarko 1971, 13). In rare cases perfective verbs can be combined with habitual adverbs, such as *always*, and with durative ones, such as *for two hours* (cf. Bondarko 1971, 19, 14). The aspectual combinations in Russian exhibit therefore the same tendencies as were shown above in French, with perfective or clearly delimited contextual elements combining best with perfective verbs, and imperfective elements with imperfective verb forms. When in the past tense, perfective verbs form sequences of events and express sudden events forming the foreground (cf. Bondarko 1971, 14–16). The main use of perfective verbs is factual, denoting a singular event (cf. Bondarko 1971, 22). In addition, the perfective verb can express an exemplified case of habituality or iteration – in this case the context extends the meaning of the perfective verb and makes it repetitive (cf. Bondarko 1971, 22). All in all, the perfective form in Russian mainly expresses singular occurrences of the narrative foreground with a global perspective and inherent boundaries (telicity).

The imperfective form carries the semantically dominant feature of processuality and denotes an event in its development, as in French (cf. Bondarko 1971, 12). In Russian, this form is considered unmarked as it is equally compatible with elements expressing singular events as well as general facts (*Он сейчас волнуется<sub>IMPF</sub> – Он обычно волнуется<sub>IMPF</sub>* ‘He is worrying right now – He worries in general’) (Bondarko 1971, 14). Prototypically imperfective verbs mark the duration or ongoingness of a singular, clearly localised process. With a few exceptions, this meaning is achieved with all lexical aspects (cf. Bondarko 1971, 24–25). With action verbs, the imperfective verb form expresses ongoingness, denoting the event in its development, while with stative verbs it expresses durative states (*Он стоял<sub>IMPF</sub>, не снимая пальто, и что-то доставал<sub>IMPF</sub> из кармана*, ‘He was standing (state), and without taking off his jacket he was taking something out of his pocket (action)’, L. Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, in Bondarko 1971, 26). In addition, the imperfect can express general facts and iterativity (cf. Bondarko 1971, 28).

All in all, the Russian imperfect is unmarked and is most often associated with processuality, expressing, like the French form, the ongoingness or durativity of singular events or iterations, or general facts, prototypically simultaneous to other events.

Instances in which perfective verb forms can be replaced by imperfectives in the past tense are very limited and always result in a change of meaning. For instance, a perfective singular event when replaced by an imperfect becomes iterative or a general fact (cf. Bondarko 1971, 37). In all other cases a replacement leads to grammatically incorrect or absurd utterances (cf. Bondarko 1971, 36). A replacement without a change of meaning that would confer on the imperfect an accomplished perspective is not possible in Russian, as the clear aspectual difference between the two verb forms is always maintained.

Lexical aspect (*Sposoby dejstvija/Cnocoбы действия*) is formed by adding affixes, especially prefixes, to both perfective and imperfective verb roots. An example is the prefix *раз-* (*raz-*) with the meaning ‘to do something, here: to burn with increasing intensity’, which can express either an accomplished (*разгореться*<sub>PERF.</sub> – *razgoret’sja*) or ongoing event (*разгораться*<sub>IMPF.</sub> – *razgorat’sja*). As in French, verbs can be divided into semantic subcategories. The main semantic groups are inchoativity (*зачесть* – *zapet’*, ‘to start singing’), gradual intensification (*разгореться* – *razgoret’sja*, ‘to burn with increasing intensity’), and resultativity (cf. Bondarko 1971, 5).

Contextual elements that express aspectuality are adverbs of durativity (*часами* – *časami*, ‘for hours’), abruptness (*вдруг* – *vdrug*, ‘suddenly’), processuality, intensification, etc. (cf. Bondarko 1971, 5).

In this section we have presented the similarities between the aspectual means of the French and Russian languages and the differences between them at the level of grammatical aspect. As indicated above, where a prototypical perfective form is replaced with an imperfect in a perfective context in French an exact translation into Russian using the same means is not possible. The translation will therefore need to be modified in order to compensate for the untranslatable construction and to reproduce the particular effect achieved by the non-prototypical French imperfect. It is therefore of great interest to us to analyse the Russian compensatory strategies, i.e., the language-specific linguistic means chosen to transmit the aspectual meaning of the IPC in Russian.

### 3 An onomasiological model of aspectuality

The onomasiological model of aspectuality developed by Dessi Schmid (2014)<sup>6</sup> is the basis for the analysis presented here (§4). It has many advantages that will be examined in detail below. In §4.2 an addition to the model – a further level which

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<sup>6</sup> Dessi Schmid’s work on her onomasiological model of aspectuality was published in German in 2014, and in English translation in 2019. Quotes are taken from the English translation.

allows contextual elements to be integrated on the textual level – will be presented. This onomasiological model departs from the conventional terminology and abandons the bidimensional approach to aspectuality in favour of a unidimensionally-conceptualised category. According to Dessi Schmid (2019, 40), aspectuality is a universal content category that “represents the cognitive domain that concerns the temporal structuring of states of affairs” (Dessi Schmid 2019, 40). “It can function as a conceptual *tertium comparationis* since it is not derived from a formal pattern in an individual language, for which, of course, there would be no perfect equivalent in another individual language” (Dessi Schmid 2019, 40). A comparison focused on the formal realisations and means of aspectuality would simply point out the differences in expressing aspectuality in different languages and not help to identify conceptual similarities. However, with Dessi Schmid’s model it is possible to compare the aspectual context expressed in different languages even where the linguistic means used in these languages are not comparable.

The main difference between unidimensional and bidimensional approaches is that the latter regard aspect and *Aktionsart* as two semantically and formally distinct categories, whereas the former “assume no semantic distinction on the cognitive level between the two categories and therefore also no division within aspectuality. In this sense, aspect and *Aktionsart* represent only different formal realisations of one and the same content category” (Dessi Schmid 2019, 3). The bidimensional formal distinction between lexical and grammatical aspect is further resolved as grammar and lexicon are seen as “belonging to a continuum, of which lexicon and grammar represent the two poles of variable realities, since linguistic elements may have a greater or lesser degree of grammaticality or lexicality.” (Dessi Schmid 2019, 53). With aspect and *Aktionsart* expressing the same semantic content, the traditional terminological distinction becomes obsolete. Therefore, Dessi Schmid (2019) proposes a different terminology, which does not refer to the formal characteristics of language-specific aspectual means, but to the general level of the functional-semantic category of aspectuality.

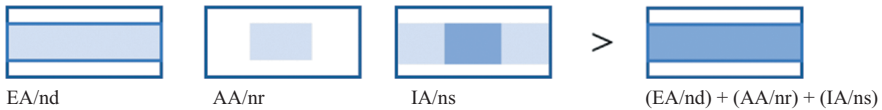
Her aspectuality model is based on frame semantics where each state of affairs or sentence proposed is conceptualised as an aspectual frame. A frame is defined as a “coherent schematization of [ . . . ] experience” (Fillmore 1985, 223, in Dessi Schmid 2019, 72) or “as a structured and coherent knowledge context, which may be of a general conceptual or culturally-specific nature, by means of which humans address various everyday situations (making decisions, coping with problems, . . .)” (Dessi Schmid 2019, 72). We now look at the structuring and the components of aspectual frames, each of which is “perceived as a figure in relation to the others which are the corresponding ground” (Dessi Schmid 2019, 111). The main principle of aspectuality is defined according to Dessi Schmid (2019, 50) as “delimitation

or demarcation, i.e., very generally as the setting of temporal boundaries in the structuring of states of affairs, and [. . .] therefore one of the fundamental distinctions between the different types of states of affairs is precisely that between the delimited and the non-delimited". The delimitations in question are the initial and final boundaries, and the subdivision delimitations of states of affairs. An event that is seen as accomplished is delimited as it has initial and final boundaries. Recognising or setting those boundaries creates three aspectual elements, which are the above-mentioned components of the aspectual frame: "the boundary (tx) itself, the adjacencies before and after the set boundaries, and the interval enclosed by two set boundaries" (Dessi Schmid 2019, 111). From these elements follow Dessi Schmid's three aspectual dimensions, which are:

- 1) External aspectuality, which differentiates externally delimited (EA/d) events that have initial and final boundaries with a time span in between; punctually delimited states of affairs (EA/pd) that cannot be extended; and non-delimited states of affairs (EA/nd). The focus of this dimension is on the duration of an event (cf. Dessi Schmid 2019, 117).
- 2) Adjacency-related aspectuality, which focuses on the relevance of a state of affairs for its adjacency. An event can have final relevance (AA/fr) with respect to its preceding adjacency by marking its end, i.e. its final delimitation; it can have initial relevance (AA/ir) if it marks the beginning of a subsequent situation, i.e. its initial delimitation; it can have transformative relevance (AA/tr) if it functions as the end of a preceding adjacency and the beginning of the subsequent one, marking a change of state; or it can have no influence at all on its adjacencies and thus not be relevant to them (AA/nr). This dimension focusses on the resultativity, ingressivity or change of state of an event (cf. Dessi Schmid 2019, 127).
- 3) Internal aspectuality, which deals with internally subdivided states of affairs. This dimension relates to the structuring of the time span between two boundaries and can either be subdivided, in which case it consists of different perceivable moments and is pluriphasic (IA/s), or not subdivided, in which case it is monophasic/static and contains no different perceivable moments (IA/ns). This dimension concerns the dynamic and static properties of an event (cf. Dessi Schmid 2019, 135).

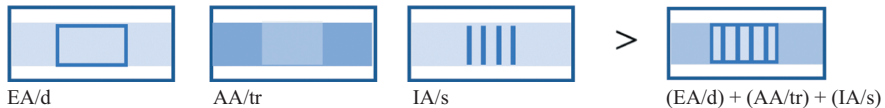
The three aspectual dimensions combine to form delimitation schemas (DS), as shown in examples (3) and (4). As these dimensions are situated on the conceptual level of aspectuality, their formal realisations differ from language to language. The following two examples show prototypical delimitation schemas of the *imparfait* and the *passé simple*:

- (3) *Julie était<sub>IMP</sub> grande pour son âge.*  
 ‘Julie was tall for her age.’  
 [(EA/nd) + (AA/nr) + (IA/ns)]



**Figure 1:** Prototypical delimitation schema: *imparfait* (cf. Dessì Schmid 2019, 145).

- (4) *Le printemps s’installa<sub>PS</sub> dans les jardins tout doucement.*  
 ‘Spring came to the gardens very slowly.’  
 [(EA/d) + (AA/tr) + (IA/s)]



**Figure 2:** Prototypical delimitation schema: *passé simple* (cf. Dessì Schmid 2019, 157).

In (3) the imperfective verb form is non-delimited as it does not denote the beginning or end of a state of affairs. Nor does the context contain any delimiting elements, so the external aspectuality is non-delimited (EA/nd). As it has no boundaries, it consequently has no preceding or subsequent adjacency on which it could have an effect and is thus not relevant for its adjacency (AA/nr). Its internal aspectuality is monophasic as *être* (to be) is a stative verb and does not convey any internal development (IA/ns). The illustration (cf. Figure 1) shows the basic conceptualisations of EA without any boundaries, an AA with no left or right adjacency, and a non-subdivided IA. Together they form a delimitation schema that represents the aspectuality of the state of affairs in (3) (cf. Dessì Schmid 2019, 146).

In (4) the *passé simple*, characterised by a global perspective and clear initial and final boundaries, has a delimited aspectuality (EA/d). The event it depicts, the slow coming of spring, creates a change of state as it was winter before and afterwards spring will have arrived in full bloom. The coming of spring is therefore transformative (AA/tr), it ends winter and marks the beginning of spring. The internal aspectuality is pluriphasic because the gradual coming consists of a number of different perceivable stages. The schema in Figure 2 shows a clearly delimited EA, an AA/tr with the preceding and subsequent adjacencies that it influences on the left and right sides, respectively, of the state of affairs, marked with a dark colour, and a subdivided IA, which altogether form the DS (cf. Dessì Schmid 2019, 157–158).

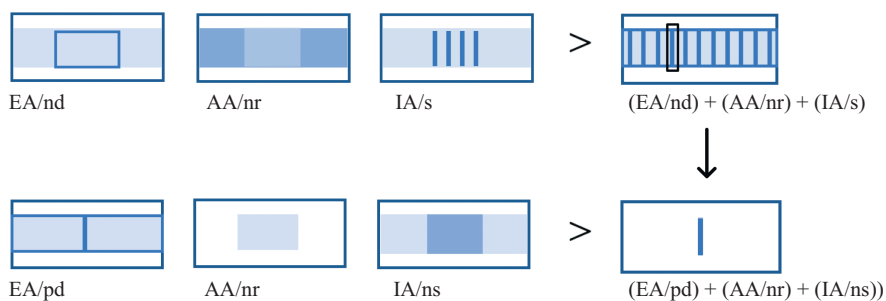
These prototypical examples show the contributions of different aspectual elements and how they interact to create the aspectual frame of a state of affairs, which then is reflected in the delimitation schema. As in (3) and (4), the analysis of the corpus examples that follows combines the onomasiological and semasiological approaches. The advantage of this is that the onomasiological approach allows the aspectual contents of examples with different aspectual formal expressions and combinations to be compared within a language as well as cross-linguistically, while the formal aspectual means of each example in any language can be described and analysed in detail using bidimensional terms. This way both the formal and semantic properties of each utterance are analysed. In our analysis, this model will only be applied to the French corpus example to unite all the aspectual means involved.<sup>7</sup>

An explanation of complex states of affairs, such as progressivity, expressed by aspectual verbal periphrases amongst other means, is necessary at this point. Complex events are integrated into the onomasiological model on a second level, “that is created through further recursive perspectivisation (or focussing) of some of the outcomes of the first level of perspectivization” (Dessi Schmid 2019, 169). An analysis on the first level only would not suffice, as this level shows the entire aspectual frame created by an utterance without the possibility of focusing on recurrent elements. On the second level one or more individual moments can be studied in detail, which is why the prerequisite for focalisation on this level is a pluriphasic or subdivided event (cf. Dessi 2019, 175):

(5) *Daniela était<sub>IMP</sub> en train de parler avec Julien.* [être en train de + Inf.]

