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A triple approximation to the concept of aspect in Spanish

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A TRIPLE APPROXIMATION TO THE CONCEPT OF ASPECT IN SPANISH

by

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ABSTRACT

A Triple Approximation to the Concept of Aspect in Spanish

by

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The present analysis studies aspect from a triple perspective: morphological, semantic and syntactic. This division aims at clarifying the concept of aspect, accounting for the traditional dichotomy Imperfect / Preterit tense in Spanish.

In contrast to those authors who consider the above categories as separate entities, we claim that the term aspect should be studied as an interaction of the three categories in the following sequence:

1. Morphological / semantic interaction. This interaction shows that the situation a verb expresses (whether durative, punctual, iterative, etc.) may be influenced by the choice of the Imperfect or the Preterit.

2. Morphological / syntactic interaction. This interaction illustrates that the choice of the Imperfect or the Preterit tenses involves different sentential components, mainly subject and adverbials.

3. Semantic / syntactic interaction. This interaction reveals that the situation a verb designates may be affected by elements of the sentence such as subject, direct and indirect object, adverbials and periphrastic verb forms.
Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge the persons who advised, helped and supported me in different ways.

The members of my Committee, Drs. Urrutibéheity, Leal and Castañeda provided helpful criticisms and advice.

Finally, my family, especially my mother Esperanza and brothers Alejandro and Miriam encourage me to overcame the difficult times and showed the finest sensitivity to support my emotional needs.
Table of contents

Abstract ii
Acknowledgements iii
Table of contents iv

I. Introduction 1

1.1. Some definitions of aspect 1

1.2. Problems with the previous definitions 6

Notes 11

II. Aspekt / aktionsart interaction 12

2.1. Aspekt. Morphological approach 12

2.1.1. Definition 12

2.1.2. Some errors related to the notion of aspekt in Spanish 15

2.1.3. Imperfectivity. The Imperfect 18

2.1.4. Perfectivity. The Preterit 21

2.1.5. Imperfect vs. Preterit 22

2.1.6. Remarks on perfectivity and imperfectivity 28

2.2. Aktionsart. Semantic approach 30

2.2.1. Transitional vs. non-transitional situations 30

2.3. Aspekt / aktionsart interaction 32

2.3.1. Marked and unmarked aspect 37

2.3.2. Verbs with two kinds of aktionsart 39

2.3.3. Remarks on aktionsart / aspekt interaction 42

2.4. Final remarks and conclusion 45
Notes

III. Context. Syntactic approach

3.1. Aspekt / context interaction

3.1.1. Animate / Inanimate subject

3.1.2. Adverbials

3.1.2.1 Adverbials related to the Perfective aspekt (Preterit)

3.1.2.2 Adverbials related to the Imperfective aspekt (Imperfect)

3.2. Aktionsart / context interaction

3.2.1. Specified / Unspecified subject

3.2.2. Direct object

3.2.2.1. Transitive versus Intransitive verbs

3.2.2.2. Noun Phrase as direct object

3.2.3. Indirect object

3.2.4. Adverbials

3.2.5. Periphrastic verb forms

3.3. Final remarks and conclusion

Notes

Conclusions

Bibliography
Chapter I: Introduction

1.1. Some definitions of aspect

The term "aspect" is the English translation of the Russian word вид (вид), etymologically related to the Latin term videre (= 'to see') and Greek eidos (= 'what can be seen', 'shape', used in classical Greek to differentiate between simple and derived verb forms).\(^1\)

Since its introduction in the study of Slavic verbal systems, the concept has been used to convey different ideas. Holt defines it as "a way of conceiving the passage of time\(^2\). Roman Jakobson claims that aspect "deals with the temporal values inherent in the activity or state itself.\(^3\)" Comrie, on the other hand, suggests that "aspects are different ways of viewing the internal constituency of a situation.\(^4\)"

The preceding definitions show that there is no general agreement among linguists on the definition of aspect. Scholars also differ in pointing out the tenses which are involved in the phenomenon of Spanish aspect. Some authors --Alarcos, Sánchez Ruipérez\(^5\)-- restrict the term to the opposition Imperfect / Preterit. Some others, include all tenses --Togeby and Pottier\(^6\)--. The present analysis supports the thesis that extends the term aspect to all tenses. Nevertheless, we will focus on the opposition Imperfect / Preterit in order to reach a more detailed account of the concept of aspect in Spanish.

Alarcos indicates that aspect is shown in Spanish by a "categoría de morfemas fundamentales que expresan el término o no término del proceso."\(^7\) According to this definition, perfective forms would indicate the end of the process while imperfective
forms would not. Marfa se duchó, se había duchado, se hubo duchado, se ha duchado belong to the perfective aspect since they indicate the end of the process ducharse. Marfa se duchaba, se ducha, se duchará, on the other hand, present imperfective aspect since the process they designate has not reached a terminal point. As the previous examples show, the differences between the various forms are expressed by the flexional morphemes they carry.

The concept of aspect acquires complexity when another term comes forth: aktionsart.

The term Aktionsart was defined for the first time by the German neogrammorian Karl Brugmann as "the manner in which the action or situation develops or proceeds in particular circumstances."8

More recently, Laurel J. Brinton has claimed that "Aktionsart is an indication of the intrinsic temporal qualities of a situation ... whether it is stative or dynamic, punctual or durative, bounded or unbounded, continuous or iterative ... Since it concerns the given nature of the event and not of the speaker, Aktionsart is objective ... Aktionsart is the character of the situation named by the verb."9

The situations the verbs designate can be divided into the following oppositions:

1. PUNCTUAL VERSUS DURATIVE10: A punctual situation designates a situation non-extended in time. For instance: disparar, golpear, dejar caer, relampaguear.

A durative situation indicates a temporally extended situation. It designates a process, an activity or a state. Examples: oír, querer, saber.

2. DYNAMIC VERSUS STATIVE: A dynamic situation designates an event, act,
process or activity which depends on an "input of energy." For instance, *girar, saltar, correr*.

A *stative* situation "is conceived of as existing rather than happening and on being homogeneous, continuous and unchanging throughout its duration." Examples: *hablar, saber, estudiar*.

3. **TELIC VERSUS ATELIC**: A *telic* situation is one which "has built into a terminal point."

An *atelic* situation designates a situation which lacks such point. Garey explains this dichotomy in these words: "If one was V+ing, but was interrupted while V+ing, has one V+ed? -Yes, atelic / -No, telic." Telic situations are indicated through verbs such as: *nacer, morir, salir*. Atelic situations are expressed by verbs such as: *cantar, estudiar*.

4. **INGRESSIVE (or INCHOATIVE) VERSUS TERMINATIVE**: An *ingressive* (or *inchoative*) situation denotes the beginning of a state, event or action which continues to occur. In Spanish, ingressive *aktionsart* can be indicated by means of the Latin infix -sc- in verbs like *anochecer, florecer, palidecer*.

Another means of denoting an ingressive character is the use of the reflexive marker *se* in verbs like: *dormir* and *dormirse, enfadar* and *enfadarse, cansar* and *cansarse*.

A *terminative* situation designates the end of a state, event or action. Examples: *firmar, besar, saltar*.

5. **SEMELFACTIVE VERSUS ITERATIVE**: A *semelfactive* situation describes an event, process or action that takes place only once. Examples: *nacer, morir*.

An *iterative* situation indicates an event, process or action which takes place more
than once. In Spanish, suffixes help convey this iterative effect. For example -ear in apedrear, manosear, mariposear. Other verbs have also an infix: -uqu- in besuquear, -et- in corretear.

Aktionsart has been defined as an objective category. Nevertheless, this statement needs some clarification. It does not mean that all speakers will agree upon the aktionsart of a given verb. In other words, different speakers will define a particular kind of situation as punctual while others will classify it as dynamic. For instance, the verb saltar can be classified with verbs denoting punctual aktionsart since it is an action that cannot be temporally extended. However, some native speakers would include it with verbs of dynamic aktionsart since it implies movement and needs an input of energy.

Sometimes, aktionsart may be influenced by context. Thus, the static or dynamic feature of a given situation may depend on the subject. For instance:

La mesa mide 2x3 m.