‘Daniela was speaking with Julien.’

[[ $(EA/nd) + (AA/nr) + (IA/s)$ ] >  $(EA/pd) + (AA/nr) + (IA/ns)$ ]]



**Figure 3:** Prototypical delimitation schema: pluriphasic event (cf. Dessi Schmid 2019, 173).

<sup>7</sup> Due to limited space, this onomasiological model will not be applied to the comparative analysis (§5).

Example (5) contains an aspectual periphrasis (*être en train de + Inf.*), which marks the progressive aspect. In the linear delimitation schema, the first level of the analysis is on the left, while the second level is on the right. The imperfective form is prototypically non-delimited and the context does not provide any limiting elements (EA/nd), therefore the event has no relevance for its adjacency (AA/nr). Because of the periphrasis, separate moments during the time Daniela was speaking can be identified, which makes it a pluriphasic event (IA/s). The dynamic character of the periphrasis can be represented on a second level given that the individual moments in which Daniela was speaking can be further perspectivised. A focalised moment in Daniela's speaking thus has a punctually delimited external aspectuality, as there is no perceivable time span in a moment (EA/pd), therefore no subdivision either (IA/ns). The focalised instances are not relevant for their adjacency (AA/nr), meaning that no single moment in Daniela's speaking has an effect on any other moment. The schema in Figure 3 functions as in the previous examples, the only difference being that a moment of the first level is marked and perspectivised on a second level, with this relationship indicated by an arrow. The two-level delimitation schema elucidates the aspectual content of complex utterances, including their dynamic progression. In the following, it will be applied to the corpus examples.

## 4 Analysis

### 4.1 The combined semasiological and onomasiological approach on the sentence level

Application of Dessì Schmid's onomasiological model of aspectuality to IPC examples has numerous advantages, outlined below. As the IPC appears in contexts where we would normally expect perfective past tense forms, the first hypothesis (§1) assumes that by taking on a role in the narrative foreground the IPC also takes over some of the perfective characteristics and thus acquires a new aspectual perspective. The perfective characteristics described in §2.1 are associated with different categories of meaning nuances in the IPC examples. To identify the meaning nuances, all aspectual means are considered, and the different perfective or imperfective values are brought together. In this way all the available aspectual information of a sentence is included and minimal differences can be easily detected because the *imparfait* and the adverb with a perfective meaning (see below) used in the corpus research function as constants. Both the semasiological and the onomasiological terminologies are used in the analysis to identify the linguistic means

that interact to create the IPC in French. There are a number of reasons for taking this approach. Application of this onomasiological model to the analysis has the advantage that all the aspectual means involved in creating the different IPCs are summarised in one delimitation schema containing its external, adjacency-related and internal aspectualities. Categorising these elements according to Dessi Schmid's onomasiological model emphasises their function in the frame rather than their belonging to a formal category, e.g., lexical or grammatical aspect. In §4.2 an addition to the model will be presented, which allows the role of the IPC to be included in the textual ensemble.

The perfective adverb was used as the search criterion in the French literary corpus *Frantext*, which contains 5,469 texts from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, providing a diachronic overview (cf. *Frantext*). The term *perfective adverbs* refers to adverbs that indicate clearly that a state of affairs has a beginning or end point, or is punctual and therefore delimited. Such adverbs add perfective meaning to the context and create the opposing aspectual pole to the *imparfait*. The corpus search was conducted with the adverb *soudain*, meaning 'suddenly'. Its synonyms *brusquement*, *inopinément*, *subitement* denote inchoativity through rapid and unexpected beginnings, as well as abrupt ends and punctual events (cf. *Trésor de la langue française (TLFi)*). Clear reference is also made to the past forms: "*Soudain* accompagne un verbe au passé simple qui, décrivant un changement, une rupture, s'oppose à un verbe à l'imp. qui marque une durée" (cf. TLFi). *Soudain* co-occurs with a *passé simple* that, describing a change, a rupture, is in opposition to an *imparfait* form that marks duration. Here, the perfective adverb combined with a perfective verb form stands in clear contrast to the imperfect. Thus, *soudain* seems to be incompatible with or unlikely to appear in close proximity to an imperfect. However, a number of corpus examples can be found that show such a cooccurrence, as in the following example:

- (6) *l'image en percutait une autre qui était ici l'enfilade de la voiture déserte, car sous la lumière électrique uniforme la perspective perdait soudain sa profondeur, dépouillée des ombres trompeuses qui la déguisent. Il venait juste d'avalier sa salive – il perçut alors l'encombrement effroyable de cet endroit, la texture des sièges en matière plastique, des aplats mats de rouille sombre, frangés d'un glaciis verdâtre, la brillance tubulaire des rampes [ . . ].*<sup>8</sup>  
(Frantext: Garat, *Voie non classée*, 1985, 91)

<sup>8</sup> The text preceding the quote: "[ . . ] Maintenant il ne se sentait rien de plus que vivant, et seul, à regarder les murs filants d'affiches bariolées, puis du noir derrière les vitres, puis lui dans le miroir des vitres, debout [ . . ] au fond de l'autobus désert. [ . . ] et c'était en surimpression une aigre odeur de linge froid, mouillée, qu'ici il reconnaît enfin, et les projecteurs crus du chantier de nuit sur les



‘The image changed to another, which was the aisle of the deserted bus, for under the uniform electric light the perspective *suddenly* lost its depth, stripped of the deceptive shadows that disguise it. He had just swallowed his saliva – he then perceived the appalling clutter of this place, the texture of the plastic seats, the dull patches of dark rust, fringed with a greenish glaze, the tubular shine of the handrails [. . .].’<sup>9</sup>

The protagonist is on a bus at night and looks out of the window, where he sees illuminated advertising. The text preceding the analysed passage lists the things he notices – including the naked body of his wife (see n. 8), an indication that at some point the narration has changed from the actual surroundings to his imagination. This text passage contains prototypical descriptive *imparfait* forms, similar to those in example (3), that express the protagonist’s feelings (*il ne se sentait rien de plus que vivant*). The narrative focus then changes abruptly – *l’image en percutait une autre* – to the inside of the bus, which the protagonist seems to take in for the first time judging by the number of descriptive details. Hence, in this passage there is a sudden change of situation, which is expressed by the imperfective verb forms *percutait* and *perdait* and the perfective adverb *soudain*. These two verbs stand in contrast to the preceding imperfects (*sentait*, *était*) as well as a present tense (*reconnaît*) that seems to create proximity in combination with the adverb ‘now’ (*maintenant*). *Percutait* and *perdait* are not prototypical occurrences of the *imparfait*, but rather instances of the IPC. Both verbs are punctual and have an inherent end point (telic) as *percuter* means ‘to hit’ (syn.: *frapper*) and *perdre* ‘to lose’. *Perdre* expresses a final moment in combination with perfective elements (e.g., *cesser de percevoir* ‘to cease to perceive’, TLFi) and can also be combined with durativity, often resulting in iterativity (e.g., *le gout des courses de taureaux se perdait en Espagne* ‘the taste for bullfighting was being lost in Spain’,<sup>10</sup> TLFi) depicting the process preceding a possible endpoint. It is thus a telic verb (i.e., a verb with an inherent end point, cf. §2.1) with a strong resultative focus. In (6), this resultative component is then underlined by the perfective adverb, so that a descriptive or durative reading becomes unlikely and the punctual reading predominant. A combination of punctual *Aktionsarten* and the *imparfait* depicting a clearly singular event is what differentiates these imperfects from the preceding ones. The contextual elements and the lexical aspect all point towards a perfective reading, hence the English simple past translation, which the adverb explicitly underlines by marking the event’s boundaries, while

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pilons crachant sous pression la vapeur pailletée de givre, et sa femme sur le lit, Anna – son corps blanc, pointes noires des seins, sexe noir –, [. . .].’

<sup>9</sup> Translated with the help of [www.DeepL.com/Translator](http://www.DeepL.com/Translator), edited by E. Eliasson.

<sup>10</sup> Translated by E. Eliasson.

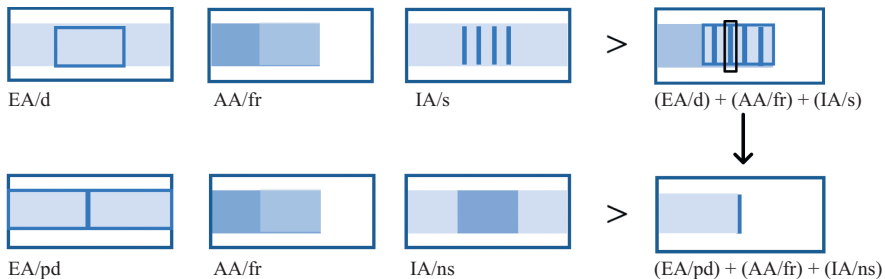
the imperfect represents the opposing aspectual quality. A descriptive or simply manner-related interpretation of this situation is excluded, due in particular to *soudain*, because a sudden loss of depth of perspective, as is the case in this excerpt, needs a reference point and thus cannot be non-delimited. There is, therefore, an aspectual conflict between the perfective and the imperfective elements marking the particular moment of change in the example. How can this conflict be resolved and what is the effect of the IPC here compared with a prototypical perfective form? As mentioned above, the perfective elements work together to underline the boundaries of the state of affairs expressed by the verb, while the verb expresses an imperfective reading. One solution is that the imperfective perspective of ongoingness is maintained with its immediacy and its internal view so that the event can be seen in its unfolding within the contextually set boundaries. Our analysis of the interpretation of the IPC is similar to that proposed by Bres (2005), who holds that the *imparfait* becomes a form of the foreground and is perceptible as it unfolds. The difference between our approach and previous ones is that in ours the perfective adverb is the starting point of our research so that a number of comparable IPC examples are generated in *Frantext*, as there are two constants (§2), the imperfect and the adverb, allowing for a more nuanced and detailed comparison and analysis of the examples.

In example (6) the IPC reflects the protagonist's sudden change of perception as he turns his attention from the dark streets to the lit-up interior of the bus (*car sous la lumière électrique uniforme la perspective perdait soudain sa profondeur*). More precisely, while his change of focus is only indirectly verbalised (*l'image en percutait une autre*), its effect and the result – the sudden loss of the protagonist's depth of perspective and the changed visual perception of his surroundings – is directly expressed and even accentuated by the unusual aspectual combination. In addition to the accentuation, the IPC enriches the excerpt, as can be deduced from the following: the third-person narration contains many elements of proximity in its wider context, such as the adverb *maintenant* and present tense forms. In addition, the account of the situation is not objective, but rather very subjective, even partly imaginary. The loss of depth of perspective, in particular, is an indication of the protagonist's sensory reaction to the lights in the bus. Through the particular effect of the *imparfait* the reader witnesses the gradual process of the protagonist becoming accustomed to the lighting conditions. The internal sensory perspective thus stands in contrast to the objectively punctual loss of depth, expressed through the perfective *Aktionsart* of *perdre* and underlined by *soudain*. The IPC therefore shows both the perceived gradual sensory change and its initial and final delimitations, the latter marking the moment when the visual depth is finally lost and his eyes have adapted to the light. The wider context contains a detailed description of the interior of the bus, which underlines that the protagonist has become

accustomed to the light. Finally, the single *passé simple* form appearing right before this description (*il perçut alors l'encombrement effroyable de cet endroit*) marks an important point in the narration: the end of the subjective phase, setting the boundary of the accustoming process, and the return to the appalling (*effroyable*) disillusioning reality of the bus.

The narrative proximity identified in this passage and connected to the subjective perspective of the third-person narrator and also the resultative character of the sensory reaction to the light links this IPC with the characteristics of the *passé composé*. The *imparfait* enriches the text, as it creates a dynamic effect and makes the protagonist's subjective perception tangible, while at the same time depicting a delimited event. The resolution of the aspectual conflict on the semantic level can also be captured by a delimitation schema (DS) on two levels:

$$(7) \quad [((EA/d) + (AA/fr) + (IA/s)) > ((EA/pd) + (AA/fr) + (IA/ns))]$$



**Figure 4:** Delimitation schema of example 6: delimitation and ongoingness.

On the first level, the boundaries set by the context (*soudain*, telic verb/perfective lexical aspect) determine a delimited external aspectuality. The event can be subdivided as the situation is unfolding (*perçoit<sub>IMP</sub>*) and therefore different stages or moments in the gradual accustoming to the illuminated interior of the bus can be perceived. The event has final adjacency relevance, meaning that the gradual process of the loss of depth of perception marks the end of this perceived depth of perception. The lexical aspect plays a role in the adjacency-related aspectuality, as it is the inherent meaning of the verb ‘to lose’ that creates a final relevance (fr) rather than a transformative relevance. Although it introduces a change of state, the verb meaning itself focusses on what is lost and not on what is created, which explains the final relevance. The depiction of this event on two levels in Figure 4 resolves the aspectual conflict as one level only captures the boundaries and the pluriphasic quality, but does not capture the particularity of this combination, i.e., the immediacy of the imperfect within the boundaries. On just the first level, this

event would be comparable to example (4), which contains a *passé simple*. Thus, the internal and immediate effect of the *imparfait*, while being completely delimited, can only be transferred, similar to the progressive examples, through a second level representation. On the second level, each instant that is focalised is punctually delimited and cannot be subdivided. It has final adjacency relevance, as each moment of the gradual process shows greater clarity and therefore ends the depth of perception of the preceding moment.