Here mide is static because the subject is inanimate. Nevertheless, in the example El profesor mide la mesa

the aktionsart of medir is dynamic due to the fact that the subject is animate (for further discussion of this type of difference see section 3.2.1.)

The previous classification tries to cover the main divisions into which verbs can be classified according to their aktionsart taking into consideration that the possibilities are unlimited.

The different situations the verbs designate can be divided into two main groups: transitional and non-transitional situations.
Transitional situations cannot be extended in time and indicate in different ways the beginning and/or the end of an action. They express, at the same time, a change into another state or action. Punctual (disparar), telic (nacer), ingressive (anochecer), terminative (besar), and semelfactive situations (morir) belong to this group.

The second group will be called non-transitional. These situations convey a state or an action which can be extended indefinitely in time. They do not indicate a change into another state or action but rather their lasting quality. Durative (oír), stative (hablar), and iterative situations (manosear) belong to this class.

The verb morir, for instance, is transitional since the kind of situation it expresses is a momentary one and cannot be extended in time. Hablar, on the other hand, is non-transitional since the kind of situation it indicates can be extended for an indefinite period of time.

The limits between aspect and aktionsart are unclear in the studies of some authors. Bassols\textsuperscript{14} claims that verbal aspect describes the non-transitional or transitional character of a given verb, adding that only non-transitional situations may accept more than one kind of aspect. It would be more accurate to call Bassol’s definition of aspect aktionsart for only semantic features are taken into consideration.

Lázaro Carreter also describes aspect in terms of aktionsart. He defines aspect as follows: "El aspecto se produce en las lenguas modernas occidentales, más que como una categoría gramatical, como nota de su significación; picotear indica, por ejemplo, acción repetida; disparar acción instantánea, etc."\textsuperscript{15}
1.2. Problems with the previous definitions

As the foregoing definitions illustrate, some of the studies dealing with the matter of aspect in Spanish emphasize the *aktionsart* of the verb contained in its stem (Bassols, Lázaro Carreter), disregarding the concept of aspect reflected through flexional morphemes in tenses. Other studies, such as those by Lenz, Criado de Val and Alarcos, tend to stress this latter feature of aspect.

The present study will show that flexional morphemes --which express tense differences-- and *aktionsart* --divided into transitional and non-transitional situations-- are of equal importance. We will also analyze the relationships that the verb establishes with other elements of the sentence --context-- to show how the idea of aspect is modified.

Aspect will be defined as a category constituted by a triple interaction:

1. Morphological / semantic (*aktionsart*) interaction
2. Morphological / syntactic (context) interaction
3. Semantic (*aktionsart*) / syntactic (context) interaction

We will claim that aspect --marked by flexional morphemes-- is a component of the concept of aspect together with *aktionsart* and context.

Aspect will be defined as "a matter depending on the speaker's viewpoint or perspective on a situation." If the speaker observes the situation from its inside, s/he will perceive it as an entity without definite limits. S/he will choose, then, the Imperfect. For instance, *María estudiaba en la biblioteca*. On the other hand, if s/he views the situation from its outside, that is, from a moment subsequent to the action, s/he will consider the situation as a whole entity with definite limits. In this case, the Preterit will be selected.
For example, *María estudió en la biblioteca.*

**Aktionsart** is the second component of aspect and indicates the intrinsic temporal qualities of verbal situations. These will be classified as transitional and non-transitional.

Finally, context —the third element— names the relationships that the verb establishes with other components of the sentence.

There is, therefore, one label —"aspect"— to name two phenomena:

a. A concept depending on the speaker's viewpoint on a situation

b. Result of the triple interaction (speaker's viewpoint / **aktionsart** / context)

To avoid any kind of confusion, two terms will be used:

The German word *Aspekt* will designate the speaker's viewpoint. We will reserve the English term "aspect" to imply the result of the union **aspekt** + **aktionsart** + context.

As we stated on page 1, this study will focus on the dichotomy Preterit / Imperfect although it is assumed that aspect can also be studied through all the tenses and moods of the Spanish verbal system.

Let us consider now some problems that the previous definitions present showing the advantages of the interaction we propose.

First, the **aspekt** / **aktionsart** interaction will show that the **aktionsart** a verb expresses (whether durative, punctual, iterative, etc.) may be influenced by the choice of the Imperfect or the Preterit. Consider the following two sentences:

1. El cazador **disparó** contra la liebre.

2. El cazador **disparaba** contra la liebre.

The use of the Imperfect in sentence 2. modifies the **aktionsart** of **disparar** which
is usually punctual (one that takes place only once) and renders it iterative (one that takes place more than once). In the aspekt / aktionsart interaction, aspekt acts as a device which modifies aktionsart. Thus, disparar, originally designating a transitional situation (punctual), through the influence of the Imperfect, becomes non-transitional (iterative).

Lázaro Carreter’s analysis fails to recognize this fact since he only considers semantic factors. According to this author, aspect is achieved by means of derivative morphemes. Thus, toquetear, revolotear, picotear are given iterative aktionsart by way of the suffix -ear and the infix -et-. In the same sense, a verb like retener is opposed to tener by means of the prefix -re, this one marking iterative aktionsart.

Lázaro Carreter’s analysis shows a partial view of the category aspect. Thus, sentence 2. shows iterative aspect although none of the means mentioned by Lázaro is used.

Sentences 1. and 2. also contradict Bassol’s statement that only non-transitional situations may change aspect. Disparar changes from a transitional situation (punctual) to a non-transitional one (iterative).

Secondly, the aspekt / aktionsart interaction will illustrate that durativity, punctuality, etc. are features that belong to the aktionsart of a given verb. Consider the following two cases:

3. El niño nació ayer.

4. El niño cantó ayer.

Although verbal morphemes --Class II morphemes which express aspekt, namely -- are common to both sentences, differences exist regarding their aspeccual behavior.
The answer will be found in the lexical component of aspect, aktionsart. Let us consider these sentences associated with the durational adverbial durante todo el día. The asterisk will indicate the inaccuracy of the sentence:

3a. *El niño nació ayer durante todo el día.
4a. El niño cantó ayer durante todo el día.

The foregoing cases show that the verbs cantó and nació are different although there is no difference in the flexional morphemes that indicate aspekt and tense: [naθ-i-Ø] / [kant-Ø-Ø]. Thus, the thesis by authors (Lenz, Criado de Val, Alarcos Llorach) who only consider morphological differences (based on flexional morphemes) also proves to be incomplete. The reason why sentence 3. does not accept the combination with the adverbial durante todo el día is because nacer designates a transitional situation that cannot be extended beyond a given point. After having reached the point of birth, the action expressed by nacer cannot be extended. Cantar, on the other hand, indicates a non-transitional situation that can be extended indefinitely.

The thesis by those authors who only consider flexional morphemes as components of aspect also proves to be inaccurate.

Thirdly, the aktionsart / context interaction will illustrate that the aktionsart a verb designates may be affected by elements of the sentence, such as subject, direct and indirect objects, adverbials and periphrastic verb forms. Consider the following examples:

5. Pedro escribió.
6. Pedro escribió una carta.
7. Pedro escribió una carta todos los días.
These examples illustrate the relevance of the *aktionsart* / context interaction. The *aktionsart* of a given verb may be modified by context, namely direct object and adverbials. The situation described by *escribir* is non-transitional in sentence 5. since it can be extended indefinitely in time. In sentence 6., however, the same verb designates a transitional situation, that is, one that cannot be extended in time. The action ends when the letter has been written. It is the object *una carta* which varies *aktionsart*.

Sentence 7. acquires again a non-transitional character (iterative) because of the adverbial *todos los días*.

Thus, the *aktionsart* of the verb *escribir* is modified by the direct object in 6. and by the adverbial *todos los días* in 7.