The semasiological and onomasiological analyses of this example have shown how a combination of opposing aspectual means can be unified in a delimitation schema. The particular effect of the *imparfait* realising its characteristic immediacy and ongoingness within its contextually given boundaries is resolved by transferring the dynamicity to a second level, while the first level presents the boundaries.

However, not all the contextual elements named in the semasiological analysis using bidimensional terminology can be integrated into the onomasiological delimitation schema. The two-level analysis focuses on the central clause containing the aspectual conflict, while the adjacent clauses constitute the wider context and are not represented in this schema. The importance of the wider context for the understanding and functioning of the non-prototypical *imparfait* in the textual structure is evident. This is why in the following we will present an innovation to the onomasiological model: a third level that represents the aspectual information of the wider context.

## 4.2 The extension of Dessì Schmid's onomasiological model: The textual level

The onomasiological aspectuality model operates on the sentence level and the examples given by Dessì Schmid (2019) all consist of sentences with one or two clauses and no further context (see examples 3, 4 and 5).<sup>11</sup> In the case of the *imparfait* corpus examples the focus lies on the clause containing the IPC (*sous la lumière électrique uniforme la perspective perdait soudain sa profondeur*). As this

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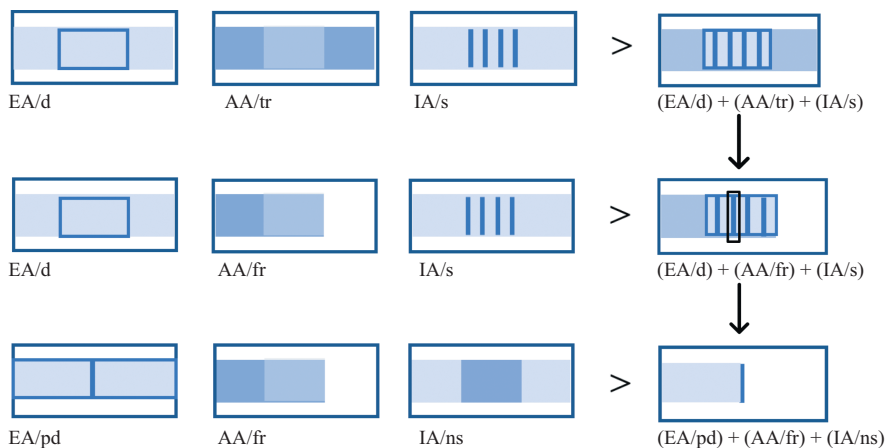
<sup>11</sup> Dessì Schmid (2019) speaks of *aspectual situation frames* – conceptualisations of her examples based on world knowledge (§3). A “frame represents the entity at the macro-level, then the relations based on contiguity are the organising principle at the micro-level” (Dessì Schmid 2019, 105). The sentences analysed therefore represent the macro-level, while the constituents operate on the micro-level. The addition proposed in §4.2 is also situated at the macro-level. The information provided by the context can be conceptualised as an additional frame that then serves as a basis for comparison with the IPC clause analysed (see example 7).

clause plays a role in the textual structure and does not appear as an isolated unit, it is important that the delimitation schema also reflects its position in the text. The DS should therefore include contextual elements that have an influence on or stand in a relation to the central clause. To be more precise, it is the relationship of this clause to the narration that needs to be represented on an additional textual level in the delimitation schema. For this purpose, I propose three categories of influence:

- 1) elements that mark delimitations. These include temporal and local specifications that situate events in time by providing aspectually relevant reference points (e.g., dates);
- 2) anaphoric and cataphoric elements that underline the *imparfait*-clause, e.g., pronouns that refer to the event expressed by the IPC, thereby accentuating it and pointing out its importance for the narration;
- 3) elements that mark enumerations. It is important to consider which position in a sequence the *imparfait* occupies. An *imparfait* occurring in a final position can, for instance, marks a closure (*imparfait conclusif, de clôture*), appearing at the beginning of a narrative succession it can function as an *imparfait d'ouverture* (cf. Bres 2005, 201–204), or it can simply direct the focus to the development of an event if it appears in the middle of a chain of events or marks a change of state.

The way the new level works is that it does not simply summarise the relevant contextual elements, but functions as an interaction schema that relates the *imparfait* to the contextual information. Summarising the variety of contextual variables in one delimitation schema would not be possible. Moreover, a schema does not represent individual elements but the sum of their influences, in this case their aspectual effect on the central clause. The interaction schema can either confirm and reinforce or correct the analysis of the first level. In this way this schema relates the isolated analysis at the sentence level directly to its textual role and can thus specify whether the aspectual means of the *imparfait* clause create the same effect as the interaction of the contextual elements or a different one. This specification leads to a more accurate identification of the IPC as only by analysing all aspectual elements can the aspectual network the *imparfait* functions in be grasped – just as sentence aspectuality depends on all the means of expression of aspectuality and not just on the verb morphology. The third level is therefore added as follows:

- [(EA/d) + (AA/tr) + (IA/s) > (3<sup>rd</sup> level)  
 (EA/d) + (AA/fr) + (IA/s) > (1<sup>st</sup> level)  
 (EA/pd) + (UA/fr) + (IA/ns)] (2<sup>nd</sup> level)



**Figure 5:** The addition of the textual level to a delimitation schema.

The textual level is situated above the first level connected to the latter's adjacency-related aspectuality (as shown in the schema above) given that the additional level underlines the relationship between the *imparfait* and its adjacency. Looking at the delimitation schema hierarchically, with the vertical lines marking the aspectual dimension most influenced by the additional level, has its advantages: it reproduces the hierarchy between the textual ensemble and the individual sentences, just as the second level represents a unit of the first level. The vertical perspective therefore gives a clearer overview of the aspectual relationships between text, sentence and the internal structure of the IPC analysed. The schema in Figure 5 presents the relationship between the textual and the sentence level as a perspective narrowing or zooming in, as visualised by the downward-pointing arrow.

There are three main verbs in the passage – *percutait*<sub>IMPF</sub>, *perdait*<sub>IMPF</sub> and *perçut*<sub>PS</sub> – that create a sequence. *Percutait* and *perçut* function here as elements of the third type of category of influence as they are part of the sequence or enumeration with the IPC. As punctual verbs, *percutait* marks the beginning of the passage, *perdait* the subjectively prolonged moment of transition and *perçut* its end and the return to objective reality as it focuses on the beginning of the protagonist's clear perception of the surroundings.<sup>12</sup> This enumeration could be called an interrupted

<sup>12</sup> The imperfect *était* in the middle of this verb chain is prototypical and refers descriptively to the interior of the bus. *Il venait juste d'avalier sa salive* is an *imparfait* that, due to the meaning of the verbal periphrasis, also contains a perfective denotation. It operates as a connector between the previous situation of darkness in which the protagonist experienced an erotic fantasy and the final element of the sensory enumeration.

sequence as it contains different perspectives of the same event – subjective and objective text parts – with *perçut* representing the objective state of events while directly referring to the subjective and sensory dimension of the narration. The aspectual contrast between the two parts of the text can also be observed on the level of the semantic field – the internal passage cooccurs with *ombres trompeuses, déguisent*, lexical items that belong to the semantic field of illusion, which is gradually being lost (*dépouillée*, ‘stripped’ of the shadows); while the objective passage consists of detailed interior descriptions including the texture of the seats.

Looking at this sequence, it can be seen that the *imparfait* cooccurring with *soudain* influences the narration as it constitutes a transitional passage necessary for the protagonist to return to objective reality. It is therefore an internal passage that evolves somehow in parallel, though still in the foreground, with the events that are happening objectively in the narration. As such, our observations of this occurrence of the IPC agree with de Saussure’s conclusion that “all non-background IMP utterances correspond to [ . . . ] a projected non-egocentric, that is allocentric, deictic point, replacing the R-point [previous reference point]” (de Saussure 2013a, 53), meaning that the IPC marks a perspective that is different to the narrator’s in that it reflects the protagonist’s subjectivity. He further adds that the change of narrative perspective, i.e., the allocentric point of view introduced by the non-prototypical French *imparfait* “is nothing more than the grasping of a secondary origo point associated with an imaginary subjectivity perceiving the eventuality as ongoing.” (de Saussure 2013b). The *imparfait* passage here marks the contrast between the viewpoints of the excerpt’s third-person narrator and protagonist: while from the narrator’s perspective the protagonist might have rapidly turned his head towards the interior of the bus, his subjective and internal perspective is that of ongoingness. Becker/Egetenmeyer/Hinterwimmer (2021, 349) confirm the analysis of the *imparfait* marking a shift of perspective and add that “[a]spectually the imperfect marks that the thought-content (i.e., the underlying proposition of the FID [free indirect discourse]) is attached to a secondary source, the protagonist’s now”.

Continuing the onomasiological analysis, we can say that the position of the IPC between a punctual *imparfait* and a PS confirms the externally delimited aspectuality – the protagonist’s becoming accustomed to the light reaches its end point. The adjacency-related aspectuality is corrected because the interrupted enumeration situates the *imparfait* with respect to the other clauses, where it has transformative relevance (AA/tr) for the preceding and subsequent passages, as it introduces the protagonist’s sensory change, before which he was accustomed to the night’s darkness and after which he is able to fully perceive the interior of the bus (*il perçut alors*). In the subsequent sentence, *alors* (‘he then perceived’) highlights the beginning of the new perception. The protagonist’s punctual change of focus itself is objectively not subdivided, unlike the sensory adaptation expressed

in the excerpt, as seen in §4.1. For the narrative progression, the change is just a moment (*la lumière électrique*) to which *il perçut alors*, an anaphoric element of the second influencing category (see above), refers. As we observe this moment and the subsequent internal change from the protagonist's perspective through the IPC, it becomes a gradually perceivable process, which is why the internal aspectuality is also subdivided on the third level of the schema (IA/s).

To sum up, the addition of the third level to the delimitation schema proves to be efficient in refining and specifying the analysis. It allows the IPC, an imperfective verb with a perfective *Aktionsart* cooccurring with a perfective adverb, to be analysed on the sentence level and to be placed in relation to its wider context. This way the effects of contextual, morphological and lexical aspectual means, semantic fields and, in short, elements of textual coherence and cohesion can be integrated into the schema.

## 5 Comparison of French and Russian examples

In this section, the French IPC examples and their translations into Russian will be analysed with the aim of verifying the second hypothesis (§1), which states that it is not possible to translate the *imparfait* in a perfective context into Russian with the same aspectual combination as in French. Instead, it is expected that the IPC will be translated into Russian using other aspectual means (compensatory mechanisms) which will be examined in what follows.

So far, we have seen how in the case of the *imparfait* in a perfective context in French aspectual means and other elements interact at the level of the sentence and the text. The effect the IPC creates – a state of affairs with a perfective delimitation combined with an ongoingness perspective that enables the reader to participate in the unfolding of the event – has been highlighted and described. The example analysed also clarifies that the *imparfait* does not exactly take over the characteristics of the perfective verb form, but rather that it adds its quality to a perfective structure, thereby enriching it. The combination of all aspectual means produces one aspectual frame containing the particular effects and nuances of the IPC, namely, its imperfective and perfective qualities. It is the morphological identity of tense and aspect in French past forms and the absence of a clearly marked aspectual morphological category, in contrast to Russian, that give this flexibility and these aspectual combinations. As the verb is the syntactic centre, the *imparfait* is the object of the main focus and determines to a greater degree how an event is perceived (cf. §2). This leads to verb-centred terms such as the IPC or “non-prototypical *imparfait*”, although all aspectual means involved are considered. In what



follows, we will investigate how the Russian aspectual system can reproduce the effects of the French IPC.

For this purpose, we conducted a comparative corpus analysis with the European corpus programme *Sketch Engine*,<sup>13</sup> which “contains 500 ready-to-use corpora” (*Sketch Engine*<sup>14</sup>). The parallel corpus we used, OPUS2, “is a set of text corpora with aligned sentences which allow searching and analysing translations between [40 languages]” (*Sketch Engine*<sup>15</sup>). The parallel search for an imperfective verb in combination with *soudain* in French along with its corresponding Russian translation yielded 15 results in a corpus size containing 956,614,852 tokens. This shows how rare occurrences of the IPC are in French: only 1.57 hits per million tokens. The situation is similar with *subitement* and other synonymous adverbs, and also when distance is created between the two search criteria. Even the same search with a PS or a past participle yields no more than 54 results, which could be explained by the fact that OPUS2 has many sub-corpora containing spoken language data.<sup>16</sup> The low result ratio may also have to do with the Russian corpus being smaller than the French corpus (307,709,872 vs. 766,833,908 tokens, respectively).

The *imparfait* examples in French occur with action or process verbs as well as with stative verbs. It is particularly interesting that very few of the Russian translations reproduce the perfective adverb, as the selection of corpus examples in Table 1 shows:

The source of these examples, OpenSubtitles2011, is a website that provides subtitles of popular movies in various languages. The examples given therefore represent the spoken language or orally conceptualised written language. Of 15 examples, 7 are instances of *imparfaits*, the rest are *plus-que-parfait* forms that also match the search criteria. In what follows, the selected examples will be briefly analysed.<sup>17</sup>

Example (8) concerns two people who are suddenly categorised as bastard children due to a change of situation. The French example focusses on the end result of the change of state (highlighted by *soudain* and the resultative lexical

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13 The clear advantage of *Sketch Engine* is that it allows a search to be carried out for cooccurrences, whereas only one search criterion can be entered in *Frantext* so the data have to be searched manually for the rare IPC cooccurrences. The sheer number of corpora contained in *Sketch Engine*, their up-to-date data and the possibility of working with parallel corpora greatly benefit the research.

14 <https://www.sketchengine.eu/#blue>.

15 [https://www.sketchengine.eu/opus-parallel-corpora/?fbclid=IwAR1rX2ZUKTrVbZ7s-tJl8H\\_RN-mk81SkV5GIANv4m6vjPO0ynYswjzqG6dY#toggle-id-1](https://www.sketchengine.eu/opus-parallel-corpora/?fbclid=IwAR1rX2ZUKTrVbZ7s-tJl8H_RN-mk81SkV5GIANv4m6vjPO0ynYswjzqG6dY#toggle-id-1).

16 The differences in the distribution of the IPC in written and spoken discourse are yet to be determined.

17 An onomasiological analysis is not presented due to limited space.

**Table 1:** Parallel corpus examples: translations from French into Russian with and without the adverb.

French examples	Russian translations
(8) <i>Du coup, Chris et moi devenions soudain des bâtards.</i>  'Therefore, Chris and I suddenly became bastards.'*	Этот факт <i>превратил</i> ( <i>perf.</i> ) Криса и меня в незаконно-рожденных детей. OpenSubtitles2011 This fact suddenly transformed (meaning 're-defined us as') Chris and me into illegitimate children.*
(9) <i>la monogamie semblait soudain une notion désuète.</i>  'monogamy suddenly seemed an outdated idea.'*	идея моногамии как-то сама собой <i>померкла</i> ( <i>perf.</i> ). OpenSubtitles2011 the idea of monogamy has somehow faded/ disappeared on its own
(10) <i>Ma vie était soudain nulle . . . mais mes placards étaient superbes.</i>  'My life was/became suddenly hopeless. . . but my cupboards were splendid.'*	Моя жизнь <i>была</i> ( <i>imprf.</i> ) кошмаром . . . зато моя квартира становилась лучше. OpenSubtitles2011 My life was a nightmare. . . but my apartment was becoming better.*

\*translated by E. Eliasson

aspect) and also shows it in its unfolding through the *imparfait*. In Russian, this aspectual combination is not possible as it would express iteration, so only the perfective resultative meaning – the factual use of the perfective form with a global perspective (see §2.2) – can be expressed through the grammatical aspect. The Russian translation shows a change of syntactic roles as a different verb is chosen: the protagonists become syntactic objects as they are *transformed* (*превратить*) into bastard children. This modification adds dynamicity to the otherwise perfective sentence, as 'transform'<sup>18</sup> lexically implies a change of state. We can see, therefore, that the IPC is translated only through perfective aspectual means (hence the possible omission of the perfective adverb), while the imperfective qualities are expressed through compensatory mechanisms, such as the choice of a verb with a dynamic lexical aspect.

The translation of example (9) is also interesting because of the context and the verb changes. In this particular example, monogamy suddenly seems to have become an outdated idea. *Sembler* is a state verb that does not denote any inherent

18 Перевести в другое состояние, качество 'to bring something into a different state, quality' (cf. Малый академический словарь русского языка [https://classes.ru/all-russian/russian-dictionary-Ozhegov-term-25877.htm?fbclid=IwAR00INFO058\\_XlBm5uNnXOSkGI2hgLF5KvJSHW-GuGyn9tmlFZyvpO4qi6jY](https://classes.ru/all-russian/russian-dictionary-Ozhegov-term-25877.htm?fbclid=IwAR00INFO058_XlBm5uNnXOSkGI2hgLF5KvJSHW-GuGyn9tmlFZyvpO4qi6jY)).

boundaries and is compatible with the imperfective form. *Soudain* adds a delimitation so that the momentary nature of the situation is perceived. The adverb marks the beginning of this state which then continues. In Russian, a perfective aspect is chosen (an imperfect is possible as the context is non-delimiting, although the beginning would then not be marked and the imperfect would be prototypical). The verb chosen (*померкла* 'faded') usually refers to light or, here, an idea that loses its relevance. The prefix *no-* expresses that the event is brought to an end.<sup>19</sup> In this example the grammatical and lexical aspects are perfective and express the momentariness of the situation, which is typical of a factual perfect denoting a singular occurrence (§2.2). There seems to be no imperfective information.<sup>20</sup> The imperfective aspect in French expresses the beginning of the outdatedness while the Russian expresses the end of the importance of this practice.

Example (10) appears here because of the imperfect in its Russian translation. The French example marks the beginning of a hopeless life situation with the classical state verb 'to be' in the *imparfait* and *soudain* as the boundary setter. In the translation we have the imperfective state verb *быть* 'to be', and as *soudain*, which is incompatible with the imperfect, has not been translated there are no perfective elements. We can therefore see that the change of state and inchoative meaning of the French example have not been translated and the focus is on the durative state (see §2.2) itself. One reason for preferring the imperfect in the translation is the weak impact the perfective adverb has on the aspectual frame compared with the imperfective grammatical and lexical aspect (see §2.1). The adverb, therefore, cannot completely delimitate the state but only mark its beginning, which the translator has considered an omissible detail.

The corpus examples analysed have provided an insight into how the French IPC can be expressed in Russian. The hypothesis that an aspectual conflict, such as that presented by the French IPC, could not be recreated in Russian with the same aspectual means has been confirmed. The translators have either not translated the aspectual conflict and just focussed on the main aspectual meaning, or, as predicted, they have tried to translate the effect of this phenomenon with other means, notably lexical aspect, e.g., prefixes or different verbs, or contextual elements of uncertainty and indefiniteness. The examples in which the conflict has

<sup>19</sup> [http://project.karelia.ru/atlant/help/prist\\_ref.htm](http://project.karelia.ru/atlant/help/prist_ref.htm).

<sup>20</sup> It is also interesting that the elements *как-то сама собой* 'somehow on its own' are added. This piece of information is missing from the French, so it is not clear why it appears in the Russian version. A possible explanation is that these contextual elements expressing uncertainty add indefiniteness to an otherwise clearly delimited perfective clause. In any case, it can be seen that the punctual quality present in both the French and Russian examples is at the centre of the clauses.

not been translated at all cannot be considered accurate translations as they lack the meaning nuances expressed in the original, such as inchoativity (10). The omissions may have been for reasons of simplification or lack of subtitle space.

## 6 Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to show the functioning of the *imparfait* in a perfective context and to examine how it would be translated into Russian. Analysis of a *Frantext* corpus example revealed how the aspectual means cooccurring with the IPC interact on multiple levels. The approach taken combines semasiological and onomasiological perspectives, which here serve the purpose of unifying all the contextual aspectual means into one delimitation schema. At the sentence level the analysis revealed how a punctual verb combined with *soudain* and the *imparfait* creates the effect of a subjectively prolonged moment: the IPC creates a new structure, that of a delimited event into which the subjectively durative perspective is integrated.

Dessi Schmid's onomasiological model, which originally only operated on the sentence level, has been extended here to the textual level by including the *imparfait's* wider context with the purpose of determining the IPC's role in the textual ensemble. Three essential categories of contextual elements that influence the *imparfait* clause were proposed: delimitating means of temporal or local meaning; anaphoric or cataphoric referential markers; and structures marking enumerations and the role the IPC takes in them. All these elements are integrated on a third level of the delimitation schema, which either corrects or confirms the isolated analysis. In Figure 5 the analysis on the additional level corrects the isolated *imparfait* analysis in (6) and clarifies the role of the IPC clause in the textual passage. Division of the text into a descriptive-illusionary part, a transitional-adaptative part and an objectivity-focused part becomes clear once the adjacency-related aspectuality is corrected to *transformative*.

It has been shown that, as initially assumed, the IPC creates new textual structures in which it takes on a role in the foreground while conveying the protagonist's internal perspective. The IPC's aspectual means introduce the protagonist's perception, which constitutes a second origo point. These new structures and effects conveyed through the imperfect in the foreground show that this verb form does not replace the prototypical perfective verb form, but rather enriches the text creating a more nuanced narrative language with more subtle meanings.

Does the imperfect change its quality? Throughout the paper, it has become clear that the imperfect does not change its features of ongoingness and its internal

perspective. It is the combination of all the aspectual means that can either delimit the imperfect, leave it unbounded or add other nuances to its unfolding. In fact, the contextual information and other factors, such as the *Aktionsart*, add perfective qualities to the entire aspectual frame, not to the *imparfait* itself. Consequently, the effect of the *imparfait* in a perfective context is to be seen as the result of the interaction of all the aspectual means in close proximity to the *imparfait*. The fact that it is still being referred to as the *imperfect* in a perfective context and not by a cumulative term is due to the syntactic prominence of the predicate (cf. §2, §5). As Bres (2005, 193) puts it: “Il n’y a qu’un seul *imparfait narratif*, et tout le reste est affaire de contexte. . .” – ‘there is only one narrative imperfect and the rest is a matter of context’.

The second hypothesis stated that an exact translation of the IPC into Russian with the same means as in French would not be possible. The assumption was that compensatory mechanisms would be used in Russian. The comparative analysis proved, as expected, that a combination of contradictory aspectual means cannot be realised in Russian. It also proved that while the predicate, as the aspectual centre, is not compatible with contradictory aspectual elements, aspectual means of lower hierarchies, such as adverbs and *Aktionsart*, can combine perfective and imperfective meanings to produce finely nuanced connotations. These compensatory mechanisms concern the variability in lexical aspect, which through prefixes or a particular verb choice can translate an ongoing perspective, and contextual elements of indefiniteness, e.g., the addition of *kak-to* ‘somehow’. From an onomasiological perspective, the compensatory mechanisms can be considered stylistic differences that do not show on the semantic level. If the compensatory strategies are chosen carefully and reproduce the original effect, the same aspectual content is expressed in both languages, overcoming their formal differences.

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# ***Voilà* in the temporal discourse structure of narrative texts**

**Abstract:** Research on temporal discourse structure is traditionally centred around verb forms (tense) and temporal adverbs. I argue that, in addition to these, *voilà* constructions should also be considered. Due to their attention-directing semantic-pragmatic profile, *voilà* constructions exhibit inherent temporal and aspectual properties. Hence, they not only contribute to the constitution of temporal relations, but also serve to create prominent time points and foregrounding – including perspective-taking – effects on every level of the temporal discourse structure. Furthermore, a quantitative and qualitative analysis of Pierre Lemaitre’s award-winning novel *Au revoir-là haut* (2013) will show that *voilà* is often used as an integral part of mirative strategies, which add further profiling to the depiction of narrative events.

**Keywords:** *voilà*, deixis, attention-directing, prominence, tense, aspect, temporal discourse structure, narration, perspective, mirativity

## **1 Introduction**

Based on a previous study of the temporal and aspectual properties of deictic-presentative constructions in Italian (*ecco*) and French (*voici/voilà*) (Tacke 2022b), this paper provides an in-depth analysis of the various functions the deictic elements *voici/voilà*<sup>1</sup> perform within the temporal discourse structure of narrative texts. Following Becker/Egetenmeyer’s (2018, 41) theoretical account of temporal discourse structure, it is safe to assume, especially with regard to narrative texts, that “times, i.e., time points and time spans, and episodes are not only ordered according to ‘temporal linearity’, that is, their temporal relation properties, but also in a hierarchical manner”. In this context, the concept of “relative prominence” (ib.) is central since it captures the various ways in which foreground-background relations are expressed in discourse. Traditionally, research on temporal discourse structure has primarily focused on verb forms and temporal adverbs, regarded as the prototypical linguistic

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1 For the sake of simplicity, henceforth I will use the more frequent form *voilà* to refer to both *voici* and *voilà*.

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expressions of temporal relations. However, this paper highlights that deictic-presentative constructions also play a significant role, possessing distinct temporal and aspectual properties as part of their semantic-pragmatic profile. Most importantly, not only do they contribute to the constitution of temporal relations, they also serve to create prominence and foregrounding effects on every level of the temporal discourse structure. To obtain a complete picture of their functions and the prominence effects they help to create, an empirical analysis of *voilà* will be carried out based on its usage in the narrative discourse of the contemporary French novel *Au revoir là-haut* (2013) by Pierre Lemaitre.

To this end, Section 2 will provide a basic characterization of *voilà* and an overview of their general formal and functional properties. We will show that deictic-presentative constructions form a radial category with a prototype – the spatial deictic use – at its centre and a number of extended uses and constructional patterns around it. Section 3 will focus in on the various usage patterns of *voilà* within narrative texts. As the examples taken from Lemaitre's novel and other texts will demonstrate, *voilà* occurs both within the direct discourse of the characters and as an important attention-directing device within the narrative discourse. Furthermore, the narrative use of *voilà* is not limited to its basic attention-directing function; in certain contexts, it also serves to indicate shifts in perspective and to mark mirativity. Following this general outline, Section 4 is dedicated to an empirical analysis of its usage in Lemaitre's novel, which comprises four case studies. First, a quantitative study of the distribution of *voilà* within the novel's narrative discourse will show that it tends to occur in clusters around the most important plot moments (4.1). A qualitative analysis will shed light on the various usage patterns of *voilà* and their implications for the novel's temporal discourse structure. The second case study will show that *voilà* is often used by the narrator to contract the narrating time in order to give the impression of a rapid succession of events (4.2). The third case study will focus on the correlation between the narration of key plot moments and the use of *voilà* by showing that it frequently serves as a foregrounding device within narrative passages that are already foregrounded by other means (4.3). Finally, the fourth case study will concern the shifts in perspective created by the use of *voilà* and its correlation with the extensive use of free indirect discourse (FID) in Lemaitre's novel (4.4). The paper ends with a brief conclusion (Section 5).