The preceding cases show the relevance of context to the theory of aspect. Context may modify a given *aktionsart*. The result will be unmarked aspect if *aktionsart* is not modified, while marked aspect will indicate the change operated in *aktionsart*. 
Chapter I: Notes


3Jakobson qtd. in Brinton, 2


7E. Alarcos Llorach, 78

8Brugman qtd. in Bache, 9

9Brinton, 3

10This classification of verbal situations has been taken from Carl Bache, 13-14

11B. Comrie, 49

12Lyons qtd. in Carl Bache, 14

13B. Comrie qtd. in Carl Bache, 14


15F. Lázaro Carreter, *Diccionario de términos filológicos* (Madrid: Gredos, 1953)

16Lenz qtd. in Criado de Val, *El verbo español* (Madrid: Sociedad anónima de traductores y autores, 1969) 16; Alarcos Llorach, 78

17Brinton, 3
Chapter II: *aspekt* / *aktsionsart* interaction

2.1. **Aspekt.** Morphological approach

2.1.1. **Definition**

As we stated on page 6, *aspekt* is a matter depending on the speaker's viewpoint or perspective on a situation. *Aspekt* has been traditionally divided into two classes: imperfective and perfective *aspekt*. The main difference between the two labels depends on the speaker's attitude towards the action or event conveyed by the verb. The speaker may look at the action from inside. This way, s/he is identifying the "moment of the action" with the "moment of focusing the action". This is imperfective *aspekt*.

The speaker may also focus the action or event from the outside, acting as a spectator who "looks at" the action from a subsequent point to the moment when the action or event takes place. This is perfective *aspekt*.

Thus, three moments should be borne in mind:

1. The moment of speaking. This moment is fixed. It describes the time when the speaker utters a given sentence.

2. The moment of action. This moment depicts the moment when the action or event designated by the verb takes place. For instance, *canto* describes a moment of action simultaneous to the moment of speaking; *canté* designates a moment of action precedent to the moment of speaking; *cantará* indicates an action or event whose moment of action is subsequent to the moment of speaking.
3. The moment of envisaging the action. This moment describes the attitude of the speaker towards the action. S/he may envisage the action in its development by choosing the imperfective aspekt. S/he may, on the other hand, envisage the action or event from a subsequent point. This is perfective aspekt.

The difference between

a. Aquí vivían mis abuelos.

b. Aquí vivieron mis abuelos.

is one of aspekt. In (a.) the speaker identifies the moment of the action with the moment of envisaging the action (Imperfective aspekt). According to Hernández Alonso², the speaker accompanies --in his/her mind-- the development of the action, evoking events that happened at that time. In (b.), however, the speaker views the action from a subsequent moment to the moment of the action (Perfective aspekt). His/her perspective is more objective.

In Spanish, aspekt is conveyed by verbal flexional morphemes which belong to a closed system³:

\[
\text{Stem + Morphemes I + Morphemes II + Morphemes III}
\]

The stem provides the verb's lexical meaning. "Class I Morphemes" includes the thematic vowel; "Class II Morphemes" includes morphemes of aspekt, tense and mood; "Class III Morphemes" includes person, number and degree of familiarity morphemes⁴. In brief:
Stem + Morphemes I + Morphemes II + Morphemes III

Thematic vowel Morphemes of tense, Number, person and degree
mood and aspekt of familiarity morphemes

Next follows the chart with the morphemes of regular verbs. Aspekt is conveyed through morphemes II.

**IMPERFECT : CANTAR / TEMER / PARTIR**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stem</th>
<th>M I T. V.</th>
<th>M II M. aspekt</th>
<th>M III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cant-/Tem-/Part-</td>
<td>-a/-f/-f-</td>
<td>-ba/-a/-a</td>
<td>Ø</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cant-/Tem-/Part-</td>
<td>-a/-f/-f-</td>
<td>-ba/-a/-a-</td>
<td>-s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cant-/Tem-/Part-</td>
<td>-a/-f/-f-</td>
<td>-ba/-a/-a</td>
<td>Ø</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cant-/Tem-/Part-</td>
<td>-a/-f/-f-</td>
<td>-ba/-a/-a-</td>
<td>-mos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cant-/Tem-/Part-</td>
<td>-a/-f/-f-</td>
<td>-ba/-a/-a-</td>
<td>-is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cant-/Tem-/Part-</td>
<td>-a/-f/-f-</td>
<td>-ba/-a/-a-</td>
<td>-n</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PRETERIT : CANTAR / TEMER / PARTIR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stem</th>
<th>M I</th>
<th>M II</th>
<th>M III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cantar</td>
<td>-él-él-l</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>temer</td>
<td>-a/-i/-i-</td>
<td>ste</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>partir</td>
<td>Ø/i/i-</td>
<td>-ó</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cantar</td>
<td>-a/-i/-i-</td>
<td>-mos</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>temer</td>
<td>-a/-i/-i-</td>
<td>ste-</td>
<td>-is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>partir</td>
<td>-a/-ie/-ie-</td>
<td>-ro-</td>
<td>-n</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The preceding charts correspond to the morphemes that combine with regular verbs. The irregularities are many, especially as far as the Preterit is concerned.

A remark that can be drawn from the charts is that the first and third person singular of the Imperfect tense are the same e.g. cantaba (yo / él cantaba), temía (yo / él temía), partía (yo / él partía). The forms of the Preterit, on the contrary, have two separate forms canté / cantó, temí / temió, parti / partió.

2.1.2. Some errors related to the notion of aspekt in Spanish

According to some grammarians (Roca Pons and Criado de Val, for example) the Preterit presents actions or events in a punctual manner. In other words, the Preterit
designates a situation non-extended in time.

The inaccuracy of the previous claim can be observed in the analysis of the following sentences:

a. María me habló de su novio durante horas.

b. *El niño nació durante horas.

Although their flexional morphemes --Class II Morphemes that indicate aspekt (-6)--- are the same, their behavior is different. While the situation designated by nació cannot be extended in time, the situation indicated by habló can.

Nació shows a punctual situation, that is, one that cannot be prolonged. That is the reason why the durational adverbial durante horas cannot be added to the sentence. Habló, however, can be prolonged in time and is, therefore, not punctual but durative. A durative situation is one that can be extended temporally.

The previous sentences have shown that the Preterit does not always indicate the punctuality of a given verb. The difference between the punctual character of nació and the durative one of habló lies, rather, on the meaning of their lexical stems. Thus, cantar designates a durative situation while nacer indicates a punctual one. These features of punctuality and durativity belong, among others, to the aktionsart of a given verb.

Further examples prove punctuality to be a feature of the verbal aktionsart rather than being associated to the Preterit tense. In the example:

Felipe II reinó durante 42 años.

the situation conveyed by the verb reinó is not punctual, since it lasted for 42 years. The punctuality of a verb is, therefore, related to its aktionsart rather than to its aspekt. A
similar case is shown by the following sentence:

Carmen fue feliz durante toda su vida.

The preterit fue does not convey a punctual situation but one that lasted for a lifetime.

Different grammar analyses tend to identify the Imperfective aspekt (Imperfect) with durativity. The following sentence, however, proves that statement not to be valid for all cases:

Daba la una cuando Mario entró en la habitación.⁶

The action dar la una lacks a durative character, since it is shorter than that of Mario’s entering the room. Durativity, then, is not always related to the Imperfect. The former belongs to the aktionsart of the verb, the latter, to its aspekt.

Further examples show that the Imperfect is not possible with all expressions of duration:

*Carmen era feliz durante toda su vida.

Despite the durative character of the situation, the Imperfect cannot be used.

At this point, I would like to point out that some grammars tend to identify the presence of an endpoint with the Preterit while the absence of it is related to the Imperfect. In this sense, two sentences like:

1. El empleado se quejaba del jefe.

2. El empleado se quejó del jefe.

may be distinguished in terms of the presence or absence of an endpoint. While in (2) the employee has started and stopped complaining, in (1) he has started his complaint but has
not finished it yet. Thus, (1) has no implicit endpoint, while (2) does.

This distinction, however, does not account for Preterit forms such as supe, conocí, comprendí which do not convey the end of a situation, but its starting point:

Supe que te ibas esta mañana.

Conocí a su madre en el parque.

Lo comprendí todo cuando lo vi sentado en aquel sofá.

These examples show that the Preterit does not always imply an endpoint. Sometimes, it indicates a starting point.