## 2 *Voilà* in general: Spatial deixis, narrative deixis and temporal grounding

*Voilà* is one of the best-known French words, even among people who do not speak French likely due to its frequent usage. Moreover, in communication, it serves

the presentative function of directing the interlocutor's attention to something or someone new (or expected and finally present) within the situational context. It is also commonly used as a discourse marker in order to highlight the conclusion of an activity: “. . . et voilà!” French is not the only language that has deictic-presentative elements like *voilà*: many, if not all, languages have either an element with similar semantic, pragmatic and syntactic properties that can head a sentence, or some other kind of deictic-presentative construction – often characterised by an adverb-verb-subject order – with these same functions (cf., e.g., Engl. *There's Larry, Here comes Paul*;<sup>2</sup> Ger. *Da ist Werner, Hier stehe ich*). Since Latin has deictic elements (and constructions) of the first type, every Romance language has similar elements (Rom. *iată*, It. *ecco*, Cat. *vet/veus/heus aquí*, Sp. *he aquí*, Pt. *eis aqui*) and constructions (e.g., It. [ecco NP], Fr. [voilà NP]), although not all of these are direct formal descendants from Latin *ecce*.<sup>3</sup> As mentioned above, deictic-presentative constructions serve a universal communicative purpose, i.e., to point out a new (or an expected and newly present) referent in order to establish a joint focus of attention.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, irrespective of their formal characteristics, deictic-presentative constructions share a cross-linguistically common conceptual core.<sup>5</sup> According to Lakoff's convincing study of English *there*-constructions (1987, 462–585), this conceptual core can be described in terms of “an experiential gestalt” (ib., 489), an *idealised cognitive model*, which he calls “the pointing-out ICM” (ib., 490). It is described as encompassing a speech act background on the one hand and the speech act itself on the other. The background is defined by an entity that exists and is present within the speaker's visual field, and it is also assumed that the speaker's attention is directed at the entity while the hearer's is not. Importantly, through his speech act, the speaker “then directs the interlocutor's attention to the location of the entity (perhaps accompanied by a pointing gesture) and brings it to the interlocutor's attention that the entity is at the specified location” (ib.). The result is a joint focus of attention since both the speaker and the hearer are mutually aware of the other's attentional focus.

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2 Cf. Lakoff's (1987, 462–585) seminal study of English *there*-constructions.

3 For a comprehensive historical account of the origins of deictic pointing elements and their development from Latin to Romance, cf. Tacke (2022a, chapter 4).

4 On the concept of joint attention, cf., most notably, Tomasello (2008) as well as Moore/Dunham (1995) and Eilan et al. (2005). On the use of demonstratives to establish joint attentional frames, cf. Campbell (2002) and Diessel (1999; 2006; 2013).

5 Cf., e.g., Bergen/Plauché's (2005) comparative study of *there* and *voilà* constructions, my studies of Italian *ecco* constructions (Tacke 2022b) and Spanish *he aquí* and *aquí está* constructions (Tacke 2023), as well as the comprehensive synchronic account of Romance deictic-presentative constructions in Tacke (2022a, chapter 2).

What is special about the Latin and Romance type of construction compared with the English one on which Lakoff's description is based, is the fact that the locational predicate ('there's X') or predicate of motion ('here comes X') is not expressed by a verb in the strict sense. Instead, French *voici/voilà* – like Italian *ecco* or Latin *ecce* – acts as a *sentential demonstrative* (cf. also Tesnière's 1959, 97 term "mot-phrase incomplet").<sup>6</sup> In this sense, even though neither of these elements exhibits verbal inflection – there are no morphemes expressing person, number, tense, aspect or mode – their semantic characteristics resemble those of verbal imperatives.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, deictic-presentative constructions constitute directive speech acts:<sup>8</sup> pragmatically, the uttering of a sentence like *voilà ton frère* therefore entails the interpretation: 'become aware that there's your brother' (cf. Léard 1992, 124–127; Tacke 2022a, 164–188).

However, aside from this spatial deictic value, in most languages these constructions have developed several additional senses through pragmatic extension. Extension mechanisms regarding deictic-presentative constructions were first described for English by Lakoff (1987), for English and French by Bergen/Plauché (2001; 2005), for Italian and French by Tacke (2022b) and for Romance languages based on a historical-comparative perspective by Tacke (2022a). In line with Lakoff (1987) and especially Bergen/Plauché (2005), it has been shown that deictic-presentative constructions are best understood in terms of "a radial category". This means that the spatial deictic use of the construction functions as a prototype at the centre, while "the extended senses stem directly or indirectly from the central deictic sense" (Bergen/Plauché 2005, 11s.; cf. also Croft 2001, 104). Extended senses concern, for example, the fields of perception deixis (percepts instead of physical entities), discourse deixis (discourse entities), event deixis and narrative deixis. Furthermore, as I argue in Tacke (2022a, 509–536), the use of deictic-presentative elements as discourse markers can also be described in terms of extension mech-

<sup>6</sup> Fillmore (1982, 47): "A Sentential Demonstrative, which we can represent as D/Se[\_ (NP)] is a demonstrative that can stand alone as a sentence, having what can be called a Presentative function. These are sentences whose meanings are something like 'Behold!' or maybe 'Look at this!'. Latin *ecce*, French *voilà*, Serbo-Croatian *evo*, are examples of Sentential Demonstratives".

<sup>7</sup> Concerning the verb-like characteristics of deictic-presentative elements, cf., e.g., Kröll (1968, 39), Leumann (1977, §223), Wehr (1984, 135) and Gaeta (2013, 46–50). A discussion of these accounts can be found in Tacke (2022a, 253–279).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Lakoff (1987, 474) and Bergen/Plauché (2005) for an account of their pragmatic properties. In this context, Bergen/Plauché explain convincingly that "*voilà* and *voici* explicitly encode a directive to focus attention (*voilà*) and the location of the entity (*-ci* or *-là*)" (5) and explain that the "central deictic speech act includes a call to notice an object in a location" (24).

anisms of both event deictic and discourse deictic uses.<sup>9</sup> For the purposes of this paper, however, I will describe and classify the usage of *voilà* according to Bühler's famous distinction between

- (a) spatial deixis (*demonstratio ad oculos* or *ocular demonstration*)<sup>10</sup>
- (b) narrative deixis (*Deixis am Phantasma* or *imagination-oriented deixis*)
- (c) discourse or anaphoric deixis (*anaphora*)

In this context, it is important to note that the use of deictic-presentative constructions does not only convey spatial anchoring, but that the act of pointing out a referent (be it a physical, imagined or discursive entity) also inherently includes a temporal anchoring (cf. Genaust 1975, 81s.; Léard 1992, 105–107; Tacke 2022b): the deictic pointing out of a (new) referent implies that the proposition ‘there’s X’ also means ‘now there’s X’. In the absence of verbal inflection, this temporal anchoring is, of course, not formally rendered and thus remains implicit.<sup>11</sup> In this sense, deictic-presentative constructions can be understood as both spatial and temporal grounding devices.<sup>12</sup> This holds true for both the prototypical spatial deictic sense and any extended sense. The only thing that changes is the spatial field of application: in prototypical spatial deixis, the deictic referencing of an entity anchors its presence temporally in the *moment of utterance*; in narrative deixis, the anchoring is in the *moment of reference* or *reference point*; in contrast, discourse deixis refers to the point where the reader finds herself or himself within the discourse space, which, in turn, corresponds to the moment the recipient reads or hears the passage in question. As I will show in the analysis of *Au revoir là-haut*, all three types of deixis – including the three types of temporal grounding – occur in narrative texts.

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9 On *voilà* as a discourse marker, cf. also Auchlin (1981), Léard (1992), Bruxelles/Traverso (2006), Iliescu (2010), Maaß (2010, 128), De Cesare (2011). Cf. also the studies included in Col/Danino/Bikialo (2020).

10 The first term given in parenthesis refers to Bühler's *Sprachtheorie* (1934), the second to its recent English translation (Bühler 2011).

11 In contrast, in constructions of the second type, i.e., the verb-based English and German type, this temporal grounding is explicit. Here, the verb can only occur in the present tense. The same holds true for Spanish constructions headed by *aquí está* or *aquí viene* (cf. Tacke 2022b; 2023). Utterances exhibiting other tenses cannot be interpreted as deictic and therefore do not constitute instances of deictic-presentative constructions since it is not possible to point to something that is not there at the moment of speech.

12 Cf., in this context, Langacker (2008, 260) who states that “grounding elements serve the specific function of relating a profiled thing or process to the ground, [but] they do not themselves refer to the ground explicitly”. Taken in a broad sense, the term *ground* refers to “the speech event, its participants (speaker and hearer), their interaction, and the immediate circumstances (notably, the time and place of speaking)” (Langacker 2008, 259).

In this case, the use of narrative deixis reflects the voice of the narrator and her or his communication with the reader, which is most important in terms of the temporal discourse structure.

### 3 *Voilà* in narrative texts: Attention-directing, perspective-taking and mirativity

Before studying in detail the various roles and functions of *voilà* within the novel's temporal discourse structure, in this section I will give a more general account of its narrative functionalization in terms of attention-directing, perspective-taking and the marking of mirativity. In narrative texts, deictic-presentative constructions generally occur in both narration (narrative discourse) and within the speech of the characters (direct discourse). In the latter case, their use forms part of the so-called *fictitious orality*, i.e., the literary representation of authentic conversation (cf., e.g., Erzgräber/Goetsch 1987 and Blank 1991). As in authentic conversation, *voilà* is employed both in the prototypical sense – directing the interlocutor's attention to physical entities within the speaker's visual field – and as a device to highlight discourse entities (discourse deixis). Likewise, the characters' speech also typically includes instances in which *voilà* is used as a discourse marker. The following examples from *Au revoir là-haut* illustrate these three types of occurrences:

- (1) *Tenez, le coupa Péricourt, voici un chèque pour arrêter le projet et les premiers travaux. Prenez toutes les garanties concernant l'artiste, évidemment !* (p. 439)  
 'Here, Péricourt interrupted, *here is a cheque* to cover the submission and the initial work. Make all necessary inquiries about the artist, obviously' (p. 326)<sup>13</sup>
- (2) *Oui, monsieur ! Justement, je sais ce que c'est, imaginez-vous ! Une injure à nos morts, voilà ce que c'est ! Et donc, je vais faire arrêter les travaux.* (p. 321)  
 'Yes, monsieur, I know exactly how it is. It is an insult to the dead, *that's what it is!* So I am hereby suspending all work.' (p. 237)

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<sup>13</sup> The translations are taken from the 2016 paperback edition of the English translation of Lemaitre's novel by Frank Wynne (Lemaitre 2016). Needless to say, these are literary not literal translations. In many cases, *voilà* is thus not rendered by its immediate functional equivalent (which would be *here is/are, here comes*, etc.) but by other non-deictic linguistic means or not at all.

- (3) *Ecoute, j'y peux rien, mon grand ! Tu ne veux pas rentrer chez toi, je ne comprends pas pourquoi mais, de toute manière, c'est pas de mon ressort. C'est vraiment désolant sauf que moi, je ne peux rien y faire, voilà !* (p. 97)  
 'Listen, there's nothing I can do, *mon vieux!* You don't want to go home, I don't really understand why, but in the end I don't get to decide. It's shitty, but there's nothing I can do!' (p. 71)

In (1) Péricourt directs his interlocutor's attention to the cheque he is handing over to him, in (2) the nominal object (*ce que c'est*) of *voilà* anaphorically refers to what the speaker has just said (*une injure*), and in (3) *voilà* serves as a discourse marker that both summarises the preceding discourse and marks the end of the speaker's turn.

When referring to a known or discourse-active referent (in most cases represented by a pronoun), *voilà* often acquires an aspectual reading. In (4) *voilà* construes the referent's arrival within the interlocutor's field of vision as immediately prior to the moment of its utterance and thus presents it as a resultative state (metonymy: 'X has just arrived' → 'X is now here'; cf. Tacke 2022b):

- (4) *Tenez, il arrive, le voilà.* (p. 565)  
 'Look, here he comes now.' (p. 417)<sup>14</sup>

Aside from these central uses of *voilà*, there are also instances of pragmatically motivated extensions, which Bergen/Plauché (2005, 16–18) have called "time-related" since they are based on temporal anchoring and the aforementioned resultative reading. In these extensions, the resultative reading becomes obligatory because the construction is complemented by a so-called secondary predication:

- (5) *Et nous voilà au labo.* (Bergen/Plauché 2005, 16)  
 'And now here we are in the lab.'
- (6) *Le voilà content.* (ib., 18)  
 'Now he's happy.'

In (5), the prepositional phrase *au labo* refers to the location where the speaker and his interlocutors have just arrived – the whole construction indicates the arrival at a new location at the moment of utterance. Bergen/Plauché (2005, 16) call this

<sup>14</sup> Literally, however, the utterance would have to be rendered as 'Look, he's coming, *there he is*'.

the *now deictic*. Example (6), however, is different because instead of a change in location, the adjective *content* indicates a change of state. Bergen/Plauché (2005, 17s.) describe this usage as ‘stative deictic’ and convincingly explain it as a case of metaphorical extension:

The stative deictic is mapped from the now deictic through the metaphor STATES ARE LOCATIONS. [. . .] Instead of a specified locational complement, however, the stative deictic requires a stative complement [. . .]. The interpretation that emerges is one of stating that an entity is now in a state in which it previously was not [. . .] rather than being in a new location, as in the now deictic.