It is worthwhile mentioning here that the English verb to know when used in the Simple Past cannot imply inchoative (or ingressive) aspect. We need a different verb to convey this notion: I knew the truth (durative) / I learned the truth (ingressive)

I knew your mother (durative) / I met your mother (ingressive)

The previous cases have illustrated that the use of the Preterit or the Imperfect in Spanish is not always conditioned by the meaning of the verbs. In section 1.3.2 we will show that they are characteristics of the lexical component of aspect, aktionsart.

2.1.3. Imperfectivity. The Imperfect

As stated above, the speaker who chooses the Imperfect, perceives the moment of envisaging the action to be simultaneous with the moment of the action. The Imperfect shares with the Present the contemporaneity of these two moments. This fact has led scholars to consider the Imperfect "the present of the past." Klum has supported this fact proving that the Imperfect and the Present tend to be associated with the same adverbials,
e.g. "en ese momento," "ahora" and "hoy".

The difference that distinguishes the Present from the Imperfect is that while the moment of action also coincides with the moment of speaking and the moment of envisaging the action in the Present, it does not in the Imperfect. The graphic representation of these three moments would be as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Present</th>
<th>Imperfect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moment of speaking</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moment of action</td>
<td>---X--&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moment of envisaging the action</td>
<td>---X--&gt;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be observed, the moment of action in the Imperfect precedes the moment of speaking, while in the Present both moments are simultaneous. The reason is that the Imperfect describes an action or event which took place in the past, while the Present designates an action or event taking place in the present.

The flexional morphemes which mark Imperfective *aspekt* (-ba and -a) have the following meanings: Past / extended period / indefinite limits. In other words, the Imperfect conveys a past action occurring during an extended period of time within indefinite limits; that is, there is no reference to the beginning or the end of the action.

For instance:

María *escribió* una carta.

The evidence for the lack of an endpoint in the verbs conjugated with the Imperfect is shown in the following sentences, where the verb designates an action which can continue into the present:
La semana pasada construyan un puente. Quizás lo estén construyendo todavía.

Esta mañana Miriam tocaba la flauta. Quizás esté tocando todavía.

The Imperfect makes no reference, then, to the end of the action. In the same sense, it makes no reference to the beginning of it:

1. Cuando llamaste por teléfono, me duchaba.

2. Cuando me lo dijiste, no sabía si creerlo o no.

The subordinate clause introduced by cuando is perfective and includes endpoints. The main clause with a verb in the Imperfect has no initial point. In 1. the two actions overlap: My taking a shower started at some indefinite point before the action llamar. The Imperfect may also allow a sequential interpretation, as sentence 2. shows. My hesitation started after your telling me the news.

The absence of implicit limits in the uses of the Imperfect draws attention towards the durative aktionsart of the verb. However, it must be noted that examples with explicit limits can be frequently found, as in:

(1) A las seis y media de la mañana, Margarita ya se vestía (started to get dressed).

(2) Hacía dos días que no lo veía / Llevaba dos días sin verlo (since I had last seen him).

As the translation in English shows, the Imperfect of these sentences is marked by temporal limits. In (1) the Imperfect, helped by the adverbial a las seis y media de la mañana indicates the beginning of the interval while in (2) by means of dos días it implies the end of it.
2.1.4. Perfectivity. The Preterit

In the perfective aspekt, the speaker plays the role of a spectator, observing the action from a point subsequent to the moment of the action or event. The verbal action is, therefore, viewed as a whole entity with definite limits. As it was pointed out above, it is important not to give too much emphasis to the terminative character of the Preterit. Forms like supe, conocí or comprendí indicate the beginning of the action and not the end of it. The visual presentation of the Preterit would be the following:

Preterit\textsuperscript{12}

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
\draw[->] (0,0) -- (1,1);
\draw[->] (0,0) -- (1,-1);
\draw[->] (0,0) -- (2,0);
\node at (2,0) {x};
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

Moment of speaking

Moment of action

Moment of envisaging the action

The moment of action is, like in the Imperfect, precedent to the moment of speaking (both forms describe an action in the past). The moment of envisaging the action, unlike the Imperfect, is subsequent to the moment of the action.

The Preterit is defined according to the following features: past / closed context / definite limits. In other words, the Preterit designates a past action which took place within finite limits in a temporal context that the speaker considers as closed\textsuperscript{13}:

Victoria de los Ángeles\textit{ cantó} en Carnegie Hall ayer.

This example shows the definite limits on which the Preterit is based: ayer. However, the Preterit may also appear in sentences where limits are not explicitly indicated:

Pablo\textit{ vio} la televisión.
The Preterit, as opposed to the Imperfect, does not present actions, events or processes which continue into the present. Thus, it is not possible to say:

*La semana pasada construyeron un puente. Quizás lo estén construyendo todavía.

*Esta mañana Miriam tocó la flauta. Puede que la esté tocando todavía.

*Los niños supieron ayer la noticia. Quizás la sepan todavía.

If the speaker wants to convey an action that continues into the present he will use the Imperfect:

La semana pasada construyan un puente. Quizás lo estén construyendo todavía.

The Preterit, unlike the Imperfect, cannot be used as a basis for another simultaneous action:

*Mientras comió, yo vi la televisión.

*Cuando dieron las once, yo descansé en el sofá.

Instead of simultaneity, the Preterit is used to indicate a succession of actions or events:

Sobre un fondo azul que sugería el firmamento pintó los elementos de la Pasión de Cristo: la cruz que cargó y en la que expiró; la corona de espinas que punzó sus sienes; la túnica del martirio; la lanza del centurión que atravesó su carne; el martillo con el que fue clavado; el látigo que lo azotó; la esponja en que bebió la cicuta; los dados con que jugaron a sus pies los impíos y la bolsa en que Judas recibió las monedas de la traición.14

2.1.5. Imperfect vs. Preterit

The main uses of the Imperfect and the Preterit in Spanish are presented below. Similar contexts have been selected to stress the differences which exist between the two terms:
1. SIMULTANEITY / SUCCESSION OF ACTIONS OR EVENTS. The Imperfect designates an action or event in its development, while another action or event takes place. Consider the following sentences:

Mientras comías (= estabais comiendo), yo compré las flores.

El niño se ahogaba cuando el socorrista lo salvó.

In these sentences, there is an action being developed: comías / se ahogaba while a different one takes place: compré / salvó.

The Preterit, on the other hand, indicates a succession of actions or events and cannot serve as a basis for a different action or event:

*Mientras comisteis, yo compré las flores.

*El niño se ahogó cuando el socorrista lo salvó.

The different behavior of the Imperfect and the Preterit in the previous sentences can be also seen in the following examples15. These show that while the Preterit indicates a succession of actions or events, the Imperfect describes a characteristic of the object of the main sentence:

1. El general atacó al enemigo, que se retiró.

2. El general atacó al enemigo, que se retiraba.

Sentence 1. shows that the subordinate clause que se retiró is the consequence of the main action atacar. In other words, the enemy’s withdrawal is subsequent to the attack by the general.

Sentence 2, however, shows two parallel actions. The subordinate clause que se retiraba is a characteristic of the object of the main sentence and not a result of the
previous action.

A similar case can be seen in the following examples:

1. El profesor riñió al niño, que se rió.

2. El profesor riñó al niño, que se reñía.

Sentence 1. shows again that the child’s laughing was a result of the teacher’s reprimand, while in 2., the child’s laughing already was taking place before the reprimand.

2. ITERATIVITY. The Imperfect and the Preterit can be used to express an iterative action, event or process. An iterative action, event or process is one that takes place more than once:

1. Cada mañana, al levantarse, se cepillaba los dientes.

2. Cada mañana, al levantarse, se cepilló los dientes.

These sentences are iterative because of the repetition of the action "cepillarse los dientes". The difference between the two is the following, according to Molho:

Sentence 1. conveys a potential repetition, a programmed plan of brushing his / her teeth. Sentence 2. reports a factual event which indeed took place.

3. DESCRIPTION / NARRATION: The Imperfect is chosen when the moment of the action, event or state and the moment of envisaging the action, event or state are perceived as simultaneous. That is why the Imperfect is suitable for descriptions:

El hombre era alto y tan flaco que parecía siempre de perfil. Su piel era oscura, sus huesos prominentes y sus ojos ardían con fuego perpetuo. Calzaba sandalias de pastor y la túnica morada que le caía sobre el cuerpo recordaba el hábito de esos misioneros que, de cuando en cuando, visitaban los pueblos del sertón bautizando muchedumbres de niños y casando parejas amancebadas.
The Preterit, on the other hand, appears more frequently in narrations. Its use emphasizes the fact that the moment of envisaging the action and that of the action or state are not simultaneous:

Pero la historia que llegó a ser carne de su carne fue la de Roberto el Diablo, ese hijo del Duque de Normandía que, después de cometer todas las maldades, se arrepintió y anduvo a cuatro patas, ladrando en vez de hablar y durmiendo entre las bestias, hasta que, habiendo alcanzado la misericordia del Buen Jesús, salvó al Emperador del ataque de los moros y se casó con la Reina del Brasil.18

USES OF THE PRETERIT AND THE IMPERFECT WITH MODAL VERBS:

The different behavior of the Imperfect and the Preterit also appears when the verbs conjugated are modal.

(1) Podías haberlo hecho. / Debes haberlo hecho.

(2) Pudiste haberlo hecho. / Debieste haberlo hecho.

In (1), the Imperfect substitutes the Past Conditional (Podrías haberlo dicho). The action is presented as an obligation or a possibility which existed in the past. The sentence marks a reprimand towards the listener / reader for not having done what s/he had the opportunity to do.

In (2), there are no connotations of being reproved.

The following examples will illustrate that the Preterit, combined with modal verbs, conveys the factual realization of an act. The Imperfect, on the other hand, allows both interpretations: the factual and the potential consummation of the action performed by the verb. In the following examples, we have considered hubo que and había que as modal verbs:

1. Hubo que cortarle la pierna.
2. Había que cortarle la pierna.

While sentence 2. allows a subsequent action, sentence 1. does not. Thus,

1.*Hubo que cortarle la pierna, pero el paciente se negó.

2. Había que cortarle la pierna, pero el paciente se negó.

The first sentence is not correct because hubo already conveys the idea that the action "cortarle la pierna" took place.

OTHER USES OF THE IMPERFECT:

a. IN NARRATIONS ("Imparfait pittoresque"19): Sometimes, the Imperfect may be used instead of the expected Preterit. For instance:

1. En el año 1969, el hombre llegaba a la luna.

2. Después de dos años de sangrientas batallas, terminaba la guerra civil.

Through the use of the Imperfect the sentences acquire aesthetic connotations and affective intensity.

When combined with the Preterit, events and actions are presented as single occurrences in an objective manner:

En el año 1969, el hombre llegó a la luna.

Después de dos años de sangrientas batallas, terminó la guerra civil.

The Imperfect, on the other hand, allows for other actions to take place at the same time. For example, in sentence 1., other things are suggested, like the tension preceding man’s arrival on the moon, the preparations for the journey. In sentence 2., the horrors of the war, the wounded, cities destroyed38.

b. POLITE REQUESTS: The Imperfect may substitute the Present in polite
requests, as the following sentences illustrate:

¿Deseaba algo? -Venía a pedirle un favor.21

(= ¿Desea algo? -Vengo a pedirle un favor.)

-Buenos días, quería hablarle de mi hijo.

(= Quiero hablarle de mi hijo.)

c. UNREAL EVENTS: As we stated on page 23, the Imperfect may indicate the
potentiality of a given action, event or state while the Preterit reports their factual
realization. That is why the Imperfect is suitable to describe unreal events, such as dreams
and games. For example:

DREAMS: Y entonces venía un hombre con un cuchillo y me mataba.

GAMES: -Vamos a jugar a que yo tenía una tienda y que tú venías a comprar el pan.

- Yo era Blanquieyes y tenía una madrastra muy mala. Yo me escapaba y os
encontraba a vosotros, que érais los enanitos.

d. PERMANENT ATTRIBUTES: The Imperfect allows the simultaneity of
different actions, events or states. This fact renders it suitable to describe permanent
attributes. The Preterit, on the other hand, does not describe simultaneous actions, events
or states and is not used. For instance:

El niño tenía/tuvo los ojos grises y era/fue muy delgado y muy alto.

Mi tío era/fue de Barcelona.

La casa constaba / *constó de tres pisos.

e. IN PLACE OF THE CONDITIONAL22: The Imperfect may convey the potential
realization of an action, event or state. That is why it may substitute the conditional in
the following sentences:

Si no hablaba, se moría (=se habría muerto).

Si hubiera entrado en aquel momento, le tiraba algo a la cabeza (=le habría tirado).

2.1.6. Remarks on perfectivity and imperfectivity

In the previous sections, we discussed the importance of the speaker’s attitude towards the action indicated by the verb. The speaker’s attitude determines the choice of the Imperfect or the Preterit. If s/he considers the moment of the action and that of focusing the action as simultaneous, s/he will use the Imperfect.

On the other hand, if s/he considers the moment of action and that of focusing the action as non-simultaneous, s/he will choose the Preterit.

The examples which follow illustrate these features:

Trabajé en la embajada. (That period of time is closed)

Trabajaba en la embajada. (The action serves as background for other actions:

Trabajaba en la embajada cuando nació mi hijo)

No encontré la casa. (My search is concluded)

No encontraba la casa. (Perhaps I found it 5 minutes later)

There are cases, however, in which the speaker’s choice is not determined by his attitude towards the action. Consider the following examples:

1. No consiguió salir de la casa y permaneció encerrado todo el día.

   No conseguía salir de la casa y permaneció encerrado todo el día.

2. Lo llamé, pero nadie contestó al teléfono.
Lo llamé, pero nadie contestaba al teléfono.

According to Lucchesi\textsuperscript{24}, the difference between the sentences with the Imperfect and the Preterit is based on stylistic reasons. That is, when the speaker wants to make an objective statement without any kind of connotation the Preterit is used. This is what Lucchesi calls a \textit{Categoric statement} ('Affermazione categorica'). On the other hand, if s/he wants the sentence to have a subjective tone, the Imperfect will be employed. This statement is called \textit{Suspensive Statement} ('Affermazione sospensiva').

The last remark to be made about \textit{aspekt} will lead us to the semantic component of aspect. Consider this:

1.a. El sol \textit{se ponía} detrás de las montañas. 2.a. El niño \textit{golpeaba} la mesa con furia.

b. El sol \textit{se puso} detrás de las montañas. b. El niño \textit{golpeó} la mesa con furia.

The difference between the sentences with the Preterit and those with the Imperfect is that the former refer to a single event while the latter allude to a repetition of events.

Thus, in 1a. the Imperfect depicts an indefinite number of sunsets that can take place in an indefinite period of time. For instance, \textit{El sol se ponía siempre detrás de las montañas}. In opposition, 1b describes a single event: sunset. The sentence:

*El sol \textit{se puso siempre} detrás de las montañas

is not possible since the action that \textit{ponerse} (related to the sun) denotes is a single event. However, it is possible to find a case like the following:

\textit{El sol se puso durante el verano} detrás de las montañas
This sentence is admissible since durante el verano implies a single event (ponerse) repeated throughout a definite period of time (el verano).

The same happens in 2a and 2b. The former refers to several hits, repeated in an indefinite time interval; the latter indicates a single hit. The distinction 1a-2a / 1b-2b is based on single event / multiple event.

At this point it is necessary to turn again to the concept of aktionsart. The verbs ponerse and golpear are semelfactive because the action they designate takes place just once. The sun sets only once every day and the verb golpear can be paraphrased as 'dar un golpe'. This feature is maintained in 1b and 2b by means of the Preterit. In 1a and 2a the Imperfect shifts the semelfactive aktionsart to an iterative one. Thus:

Semelfactive aktionsart + Perfective aspect = Semelfactive Aspect
Semelfactive aktionsart + Imperfective aspect = Iterative Aspect

The foregoing examples illustrate that the choice between the Preterit and the Imperfect may change the aktionsart of a given situation.