In *Au revoir là-haut*, there is only one instance of the *now deictic* used in direct discourse. In example (7), which is extracted from a letter, the location is in fact not spatial but temporal (*en février*) and does not change the overall meaning of the construction:

- (7) *Ici, le temps n'en finit pas. Te rends-tu compte que l'armistice a été signé en novembre dernier, que nous voilà en février et toujours pas démobilisés ?* (p. 121)

‘Time drags here. Do you realise, the armistice was signed last November, it’s February already and there’s still no sign of us being demobbed?’ (p. 89)

In contrast, there are several instances of the *stative deictic*. These include prepositional phrases (8), participles (9) and nominal phrases (10):

- (8) *En danger ! s'écria Madeleine en éclatant de rire, grands dieux, me voici en danger, maintenant !* (p. 412)

‘In danger! Madeleine shrieked with laughter. Good heavens, so I’m in danger now, am I?’ (p. 306)

- (9) a. *Eh ben, te voilà réveillé, mon grand, dit Albert en tentant de mettre dans ces mots le plus d'enthousiasme possible.* (p. 75)

‘Finally decided to wake up, then, mate, Albert said, attempting to put the greatest possible enthusiasm into his words.’ (p. 55)

- b. *Car enfin, se disait-il, je ne vais pas aller maintenant déterrer des cadavres pour couvrir un mensonge commis par bonté d'âme ! Ou par faiblesse, c'est la même chose. Mais si je ne vais pas le déterrer, si je dévoile toute l'affaire, me voilà accusé.* (p. 147)

‘After all, he thought, I am not going to dig up bodies to cover up a lie I told out of the goodness of my heart! Or out of weakness, it amounts to the same thing. But if I don’t dig him up, if I reveal everything, I’ll be court-martialled.’ (p. 109)

- (10) *Pire, son nom se retrouverait au centre de ce procès ! Et si, par malheur, il avait été le seul à commander une œuvre sur mesure, serait-il le seul dont on dirait : voyez celui-là, il a mis cent mille francs dans le commerce, le voilà Gros-Jean comme devant !* (p. 453)

‘Worse still, his name would be dragged through the trial. And if, by some misfortune, he was the only person to have commissioned a bespoke memorial, then he above all would be ridiculed: See him? Poured a hundred thousand into their scheme for all he ever saw for his money.’ (p. 400)

The attention-directing function conveyed by *voilà*, the inherent temporal anchoring and the aspectual readings that are especially foregrounded in these cases of *now deictics* and *stative deictics* are essentially the same within the narrative discourse. What changes though, is the communicative setting: rather than the story’s characters interacting with each other or speaking to themselves, it is generally the narrator’s voice that engages the readers. A striking example is the following case of *now deictic* usage:

- (11) *Il tendit le document. Tous deux s’aperçurent qu’il était mouillé de transpiration, Albert voulut le sécher contre sa manche, le dossier tomba à terre, toutes les pages en désordre, les voici aussitôt à quatre pattes, vous imaginez la scène. . .* (p. 457)

‘He held out the file. They both noticed it was damp with sweat, Albert tried to dry it on his sleeve, dropped the file, pages fluttering everywhere and suddenly they were both on all fours, you can picture the scene . . .’ (pp. 338–339).

In (11), by using *voici*, the narrator emphasises the culmination point of Albert’s clumsy attempt to hand over a document that ends with him and the maid on the floor trying to pick up the loose sheets. What is special in this case is that the narrator complements the use of *voici* by the statement *vous imaginez la scène* directed at his readers.

Importantly, the inherent (and implicit) temporal anchoring conveyed by each instance of *voilà* within the narration also contributes to the structuring of what Becker/Egetenmeyer (2018) call the *temporal discourse structure*. The concept is defined in terms of a hierarchy and distinguishes three levels (ib., 42s.):

- (i) “On the level of temporal structure, time points and time spans are related to each other. Some of them may serve as anchors for others and are in this sense more important for temporal structuring. We call these prominent time points. [. . .]”



- (ii) “The perspective and the phenomenon of perspective taking are also relevant for temporal structuring. They have a strong text structuring potential that interacts with the times and has an effect on the prominence of time points and time spans.”
- (iii) “Most obvious for prominence structuring, however, is the discourse level. We consider foreground and background, and also phenomena that contribute to the profiling of a primary and a secondary story line.”

Regarding level (i), deictic-presentative constructions form part of the temporal structure since they are related to time points defined by the use of both tense and temporal adverbs. What is more, they serve as “anchors for others” and always constitute the most “prominent time points”. As we will show in section 4, *voilà* can also indicate changes in perspective (level ii), especially from the narrator’s voice to the voice of the protagonists in what amounts to the constitution of free indirect discourse (FID; Fr. *discours indirect libre*). In this context, *voilà* may serve, depending on the context, to create effects of rapprochement and visualization because it imposes a “parallel perspective”<sup>15</sup> on the event being pointed out. On level (iii), the discourse level, deictic-presentative constructions contribute to the constitution of foreground and background by profiling not only specific aspects within scenes but also by marking leaps in time, by foregrounding specific events and by highlighting “the surprising, and focal, points of the narrative” (Aikhenvald 2012, 442).

Key to the analysis of *voilà* on the discourse level is the concept of mirativity. This notion, first established in linguistic typology at the end of the 1990s, refers to “to the linguistic marking of an utterance as conveying information which is new or unexpected to the speaker” (DeLancey 2001, 369s.; cf. previously Wehr 1984 with her own terminology). Defined as a “crosslinguistic category” (DeLancey 2012, 529), research first focused on languages that have dedicated grammatical means (particles, morphemes, verbal inflections) to express surprise. The concept was later extended to include mirativity as a functional category. As such, from an onomasiological point of view, mirativity can be expressed in any language on the discourse level (*mirative strategies*). As Aikhenvald (2012, 437, 473) has shown, mirative values expressed by grammatical means (the same would be true for dis-

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<sup>15</sup> The term “parallel perspective” alludes to Coseriu’s (1976, 93s.) theory of the verbal system of Romance languages which distinguishes between *retrospective*, *parallel* and *prospective perspectives*. Coseriu shows that the speaker’s adoption of a parallel perspective (e.g., by using the present or imperfect tense) inevitably entails that the state of affairs expressed by the verb is construed as temporally unbounded (*kursiv* ‘in its course’).

cursive strategies) range from the marking of “sudden discovery” and “surprise”, through “unprepared mind” and “counterexpectation” to the simple marking of “new information” (always in contrast to the marking of already known information). Due to its basic attention-directing pragmatics, the use of deictic-presentative constructions crucially displays a strong affinity to the marking of mirativity. Even before the term *mirativity* was coined, this was observed with regard to Latin (*ecce*) and Romance constructions (e.g., It. *ecco*, Fr. *voilà*) as well as those in other languages such as biblical Hebrew.<sup>16</sup> Hence, even though *voilà* is not mirative in and by itself, it regularly forms part of mirative discourse patterns. In this context, it is important to note that these patterns do not only correspond to the speaker’s intent to mark his or her surprise, as the famous definition by DeLancey suggests. In fact, linguistic markings of surprise and related notions also encompass usages in which rather than reflecting an emotion of the speaker the intent is to provoke surprise in the interlocutor or denote the surprise of a story’s protagonist. In the latter cases, the expression of the emotion shifts to the staging or *mise-en-scène* of the emotion with the ultimate communicative goal of drawing attention to the information conveyed by the statement in question and highlighting its relevance. In this sense, Aikhenvald (2012, 473) differentiates between mirativity in relation to “(a) the speaker, (b) the audience (or addressee), or (c) the main character.” The expression of mirativity with regards to (b) and (c) is – of course – most relevant to the analysis of narrative texts. What is more, the mirative use of *voilà* is especially effective in both the constitution of salient time points and perspective-taking within the temporal discourse structure. The following example illustrates this, while a more comprehensive analysis will be presented in the following section:

- (12) *En le tenant contre lui, Albert se dit que pendant toute la guerre, comme tout le monde, Édouard n’a pensé qu’à survivre, et à présent que la guerre est terminée et qu’il est vivant, voilà qu’il ne pense plus qu’à disparaître. Si même les survivants n’ont plus d’autre ambition que de mourir, quel gâchi. . .* (p. 98)  
 ‘As he hugs the young man Albert realises that, like everyone else, Édouard spent the war thinking only of coming out alive, but now it is over, and he is still alive, all he wants is to die. If even the survivors have no greater ambition than to die, what a waste . . .’ (p. 71)

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<sup>16</sup> Cf., most notably, Wehr (1984, 98, 134ss.) who uses the term *surprisatif* for the same phenomenon. For a first analysis of deictic-presentative constructions in Hebrew that refers to the notion of mirativity, see van der Merwe (2011). Tacke (2022a, 188–223) provides a comprehensive account.

This passage beautifully demonstrates that the use of *voilà* is essential to the linguistic marking of mirativity, which in this case, expresses counter-expectation. While the preceding phrase sets up the assumed expectation (*Édouard n'a pensé qu'à survivre*), the construction [*voilà que* P] – conventionally employed in such contexts (cf. Tacke 2022a, 139–141 and 417–440) – marks the opposite result (*il ne pense plus qu'à disparaître*). In this context, the emotion of counter-expectation represents Albert's perspective, i.e., his assumptions about his friend's feelings and his astonishment about his friend's wish to die. At the same time, the whole utterance signals the end of a narrative passage and constitutes both a highly salient time point and an instance of what Dessì Schmid (2019, 114) calls “(final) adjacency-related aspectuality”, which refers to the relevance of the depicted state of affairs for the preceding situation by focusing on its end point.

#### 4 *Voilà* in Pierre Lemaitre's *Au revoir là-haut*

*Au revoir là-haut* is a 2013 novel by French author Pierre Lemaitre, which won the prestigious Prix Goncourt. It is set in the aftermath of the First World War and follows the intertwined stories of a handful of characters, in particular Albert Maillard and Édouard Péricourt, two soldiers who struggle to adjust to civilian life in post-war France, and their antagonist, lieutenant d'Aulnay-Pradelle, who concocts a fraudulent scheme to get rich. The novel is a perfect example of contemporary French storytelling. At the same time, it stands out because of the author's extensive use of perspective-taking effects through the narrative technique of free indirect discourse (FID) where the distinction between the narrator's voice and his protagonists' voices is often blurred. As mentioned above, the author relies heavily on the use of deictic-presentative constructions headed by *voilà* in his representation of the direct discourse between his characters as well as within his narrative discourse to mark both salient time points and mirativity. Four case studies will shed light on the narrative usage of *voilà*: the first consists in a quantitative analysis that shows that the occurrences of *voilà* tend to cluster around the novel's key plot moments (4.1). The following case studies then focus on selected tokens within the novel's narrative discourse. Three aspects of its usage will be at the core of these studies, all of which are related to its contribution to the temporal discourse structure: section 4.2 is dedicated to the narrative effects of *voilà* with regard to the relation between narrating time and narrated time, section 4.3 concentrates on its marking of salient reference points and section 4.3 on its use in and around FID events.

## 4.1 *Voilà* in numbers

The novel contains 14 occurrences of *voici* and 62 occurrences of *voilà*, reflecting the general tendency in French for the latter form to take over most of the functions of the former.<sup>17</sup> While 15 out of 76 instances occur in direct discourse, the remaining 61 form part of the narrative discourse where they represent either the narrator's voice or can be attributed to a protagonist's voice in cases of FID. With respect to the 607 pages of the original edition of Pierre Lemaitre's novel (counting only the text of the narration itself), these 61 occurrences equate to an average of roughly one occurrence of *voici* or *voilà* every ten pages, making it a frequent yet circumscribed linguistic device. However, a closer look reveals that these instances are not evenly distributed over the novel's narrative discourse. Interestingly, they seem to form clusters around certain plot moments: 28 occurrences, i.e., roughly 50 percent of all tokens appear in only three passages of the novel: 10 instances (or one instance every 4.3 pages) appear in chapters 1–3 (pp. 13–56), which depict the battle scene at the end of World War I and establish the novel's plot; 7 instances (or one instance every 3.7 pages) in chapter 6 (pp. 86–112), which narrates Albert's successful attempt to change Édouard's identity in order to shield him from the novel's villain and establish a new civilian life for them both; 11 instances (or one instance every 3.4 pages) in chapters 18–20 (pp. 277–314) in which several storylines come together and Édouard mounts his brilliant fraudulent scheme (which obviously inspires the title of the English translation: *The Great Swindle*); and 3 instances (or one instance every 3 pages) in chapter 38 (pp. 536–544) in which Édouard's father, M. Péricourt, finally discovers that he has been deceived and is awaiting public shame. In contrast, in all of the intervening and following chapters, i.e., chapters 7–17, 21–37 and 39–42, there is not a single instance of *voilà* within the narrative discourse. This cluster formation alone underlines the fact that its attention-directing pragmatics and its affinity with the expression of mirativity make *voilà* an appropriate linguistic device for marking salient story points and, *inter alia*, salient time points.

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17 On the tendency to use the distal form *voilà* instead of the proximal form *voici* in Modern French, cf. previously Müller-Hauser (1943, 221) who affirms: “Dans la langue courante, *voilà* a presque complètement supplanté *voici*.” Cf. also FEW (XIV, s.v. *vidēre*, 429), TLF (s.v. *voilà*), Grevisse/Goosse (142008, §1008) and, based on corpus studies of different ranges, De Cesare (2011, 55) and Karszenberg/Lahousse/Marzo (2018, 138s.). Nowadays, *voilà* is seen as the unmarked member of the opposing pair *voici* vs. *voilà* (cf. Genaust 1975, 106; Grenoble/Riley 1996, 837) parallel with the same tendency observed in the opposing pair *(i)ci* vs. *là*. Diachronically, I have shown that *voici* and its formal predecessors (e.g., *veci*) were used predominantly until the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, while the tendency of *voilà* to supplant it started in the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Tacke 2022a, 331–374).