2.2. Aktionsart. Semantic approach

2.2.1. Transitional vs. non-transitional situations

Aktionsart has been defined on page 2 as an indication of the intrinsic temporal qualities of a situation. Situations designated by verbs have been divided into sets of opposite terms: punctual (e. g. disparar) vs. durative (e. g. oír), dynamic (e. g. saltar) vs. stative (e. g. hablar), telic (e. g. salir) vs. atelic (e. g. cantar), semelfactive (e. g. nacer)
vs. iterative (e. g. manosear), ingressive (e. g. anochecer) vs. terminative (e. g. besar).

This section will analyze the previous taxonomy in terms of "phasal constituency", defined by Bache as follows: "the phasal constituency of a situation concerns the organization of the phases making up the situation." According to Bache's description, situations can be divided into the following phases:

a) The beginning of a situation
b) The middle of a situation
c) The end of a situation
d) Sub-situations of another, more comprehensive situation

The previous phases play different roles depending on the situation. In ingressive situations, for example, the first phase is emphasized, while in telic and terminative situations the terminal phase is stressed. The middle of the situation plays a relevant role in durative and stative situations while iterative situations are composed of sub-situations.

Those situations in which the beginning (ingressive -->florece--) or the end (terminative -->firmar--, telic -->morir--) or both (punctual -->disparar--) are emphasized and that cannot have indefinite extension in time, will be called transitional. A verb like cerrar describes a telic situation because it is limited by the terminal phase. It indicates, therefore, a transitional situation. For instance, María cierra la puerta. There are different degrees in the action of closing a door but the possibilities are limited. Once the door reaches a given point the action cerrar will be concluded.

The second group that can be described in terms of phasal constituency will be called non-transitional. This term includes those situations which are not limited by a
starting point or a terminal one and that can be extended indefinitely in time. This group includes dynamic (e. g. nadar), durative (e. g. saber), stative (e. g. estudiar), atelic (e. g. cantar) and iterative situations (e. g. picotear).

An important feature that differentiates transitional from non-transitional situations is that while the former indicate a change into another state or action, the latter designate their lasting quality. Thus, despertar is transitional since it indicates the change from a state "asleep" to "awake"? For example, Luis desperta de la siesta. Dormir, on the other hand, is non-transitional, since it shows no change of state. For instance, Luis duerme la siesta.

Other studies have given this dichotomy different names: telic / atelic (Garey), cyclic / noncyclic (Bull), desinentes / permanentes (Bello). The terminology transitional / non-transitional is used by authors like Co Vet, Both Díez, Pollak, among others. It has been chosen because it stresses the idea of transition or non-transition of the verbal situations.

2.3. Aspekt / aktionsart interaction

The foregoing sections have studied aspekt (morphologic component) and aktionsart (semantic component) as two separate elements. Despite this fact, these two components interact influencing each other and constitute together with context one single term: aspect.

As stated above, aspekt deals with the dichotomy Perfectivity / Imperfectivity that has been focused on the distinction Preterit / Imperfect. By choosing the Preterit, the
speaker observes the situation from a point subsequent to the moment the action was performed. As we have indicated before, by choosing the Imperfect, on the other hand, the speaker considers the moment of the action and that of focusing the action as simultaneous.

As we mentioned before, **aktionsart** designates the nature of the action or event expressed by the verb: whether it is durative, telic, iterative, etc. The different kinds of **aktionsart** that verbs indicate can be classified into two main groups: transitional and non-transitional situations. The former refers to those situations that cannot be extended in time and that indicate a change into another state or action (e.g. **despertar**); the latter alludes to those situations that can be extended indefinitely in time and do not convey a change into a different state or action (e.g. **dormir**).

In this section, the morphological component of aspect --**aspekt**-- will be claimed to influence **aktionsart**

28. If, as a consequence from this influence, there is a change in **aktionsart**, aspect will be called **marked aspect**. If, on the other hand, there is no change in the **aktionsart** of a given verb, aspect will be called **unmarked aspect**.

Verbs conjugated in the Preterit tense tend to be associated with transitional situations. The reasons to support this claim are that transitional situations resemble the perfective **aspekt**: both have been described as having definite limits and not being capable of indefinite extension in time. For example:

1. El niño **golpeó** (=dio **un golpe**) con rabia.
2. El artista **saltó** sobre el elefante.
3. El tren **llegó** a la estación.
4. Las rosas del jardín florecieron.

5. La madre besó a su hijo.

6. El niño nació a las tres de la tarde.

   The situations of the preceding examples cannot be extended in time and are, therefore, transitional. For instance, they cannot answer the question

   *¿Durante cuánto tiempo golpeó el niño? -*El niño golpeó una hora.

   *¿Durante cuánto tiempo nació el niño? -*El niño nació dos días.

   The association Preterit + transitional situation gives an unmarked aspect as result. In other words, there is no change in the semantic component of aspect, aktionsart.

   When combined with the Imperfect, transitional situations shift aktionsart. The resulting aspect is, then, marked. For instance, the situation which golpear indicates is transitional since it cannot be extended in time. For instance: El niño golpeó la mesa. However, when conjugated in the Imperfect, the aktionsart of golpear changes to a non-transitional one, that is, one that can be extended indefinitely in time: El niño golpeaba la mesa todas las mañanas.

   The sentence Los niños nacieron con los ojos cerrados indicates a transitional situation, since it makes reference to a group of children who were born with their eyes closed. The situation ends, therefore, with the last child born with his eyes closed. When conjugated in the Imperfect, the situation which nacer indicates becomes non-transitional: Los niños nacían con los ojos cerrados. The Imperfect turns the situation into a non-transitional one, that is, one that can be extended indefinitely in time.

   Non-transitional situations, when implying a past event, normally use the Imperfect
because they have in common the fact that they are not limited and that they can be extended in time. For example, the non-transitional situation that oír indicates is usually combined with the Imperfect: *El portero no oíó nada.* In this sentence, the verb oíó continues to describe a situation that can be extended indefinitely and, therefore, non-transitional.

In the same sense, the sentence *Manuel manoseaba el libro* shows a non-transitional situation associated with the Imperfect. The use of the Imperfect does not provoke a change in the *aktsionsart* of manosear, which continues to be non-transitional. In other words, the situation the verb describes continues to be non-transitional and can be extended indefinitely in time.

When non-transitional situations are associated with the Preterit, they shift *aktsionsart* and the resulting aspect is, then, marked. The verb oír indicates a non-transitional situation. However, when it is combined with the Preterit, the situation it designates becomes transitional, that is, one which cannot be extended in time: *El portero no oyó nada.*

In the same sense, the sentence *El niño caminó a los 8 meses* stresses the beginning of the action caminar and is, for this reason, transitional. Aspect is, in these cases, marked because a change in *aktsionsart* has taken place.

At this point, we would like to mention that situations (either transitional or non-transitional) acquire a [+ habitual] feature when associated with the Imperfect. The situation depicts, this way, a state or action which takes place so often that it becomes a feature of the agent of the action or of the participant in the state. For instance:
María comía mucho

This sentence may imply María era glotona, le gustaba comer mucho. The situation that comer designates takes place so often that it becomes a characteristic of the agent María. Unlike the Imperfect, the Preterit --when combined with transitional or non-transitional situations-- does not indicate a [+ habitual] feature, but a [- habitual] one. The sentence

María comió mucho

indicates that the situation designated by comer is one that may have taken place just once: María apenas comía, pero durante la cena comió mucho

From the foregoing examples, it can be said that the aspekt / aktionsart interaction presents two kinds of aspect: unmarked and marked. Unmarked aspect presents the combination of similar constituents: the Preterit combines with transitional situations because they share the fact that they cannot be extended in time and indicate in different ways the beginning and / or the end of a situation. For instance, María subió al autobús. The situation which subir indicates cannot be prolonged after having reached a given point.

The Imperfect tends to combine with non-transitional situations to result in unmarked aspect. Both have in common the fact that they are not limited and that they can be extended in time. For instance, Luisa preparaba la comida.

The second kind of aspect resulting from the aspekt / aktionsart interaction is marked aspect. This is the result of a change in aktionsart. Thus, transitional situations --which result in unmarked aspect with the Preterit-- derive into non-transitional situations
when combined with the Imperfect. For instance, *María subió al autobús*. The situation
*subir* indicates here is non-transitional since, in this case, the situation can be extended
indefinitely (e. g. *María subió al autobús todas las tardes*).

On the other hand, non-transitional situations --which usually combine with the
Imperfect to form unmarked aspect-- shift to transitional situations by means of their
association with the Preterit. For example, *Luisa preparó la comida*. The situation
*preparar* describes in this example is one that cannot be extended indefinitely in time and
is, therefore, transitional. Once the meal is ready, the action cannot be continued.

*Aspekt* --based on the speaker’s choice between the Imperfect and the Preterit--
acts as a device modifying *aktionsart* --punctual vs. durative, dynamic vs. stative, telic vs.
atelic etc.--. The result is unmarked aspect if there is no modification in *aktionsart* (e. g.
*El cazador disparó contra la liebre* in which the transitional feature of the situation
indicated by *disparar* continues), while it is marked if *aktionsart* is altered (e. g. *El
cazador disparaba contra la liebre*. The situation designated by *disparar* changes to a
non-transitional one)

2.3.1. Marked and unmarked aspect

The distinction marked / unmarked aspect --derived from the dichotomy *aspekt* / *aktionsart*-- clarifies the use of the Preterit and the Imperfect when combined with the
same verbs. We will illustrate that the Imperfect tends to be associated with non-
transitional situations resulting in unmarked aspect, while its combination with transitional
ones will give marked aspect as a result.
At the same time, we will see that the Preterit tends to combine with transitional situations and that its union with non-transitional ones results in a change of aktionsart.

Consider the following examples:

(A) Las nubes cubrían la ciudad.  
Los ratones ocupaban la casa.  
La montaña ocultaba el sol.  
María sabía la verdad.  
Conoció a Unamuno en la Universidad.

(B) Las nubes cubrieron la ciudad.  
Los ratones ocuparon la casa.  
La montaña ocultó el sol.  
María supo la verdad.  
Conoció a Unamuno en la Universidad.

The preceding examples show a group of verbs which are non-transitional --more specifically, durative--. The situations which cubrir, ocupar, ocultar, conocer indicate, can be extended indefinitely in time and do not indicate a change into another state or action. This feature is maintained in (A), where the Imperfect is used to describe the lasting quality of these situations.

The Preterit in (B), on the other hand, renders the aktionsart of the verbs transitional --ingressive--. In these situations the stress falls on the beginning phase of the situation and not on its lasting quality. This claim is supported by the fact that the previous examples can be paraphrased by empezar a: Las nubes empezaron a cubrir la montaña, Los ratones empezaron a invadir la casa, etc.

Secondly, the following examples will illustrate that the transitional aktionsart of a verb may change by means of its association with the Imperfect. For instance,

(A) El soldado disparó con furia.  
La lluvia golpeó las ventanas.

(B) El soldado disparaba con furia.  
La lluvia golpeaba las ventanas.
Los truenos relampaguearon en el cielo. Los truenos relampagueaban en el cielo.

Ernesto tosió sangre. Ernesto tosía sangre.

These cases show two different kinds of situations. In (A), the situations the verbs designate cannot be extended in time and are, therefore, transitional --more exactly, punctual--. In (B), however, the use of the Imperfect provokes a change in aktionsart. The situations become, then, non-transitional --iterative-- and it is possible to prolong them in time.

The last group of examples to be studied will show that the Imperfect can be associated with transitional and non-transitional situations, the result being a non-transitional situation --habitual--. On the other hand, the Preterit renders the aktionsart transitional --non-habitual--.

(A) Alberto hablaba francés. (B) Alberto habló francés.

Luis robaba para comer. Luis robó para comer.

Miriam tocaba la flauta muy bien. Miriam tocó la flauta muy bien.

In (A), the Imperfect indicates an action which can be extended in time. It is habitual, that is, it takes place so often that it indicates a feature of the agent of the action or event (e. g. Luis robaba = Luis era ladrón; Miriam tocaba la flauta = Miriam era flautista). The examples with the Preterit show situations that do not depict such a habitual action or event (e. g. Luis robó /does not imply/ Luis era ladrón).

2.3.2. Verbs with two kinds of aktionsart

In his article, Lucchesi²⁹ describes verbs, such as recordar, querer, tener as having
a stative and a dynamic meaning. Stative meanings use the Imperfect, while dynamic ones use the Preterit. In this section, we will illustrate

a. that these two meanings correspond to different classes of *acción* / *transional* / *non-transional* situations)

b. that the dichotomy *aspekt* / *acción* --resulting in the distinction marked / unmarked aspect-- clarifies some cases of ambiguity.

**RECORDAR**: 1. 'to call back into the mind'. Transitional situation. Preterit

   2. 'to keep in the memory'. Non transitional situation. Imperfect

The first meaning denotes a transitional situation. It indicates a change from one state ('no recordar') to a different one ('recordar'). It is combined with the Preterit to form unmarked aspect:

   *Cuando lo vi, recordé lo que había ocurrido.*

The second meaning creates with the Imperfect a non-transitional situation which shows no indication of a change of state:

   *Felipe recordaba todos los nombres de sus compañeros de clase.*

The two possible meanings of *recordar* make a sentence like the following ambiguous:

   *María lo recuerda todo.*

The preceding case can have two possible interpretations:

1. Después de hablar con el médico, María lo recuerda todo. Transitional

2. Desde pequeña, María lo recuerda todo. Non-transitional

The use of the Preterit in the first sentence and the Imperfect in the second one
eliminates the ambiguity of the meanings:

1. Marfa lo recordó todo. Preterit. Unmarked aspect (transitional situation)
2. Marfa lo recordaba todo. Imperfect. Unmarked aspect (non-transitional situation)

A verb like tener may also have different meanings, which correspond to different classes of aktionsart:

TENER: 1. 'to possess'. Non-transitional situation. Imperfect
       2. 'to receive or obtain'. Transitional situation. Preterit
       3. 'to experience or enjoy'. Transitional situation. Preterit

1. Mi vecina tenía unos canarios en el patio. Unmarked --non-transitional-- aspect
2. Mi amiga tuvo un niño. Unmarked --transitional--aspect
   Tuve noticias de mi hermano. Unmarked --transitional-- aspect
3. Tuve grandes problemas económicos. Unmarked --transitional-- aspect
   3a. Tenía grandes problemas económicos. Marked --non-transitional-- aspect

A sentence like:

Tengo noticias de mi hermano.

is ambiguous because it may allow two interpretations:

1. He recibido noticias.
2. Poseo noticias. Las tengo de hace algún tiempo.

This ambiguity disappears in the past with the use of the Preterit in the first example and the Imperfect in the second one:

1. Tuve noticias de mi hermano.
2. Tenía noticias de mi hermano.
Querer is another verb which shows different kinds of situations:

QUERER: 1. 'to have a desire to or for' Non-transitional situation. Imperfect

2. 'to have a desire for something and to obtain it' Transitional situation. Preterit

1. Carlos quería el apartamento de su tío. Unmarked --non-transitional-- aspect

2. Carlos quiso el apartamento de su tío. Unmarked --transitional-- aspect

2.3.3. Remarks on aktsart / aspekt interaction

Iterative situations (those which take place more than once) are usually expressed through the Imperfect because they have in common the fact that they can be extended indefinitely in time. However, iterative situations may also appear with the Preterit, as the following cases show:

Antes de comer, el niño golpeó dos veces la mesa.

Antes de comer, el niño golpeaba dos veces la mesa.

Both examples describe an action golpear which is repeated twice. The difference between the two lies in the fact that the Imperfect adds a feature of [+habitual] that the sentence with the Preterit lacks.

It can be said, then, that iterative situations select the Preterit when they have the feature [- habitual], while they choose the Imperfect to convey a sentence with the feature [+ habitual]

The following cases will illustrate that the Imperfect may indicate iteration by
itself, while the Preterit may not:

Me lo explicaba y yo no lo entendía (He would explain it to me over and over and I would not understand it)

Me lo explicó y yo no lo entendí (He explained it to me and I did not understand it)

The Preterit, unlike the Imperfect, needs extra-verbal elements to convey this iterative character. Thus, the difference between

Me lo explicó

Me lo explicó dos veces

lies in the presence of the adverbial dos veces. The iterative aktionsart of the situation explicar in the second sentence is not due to the nature of the Preterit --for the same tense appears in both cases--. It is, rather, an extra-verbal element --dos veces-- which determines this iterative character. Thus:

Preterit + Adverbial = Iterative aktionsart.