## 4.2 *Voilà* in relation to “narrating time” and “narrated time”

Due to their semantic-pragmatic profile, deictic-presentative constructions are sometimes used as linguistic time lapse devices in the depiction of certain events or event sequences. Central to the description of time lapse effects is Müller’s ([1948] 1968, 270) well-known distinction between narrating time (*Erzählzeit*) and narrated time (*erzählte Zeit*): while narrated time refers to the time span of the events depicted in the story, narrating time refers to the time supposedly needed to read the narrative representation of these events.<sup>18</sup> Narrative texts usually transform the presupposed linear and homogeneous time they represent to either foreground or background certain events depending on their aesthetic storytelling goals. Of the various possibilities of narrative transformation, only the contraction of time is relevant when it comes to the use of *voilà*. In fact, it is quite common to find deictic-presentative constructions narratively functionalised in order to contract time and skip certain intermediary events. Formulated in an abstract manner with regard to a series of three related events (A-B-C), they often serve to draw attention to a resultative event (C) following a first event (A) without ever mentioning the logically necessary intermediate step (B). Consider the following examples:

- (13) *Très courtois*, <sub>A</sub>[*M. Péricourt tendit la main vers un fauteuil*], <sub>C</sub>[*les voilà installés*]. (p. 293)  
 ‘Very graciously, M. Péricourt waved towards an armchair *and they sat*.’ (p. 216)
- (14) [. . .] <sub>A1</sub>[*fil monta les six marches du perron*], <sub>A2</sub>[*sonna*], <sub>A3</sub>[*essuya furtivement chaque chaussure derrière le mollet opposé*], <sub>A4</sub>[*la porte s’ouvrit*]. *Le cœur affolé dans la poitrine*, <sub>C</sub>[*le voici dans le hall haut comme une cathédrale*], *des miroirs partout, tout est beau même la bonne, une brune aux cheveux courts, rayonnante, mon Dieu, ces lèvres, ces yeux, tout est beau chez les riches, se dit Albert, même les pauvres*. (pp. 285s.)

<sup>18</sup> There are a number of terminological derivatives: narrating time or *Erzählzeit* as opposed to narrated time or *erzählte Zeit* are also described as the dichotomies *Erzählzeit* and *Handlungszeit* (‘plot time’) (Hirt 1923, 27–31), *temps du récit* and *temps de l’histoire* (Genette 1972, 77), *represented time* and *representational time* (Sternberg 1978, 14) and *text time* and *act time* (de Toro 2011, 113–115).

'he climbed the six steps to the front door, rang the bell, furtively buffed his shoes, rubbing each against the back of the other calf, the door opened. Heart hammering wildly in his chest, *he finds himself in a lobby that soars like a cathedral*, there are mirrors everywhere, everything is beautiful, even the housemaid, a young woman with short dark hair, she is radiant, my God, those lips, those eyes; in the houses of the rich, Albert thinks, even the poor are beautiful' (p. 210).

- (15) [*. . .*] <sub>A1</sub>[elle lui indiqua la pièce], il pouvait s'installer où il voulait, <sub>A2</sub>[elle arriva juste à dire "Désolée", à cause de ce rire qu'elle ne parvenait pas à endiguer;] il leva les mains, non, non, riez, au contraire.

<sub>C</sub>[Maintenant le **voilà** seul dans cette pièce, la porte est refermée,] *on va prévenir que M. Maillard est ici, son fou rire est calmé, ce silence, cette majesté, ce luxe vous en imposent quand même.* (p. 287)

'she gestured him to sit wherever he liked, and could only manage to stammer "Sorry", since she still could not contain her giggles. Albert held up his hands, giggle away, it's alright.

*Now he is alone in the room, the door has closed, the announcement is being made that M. Maillard has arrived, his laughing fit has subsided, overawed by this silence, this majesty, this opulence.'* (p. 211)

In all three cases, the narrator skips one intermediary event: the act of sitting down in (13), Albert's arrival in (14) and the maid's departure in (15). Instead, *voici* and *voilà* focus on the resultative states. To this effect, they occur either as a *now deictic*, as in (14), where *dans le hall* indicates the new location and implies that Albert has arrived there just prior to the utterance containing *voici*; or as a *stative deictic* as in (13) and (15), where *installés* and *seul dans cette pièce* indicate the metaphorical 'arrival' at the new state, i.e., 'being seated' and 'being alone'. Either way, *voilà* contracts the narrating time that would otherwise be taken up in depicting the skipped events and has, therefore, an effect on the scene as a whole. Combined with the preceding use of the *passé simple* – typical for the temporal sequencing of events (cf. Kamp/Rohrer 1983; Labeau 2007; Becker/Egetenmeyer 2018, 31s.) – the transition from the preceding sequence of events (A<sub>1</sub>-A<sub>2</sub>-A<sub>n</sub>) to the resultative state (C) gives the impression of a rapid succession in which the intermediate event (B) is barely noticeable and therefore not expressed overtly.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, if the scene itself is conceived as a rapid succession of events, the use of *voilà* and the

<sup>19</sup> This narrative technique is, of course, not exclusive to contemporary French literature, and neither is the functionalization of deictic-presentative constructions, as I have shown in my analysis of their use in the Old Spanish *Cantar de mio Cid* (Tacke 2021).

subsequent skipping of a barely noticeable event allows the narrator to represent the narrated time in a temporally iconic fashion.

A second type of temporal contraction concerns cases in which, even though no event sequence is skipped, the use of *voilà* (the proximal form *voici* is used in the following examples) has a similar acceleration effect:

- (16) *Il ouvre la barrière, traverse la cour ; le voici en bas des marches, il regarde vers le haut de l'escalier; personne alentour ; il se risque, monte, méfiant, prêt à tout, ah ! comme il aimerait avoir une grenade à cet instant, mais ce n'est pas la peine ; il pousse la porte, l'appartement est inoccupé.* (p. 583)

'He opens the gate, crosses the courtyard and he stands at the foot of the steps; he peers up, there is no-one around, he takes the risk, climbs the stairs warily, ready for anything, oh, how he wishes he had a grenade at this very moment, but it doesn't matter; he pushes open the door, the apartment is empty.' (pp. 430–431)

- (17) – *Cent trente mille francs, dit M. Péricourt.*

*C'était plus fort que lui.*

*Mais sa fille ne l'entend pas, la voici penchée sur un détail d'une autre œuvre.* (p. 435)

"A hundred and thirty thousand francs," M. Péricourt says.

He cannot stop himself.

But his daughter does not hear, *she is studying a detail in a different portfolio.*' (p. 323)

The *now deictic* in (16) – cf. also example (11) above – directs the reader's attention to the end point of the two previously depicted actions (*il ouvre, [il] traverse*). By doing so, the narration implicitly indicates the rapidity with which Albert crosses the courtyard. In contrast, the use of the *stative deictic* in (17) indicates a shift in perspective: the narrator first focuses on Péricourt's speech and behaviour (*c'était plus fort que lui*), then shifts attention (seemingly by assuming the perspective of the character) to his daughter, who is already concerned with other things.

### 4.3 *Voilà* in key moments: Marking key plot moments

As we have seen in the preceding subsection, the narrative representation of events does not equate to the homogeneous progression of physical (or event) time.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> On the concept of event time as well as other relevant time concepts, cf. Becker/Egetenmeyer (2018).

Instead, deictic-presentative constructions serve to contract time and to add certain acceleration effects. Another pattern of use of *voilà* can be observed on the discourse level and concerns the profiling of a primary story line. We have already seen that the distribution of its occurrences in *Au revoir là haut* (4.1) indicates a correlation between its use and the narration of key plot moments. A closer look at one of them, namely the battle scene that establishes the friendship between the two protagonists (Albert, Édouard) and the antagonistic relationship between them and the villain (Pradelle), will be examined in order to shed light on the role of *voilà*.

What stands out in the narrative depiction of these key plot moments is the persistent narrative use of the present tense.<sup>21</sup> Importantly, the present tense serves to construe the scenes as if the reader were a direct witness to the events, giving them a sense of immediacy. The depiction of these scenes is, therefore, foregrounded against other parts of the story. Here again, *voilà* serves as a foregrounding device within those present-tense passages since it stands out against the regular use of verbs. In this respect, *voilà* provides additional profiling within the foregrounded discourse passages. The following example illustrates how *voici*, at the end of a sequence of actions, draws the reader's attention to Albert's coming upon a second comrade's corpse on the battlefield.<sup>22</sup> This is vital because Albert has doubts about his lieutenant's version of their death and is going to reveal that they were, in fact, killed by him (the lieutenant) and not the Germans:

- (18) *Il enjambe le cadavre et fait quelques pas, toujours baissé, on ne sait pas pourquoi, les balles vous attrapent aussi bien debout que courbé, mais c'est un réflexe d'offrir le moins de prise possible, comme si on faisait tout le temps la guerre dans la crainte du ciel. Le voici devant le corps du petit Louis.* (p. 24)  
 'Albert steps over the body and takes a few paces, he is still half crouching though he does not know why, since a bullet can strike whether a man is standing or stooping, but instinctively he offers as small a target as possible, as though war were constantly waged for fear the sky should fall. *Now he stands before the body of young Louis.*' (p. 19)

Another narrative peak is reached a little later: having discovered the truth, Albert is pushed into an impact crater by lieutenant d'Aulnay-Pradelle and is then buried there after a round of artillery explodes near him. Miraculously, another round of

<sup>21</sup> On narrative present-tense usage, see, e.g., Fludernik (2003), Huber (2016) and Meisnitzer (2016).

<sup>22</sup> On the eve of the war's end, their lieutenant shoots two of his own troops while on a reconnaissance mission. He blames the Germans in order to instigate a final attack on them. Albert goes out to look at the corpses. Example (25), discussed below, depicts the same moment from the villain's point of view.



artillery allows him to free himself. At this very moment, he finds himself face to face with the head of a dead horse:

- (19) *L'obus, en trouant le sol, a déterré un de ces innombrables canassons morts qui pourrissent sur le champ de bataille et vient d'en livrer une tête à Albert. Les voici face à face, le jeune homme et le cheval mort, presque à s'embrasser. L'effondrement a permis à Albert de dégager ses mains, mais le poids de la terre est lourd, très lourd, ça comprime sa cage thoracique.* (p. 36)

'As it buried itself in the ground, the shell had unearthed one of the countless old nags rotting on the battlefield and served the head up to Albert. *Face to face, the young man and the dead horse are so close they could almost kiss.* The collapsing soil has freed Albert's hands, but the soil weighs heavily on him, crushing his ribcage.' (p. 27)

In this context, *voici* is used to direct attention to one of the most emblematic moments (or pictures) of the novel (and also of the graphic novel and the live-action film that drew on it). A third example, which likewise draws on the use of the *now* and *stative deictics* and imposes a perfective aspectual reading, is the following scene where Albert has finally managed to save his comrade Édouard, the novel's second protagonist:

- (20) *Albert continue de vomir, Édouard lui tape gaiement dans le dos, il pleure et il rit en même temps. Le voilà assis là, sur ce champ de bataille dévasté, à côté de la tête d'un cheval crevé, une jambe repliée à l'envers, sanguinolente, tout près de défaillir d'épuisement, avec ce type qui revient de chez les morts en dégueulant. . .* (p. 56)

'Albert carries on vomiting and Édouard cheerfully pats him on the back, laughing and crying at the same time. *There he sits on the ravaged battlefield beside a horse's severed head, one leg bent backwards and bleeding, feeling he might pass out from exhaustion, while next to him this man who has returned from the dead is throwing up . . .*' (p. 42)

This brief analysis shows how deictic-presentative constructions are used within the narrative discourse to mark salient reference points and simultaneously draw attention to the key plot moments by highlighting them against the events they are embedded in.

#### 4.4 *Voilà* in between: Perspective-taking and free indirect discourse

The third case study of *voilà* concerns its use as a perspective-taking device contributing, in many cases, to the marking (and occurring in contexts) of FID.<sup>23</sup> In this context, the concept of perspective time, as defined by Becker/Egetenmeyer (2018, 50–53), can be usefully applied. Perspective time “marks a time point from which a certain eventuality or a sequence of eventualities are seen. It acts as a typical vantage point to which a series of time points introduced via eventualities may be related” (ib., 51). Whereas the primary perspective source or “perspectival centre is, by default, the speaker” (ib.), i.e., in our case, the narrator, the narration’s perspective may shift to a “secondary or text-internal source” (ib., 52). Concerning the temporal discourse structure, these shifts in perspective are achieved primarily through the choice of tense. For example, Becker/Egetenmeyer (2018, 52) point to the use of the *imparfait*, which conveys a “parallel” perspective (cf. note 15) on the represented events, as opposed to the *passé simple*, the use of which implies the setting of new reference times. Importantly, Becker/Egetenmeyer (2018, 53) point to the fact that not only tense forms, but also “temporal adverbials, such as *now*, are paramount for the updating and highlighting of a perspective time”. As I will demonstrate, deictic-presentative elements like *voici* and *voilà* are as equally capable as more salient linguistic expressions when it comes to highlighting shifts in perspective.

A special kind of perspective taking is the phenomenon of free indirect discourse (FID), which refers to the representation of the speech and thoughts of characters without the explicit indication typical of both direct and indirect discourse (see, e.g., Banfield 1982; Doron 1991; Landeweerd/Vet 1996; Schlenker 2004; Eckardt 2014; Maier 2015; 2017; Reboul/Delfitto/Fiorin 2016; Egetenmeyer 2021; on FID in French, see, e.g., Vettters 1994; Vuillaume 2000; on forms of FID in medieval literature, see Lebsanft 1981). Most of these theoretical approaches (except for Maier 2015, 2017; cf. Becker/Egetenmeyer/Hinterwimmer 2021; Egetenmeyer 2021 for an overview) conceive FID as a competition between different voices or contexts, a view we will adopt here as well.

Thought and speech representation, whether indicated directly or as FID, is a frequent narrative device in Lemaitre’s novel. However, there is not always a clear-cut, explicitly indicated difference between thought representation and FID

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<sup>23</sup> The use of deictic-presentative constructions as markers of free direct discourse has not been studied comprehensively. See, however, Renzi/Salvi/Cardinaletti (2001, IX.4.3) who mention the Italian cognate *ecco* among the “indicatori sintattici e pragmatici del discorso indiretto libero”.

events. The following examples show how *voilà* contributes not only to the creation of perspective effects, but also interacts with contexts of FID. In (21), there is a shift of perspective from the narrator to Albert, whose inner thoughts are overtly indicated by an introducing comment:

- (21) *En fait, Albert le comprend maintenant : Édouard n'aura plus la force de se tuer. C'est fini. S'il avait pu se jeter par la fenêtre le premier jour, tout aurait été réglé, le chagrin et les larmes, le temps, l'interminable temps à venir, tout se serait achevé là, dans la cour de l'hôpital militaire, mais cette chance est passée, il n'aura plus jamais le courage ; le voici condamné à vivre.* (p. 98)

'Finally Albert understands: Édouard no longer has the strength to kill himself. It is over. If he had managed to throw himself through the window that first day, it would all be over, the misery and the tears, the time, the interminable time to come, it would all have ended there in the courtyard of a field hospital, but the opportunity has passed, he will not have the courage to try again; he is condemned to live.' (p. 71)

In this context, which, despite the introductory comment, could be interpreted as an instance of FID, the use of *voici* underlines Albert's perspective as he is thinking about his comrade's fate and could be paraphrased as '*maintenant je [= Albert] comprends qu'il est condamné à vivre*'. At the same time, *voici* adds a mirative value to the situation depicted: its use in (21) emphasises the fact that the result (Édouard has to live on, suffering) is the opposite of what would have been the best for him (according to Albert). *Voici* is thus used to convey a sense of counter-expectation (or countered hope in this case) and marks Albert's act of awareness.

The following example from the novel's second half is a more clear-cut case of FID. Here, *voilà* is used to represent the collective voice of the public – [*voilà que P*] – and is, as already mentioned, conventionally tied to the expression of counter-expectation. The police arrive after Albert is attacked by a man from whom he had previously stolen a box of morphine for his friend. Yet, both of them manage to get away, to the disappointment of the bystanders the fight had attracted:

- (22) *Tout le monde fut déçu. On avait une relance de l'action et voilà que les protagonistes disparaissaient. On était frustré d'une arrestation, d'un interrogatoire, car enfin, on avait participé, on avait le droit de connaître le fin mot de l'histoire, non ?* (p. 367)  
 'The assembled crowd was disappointed.'

Just as the action was about to start, the protagonists were disappearing. They had been cheated out of an arrest, an interrogation, after all they had played their part, the least they deserved was to know how the story ended' (p. 271).

In this passage, the narrator sums up the situation in the first phrase (*Tout le monde fut déçu*), uttered in the simple past tense, then goes on to elaborate the situation from the public's perspective. The shift of perspective is expressed not only by the pronoun *on*, the use of the imperfect tense and the question at the end of the passage, but especially by the use of *voilà que*, marking the bystanders' counter-expectation and representing both their perspective and (collective) thoughts.

Interestingly, there are several instances of FID in which this narrative technique is combined with present tense narrations (on the rather rare cases of FID in present tense narratives, cf. Eckardt 2014, 225–227; cf. also Schlenker 2004). In these cases, *voilà* is used to mark the shift from past to present tense and from the narrator's voice to the protagonist's. This can be observed in (23) – already analysed under (14) from another angle – where the shift from the narrator's to Albert's voice immediately follows the *voici* construction:

(23) *Vers dix-neuf heures trente, il repassa devant l'hôtel, trottoir d'en face, décida de rentrer chez lui, mais on allait venir le chercher; envoyer le chauffeur qui serait moins délicat que sa patronne, les mille et une raisons qu'il retournait sans cesse se carambolèrent de nouveau dans sa tête, il ne sut jamais comment cela se fit, il monta les six marches du perron, sonna, essuya furtivement chaque chaussure derrière le mollet opposé, la porte s'ouvrit. Le cœur affolé dans la poitrine, le **voici** dans le hall haut comme une cathédrale, des miroirs partout, tout est beau même la bonne, une brune aux cheveux courts, rayonnante, mon Dieu, ces lèvres, ces yeux, tout est beau chez les riches, se dit Albert, même les pauvres. (pp. 285s.)*

'At about 7.30 p.m. he passed the house again, crossed to the opposite side of the street, decided to go home, but they would come and fetch him, they would send a chauffeur who would not be as tactful as his mistress, the whys and wherefores rattled and ricocheted inside his head and, though he never understood how it came about, he climbed the six steps to the front door, rang the bell, furtively buffed his shoes, rubbing each against the back of the other calf, the door opened. Heart hammering wildly in his chest, he finds himself in a lobby that soars like a cathedral, there are mirrors everywhere, everything is beautiful, even the housemaid, a young woman with short dark hair, she is radiant, my God, those lips, those eyes; in the houses of the rich, Albert thinks, even the poor are beautiful' (p. 210).

A closer look at the passage reveals, that at the beginning of this passage, the narrator already refers to Albert's thoughts through FID, which is indicated by the shift from the simple past ([il] *décida de rentrer chez lui*) to the imperfect tense (*mais on allait venir le chercher*) and back. But it is *voici* that seems to mark a definitive shift to the protagonist's inner thoughts with the description and admiration (!) of the mansion's entrance hall. The utterance *tout est beau même la bonne* as well as the interjection *mon Dieu* clearly represent Albert's viewpoint and constitute FID events even though the narrator marks these statements *a posteriori* as coming from his protagonist (*se dit Albert*). At the same time, *voici* marks the second shift from a past tense to a present tense narration combining thus two narrative techniques in one instance. Another look at (15), which is expanded in (24) to provide more context, shows that it can be interpreted as yet another example of the overlapping of present tense narration and FID:

- (24) *Albert se mit à rire, simplement. On voyait qu'il riait pour lui-même, de lui-même, la main devant la bouche, c'était si spontané, si vrai, que la jolie bonne se mit à rire elle aussi, ces dents, mon Dieu, ce rire, même sa langue rose et pointue était une merveille. Avait-il vu ses yeux en entrant ou était-ce maintenant seulement qu'il les découvrait ? Noirs, brillants. Tous deux ne savaient pas de quoi ils riaient. Elle se détourna en rougissant, toujours riant, mais elle avait son service à assurer, elle ouvrit la porte de gauche, le grand salon d'attente, avec le piano à queue, les hauts vases de Chine, la bibliothèque en merisier remplie de livres anciens, les fauteuils en cuir, elle lui indiqua la pièce, il pouvait s'installer où il voulait, elle arriva juste à dire "Désolée", à cause de ce rire qu'elle ne parvenait pas à endiguer, il leva les mains, non, non, riez, au contraire.*

Maintenant le **voilà** seul dans cette pièce, la porte est refermée, on va prévenir que M. Maillard est ici, son fou rire est calmé, ce silence, cette majesté, ce luxe vous en imposent quand même. Il tâte les feuilles des plantes vertes, il pense à la petite bonne, s'il osait . . . Il tente de lire les titres des livres, glisse l'index sur une marqueterie, hésite à appuyer sur une touche du grand piano. Il pourrait l'attendre à la fin de son service, sait-on jamais, a-t-elle un ami déjà ? (pp. 286s.) 'Albert suddenly started to giggle, naturally, spontaneously, his hand covering his mouth, and it was so obvious that he was laughing to himself, at himself, that the pretty housemaid began to laugh too – her teeth, my God, and that laugh, even her pink, pointed tongue was a vision. Had he seen her eyes as he arrived, or was he only now seeing them for the first time? Dark, shimmering. Neither of them knew what they were laughing at. Blushing furiously, and still laughing, she turned away; she had her duties to attend to. She opened the door on the left leading to a formal

waiting room with a grand piano, tall Chinese vases, cherrywood bookcases filled with old books, and leather armchairs; she gestured him to sit wherever he liked, and could only manage to stammer “Sorry”, since she still could not contain her giggles. Albert held up his hands, giggle away, it’s alright.

*Now he is alone in the room*, the door has closed, the announcement is being made that M. Maillard has arrived, his laughing fit has subsided, overawed by this silence, this majesty, this opulence’ (p. 211).

Again, at the beginning of this passage, i.e., the first paragraph, FID is used to represent Albert’s perception, as is indicated by the use of deictic expressions, interjections and reference to the protagonist’s evaluations on the one hand (*ces dents, mon Dieu, ce rire, même sa langue rose et pointue était une merveille*) and the question (*Avait-il vu ses yeux en entrant ou était-ce maintenant seulement qu’il les découvrirait ?*) on the other hand. The subsequent paragraph beginning *Maintenant le voilà seul dans cette pièce* then goes on to mark another shift to a present tense narrative and FID. Interestingly, in this passage, the narrative seems to keep shifting between the narrator’s voice and the protagonist’s: *ce silence, cette majesté, ce luxe vous en imposent quand même* seems to represent Albert’s perception, before the narrator continues the plot (*Il tâte les feuilles des plantes vertes, il pense à la petite bonne*) only to return to Albert’s voice *s’il osait . . .*; the narrator then takes over again (*Il tente de lire les titres des livres, glisse l’index sur une marqueterie, hésite à appuyer sur une touche du grand piano*), but lets the passage end with Albert’s thoughts: *Il pourrait l’attendre à la fin de son service, sait-on jamais, a-t-elle un ami déjà ?* In sum, as this analysis shows, *voilà* seems to be used primarily to mark a change from past to present tense and consequently to foreground the plot depicted in the second paragraph against the preceding one. The present tense narrative, in turn, constitutes the perfect context for a continuous shifting of perspectives and the embedding of FID.

Finally, the initial battle scene of the novel offers another interesting example: in (25), the reader follows the villain’s thoughts and actions while he is eagerly trying to cover up his tracks after murdering two of his own soldiers in cold blood (cf. above):

(25) *Or ce corps-là, Pradelle l’avait à l’œil depuis le début de l’attaque parce qu’il devait absolument s’en occuper et, le plus vite possible, le faire disparaître, c’était même pour cette raison qu’il était resté en serre-file sur la gauche. Pour être tranquille.*

Et voilà ce con de soldat qui s’arrête en pleine course et regarde les deux cadavres, le vieux et le jeune. (p. 43)

'The lieutenant had been keeping an eye on that particular corpse from the moment he launched the attack because he needed to deal with it, needed to make it disappear as soon as possible, in fact this was why he had brought up the rear. To make sure . . .

*And now this stupid fucking soldier stops and starts examining the bodies of the old man and the kid' (p. 32).*

While the first paragraph represents the narrator's voice, the second paragraph marks a change in both perspective and voice. In this case, the whole utterance headed by *voilà* is a clear instance of FID since the evaluative expression *ce con de soldat* can only be attributed to Pradelle.<sup>24</sup> In this particular instance, *voilà* fulfils a whole range of functions: (a) it occurs as part of a cleft-sentence construction which adds a new perspective time by marking the transition from past to present tense, as is the case with examples (23) and (24); (b) it adds a mirative reading pointing to the abruptness of Albert's physical and metaphorical appearance on the scene; and (c) it marks the event's importance within the primary plot line by pointing to the very moment where Albert enters the villain's path and therefore becomes his target – triggering the novel's plot.

## 5 Conclusion

Analysis of the use of *voilà* within the narrative discourse of Pierre Lemaitre's *Au revoir là-haut* has demonstrated how the deictic-presentative element contributes to the constitution of the temporal discourse structure of narrative texts. Whereas tense and temporal adverbs are traditionally at the forefront of tense-related studies, it has been shown that deictic-presentative constructions headed by *voilà* should also be considered, especially when it comes to determining how relative prominence and foreground-background relations are expressed in discourse. In this sense, their semantic and pragmatic properties are systematically functionalised by the narrator. *Voilà* constructions add further profiling and always constitute the most prominent time points in a narration, at both the sentence and the discourse levels. As the quantitative analysis of the use of *voilà* in Lemaitre's narrative discourse has shown, it tends to cluster around the most important plot moments. The subsequent qualitative analysis of its use within specific scenes then sheds

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<sup>24</sup> It might be objected that the utterance could simply represent an instance of direct discourse. In the novel, however, direct discourse is consistently marked not only by a line break but also by a dash, which is not the case in this example.

light on how *voilà* constructions impact on the temporal discourse structure and add to the marking of mirativity. First, the study showed how *voilà* is regularly used by the narrator in order to contract the narrating time: in these cases, the predicate within the *voilà* construction highlights a resultative state, e.g., the new location of a character, without representing the intermediary step of arriving or moving there (e.g., *M. Péricourt tendit la main vers un fauteuil, les voilà installés*). By doing so, *voilà* serves to create narrative acceleration effects that give the impression of a rapid succession of events in narrated time. By contrast, the third and fourth case studies investigated the impact of *voilà* constructions on higher discourse levels. We were able to show that the novel's key plot moments are characterised by persistent narrative use of the present tense. Interestingly, *voilà* is frequently used either to mark the shift from past tense to present tense narration or to add further profiling within already foregrounded discourse passages. Finally, we demonstrated that *voilà* is also used to mark shifts in perspective and to represent the thoughts and perceptions of the protagonists within FID events. In sum, the quantitative and qualitative analyses of the use of *voilà* in the novel highlight the fact that it functions not only as an attention-directing and temporal grounding device, but also as an indicator of perspective-taking and, in some cases, FID.

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