The preceding examples illustrated that the Preterit is mostly associated with transitional situations resulting in unmarked aspect. The combination Preterit + explicar results in a semelfactive situation, that is, one that takes place only once. The use of the adverbial dos veces influences the aktionsart of the verb, turning the situation into an iterative one. Since there is a change of verbal aktionsart, the result will be called marked aspect:

Transitional situation (semelfactive) + Adverbial = Non-transitional (iterative) situation.

The preceding case shows that aktionsart may be modified not only by aspekt but also by extra-verbal elements such as adverbials. These belong to context, whose
importance in the theory of aspect will be studied in the next chapter.

A similar case occurs with ingressive *aktionsart*. It is usually expressed through the Preterit (e.g. El niño *caminó* a los 9 meses). Nevertheless, adverbials may shift this function to an Imperfect. Two sentences like

**A una señal del capitán**, los soldados *montaron* el campamento.

**A una señal del capitán**, los soldados *montaban* el campamento.

do not differ in the ingressive character that is usually involved with the use of the Preterit. The difference is that the former is [- habitual] while the latter is [+ habitual].

These examples reveal that ingressive situations choose the Imperfect when they present the feature [+ habitual], while the Preterit is selected if they do not contain the feature [+ habitual].

The ingressivity of the forms in the Imperfect is the result of a change in *aktionsart*, from a non-transitional to a transitional (ingressive) situation. Thus, Non-transitional situation + Adverbial = Transitional situation. Marked aspect

The previous cases illustrate that *aktionsart* may be modified, not only by means of verbal elements such as *aspekt*, but also through extra verbal components such as adverbials. Next chapter will show that subject, direct, indirect objects, adverbials and periphrastic verb forms may vary the *aktionsart* of a given verb, resulting, then, in marked aspect. In some cases, their influence does not imply a change in the verbal *aktionsart*. The result being, therefore, unmarked.
2.4. Final remarks and conclusion

This chapter has considered the importance of the distinction aspekt / aktionsart and its interaction in the analysis of Spanish verbal aspect.

Aspekt is the morphological component of aspect. Its description has been formulated in terms of the opposition Preterit / Imperfect. These terms are differentiated by means of flexional morphemes --Class II morphemes which indicate aspekt--.

The speaker uses the Preterit when s/he observes a given situation from a point which is subsequent to the moment the action was performed. Consequently, the action is seen as a whole entity with definite limits.

The speaker will use the Imperfect when s/he follows, in his/her mind, the development of the action.

Consequently, the choice between:

María comió la tarta.

María comió la tarta.

will be made depending on the speaker’s viewpoint.

The Imperfect and the Preterit also differ in that the Imperfect, unlike the Preterit, may serve as a basis for a different action or event (e. g. Llovía mientras vi a Esteban). The Imperfect may, therefore, indicate simultaneous actions. This is why it is suitable for descriptions (e. g. Mi prima tenía el pelo largo y vestía siempre pantalón corto). The Preterit, on the contrary, indicates succession of events or actions (e. g. Me levanté, hice la cama y me fui a clase).

In opposition to those studies which identify durativity with the use of the
Imperfect, this analysis has stressed the fact that the Imperfect may not always indicate durativity (e. g. Daba la una cuando Mario entró en la habitación). In the same sense, emphasis has been put on not identifying the use of the Preterit with the presence of an endpoint (e. g. Supe que te ibas esta mañana).

Aktionsart is the semantic component of aspect. It deals with the different kinds of situations the verbs designate. These can be divided into two main groups: transitional and non-transitional situations. Those that do not contain the idea of duration in themselves, and thus, cannot be extended indefinitely in time have been called transitional situations (e. g. punctual --disparar--, telic --salir--, ingressive --anochecer--, terminative --firmar--, semelfactive --morir--). They express in different ways the beginning and the end of the action designated by the verb. Those that can be extended indefinitely in time and have the idea of duration in themselves have been named non-transitional (e. g. durative --oír--, dynamic --correr--, stative --saber--, atelic --hablar--, iterative --mariposear--)

We have shown previously that the Preterit tends to be used with transitional situations to indicate the end of the transition. For example, despertar designates the end of the transition from asleep to awake (e. g. Marta se despierta a las 7 de la mañana). The Imperfect appears associated with non-transitional situations to convey their immanence in the same state. For instance, dormir, leer, beber (e. g. Marta duerme en el salón)

In the interaction aspekt / aktionsart, aspekt is a device which influences aktionsart, resulting in marked or unmarked aspect. Unmarked aspect describes an
**aktionsart** that has not changed by means of the influence of **aspekt**:

- Perfective + Transitional > Transitional
  - Unmarked aspect

- Imperfective + Non-transitional > Non-transitional

For instance,

El tren **llegó** a la estación

indicates a transitional situation --**llegar**-- which keeps its transitional value by means of its association with the Preterit. In the same sense,

Manuel **manoseaba** el libro

designates a non-transitional situation --**manosear**-- which keeps its non-transitional nature when combined with the Imperfect.

Marked aspect results from the combination between **aspekt** and **aktionsart** which results in a change of **aktionsart**. Thus:

- Perfective + Non-transitional > Transitional
  - Marked aspect

- Imperfective + Transitional > Non-transitional

For example,

Pablo **supo** la respuesta ayer

In this case, the non-transitional feature of the situation that **saber** indicates, changes to a transitional one, that is, one that cannot be extended in time. A sentence like

El cazador **disparaba** contra la liebre
gains non-transitional aktionsart by means of the association of a transitional situation and the Imperfect.

Finally, it has been pointed out that the distinction marked / unmarked aspect clarifies the use of verbs which describe both transitional and non-transitional situations.
Chapter II: Notes


2César Hernández Alonso, Gramática funcional del español (Madrid: Gredos, 1984) 368

3Ibid, 363

4Ibid, 260-1


6W. Pollak, "Un Modèle Explicatif de l'Opposition Aspectuelle: le 'Schéma d'Incidence'," Le Français Moderne 44 (1976)

7Yvon, Keniston qtd. in Klum, Verbe et Adverbe (Acta Universtitatis Upsaliensis, Stockholm: Almquist & Wiksell, 1961) 180, n.9)

8Klum, 180

9Safarewicz, 329


12J. Safarewicz, 329

13Ch. Rallides, 24-5

14Mario Vargas Llosa, La guerra del fin del mundo (Barcelona; Caracas; México: Seix Barral, 1981) 51

15W. Pollak, 293

16Mauricio Molho, Sistemática del verbo español: aspectos, modos, tiempos (Madrid: Gredos, 1975) 271
17. M. Vargas Llosa, 15

18. M. Vargas Llosa, 65


21. F. Lázaro Carreter, Diccionario de términos filológicos (Madrid: Gredos, 1953)


27. Francisco Marsá, Cuestiones de sintaxis española (Barcelona: Ariel, 1984) 150


29. Lucchesi, 199-201


31. Vikner, 90-1

32. Lucchesi, 195
Chapter III: Syntactic Approach

3.1. Aspekt / context interaction

As we saw in Chapter II, aspekt is a category expressed by means of flexional morphemes --class II morphemes which indicate aspekt--. We have mentioned that the term aspekt can be extended to all tenses of the Spanish verbal system. We have also indicated that this analysis will focus on the binary opposition Imperfect / Preterit to reach a more detailed description of the phenomenon of aspect in Spanish. The speaker’s viewpoint on the choice between the Preterit and the Imperfect has been revealed to play a major role. If the speaker’s mind follows the development of the action or event, the Imperfect will be used. If, on the contrary, the speaker’s mind observes the action or event as an entity within definite limits and does not participate in its development, the Preterit will be used.

In this section, other elements related to aspekt will be considered. They will help understand that the choice of the speaker is restricted by syntactic factors. Firstly, the relationship with the subject will be analyzed followed by the relationship with adverbials.

3.1.1. Animate / Inanimate subject

Lucchesi\(^1\) has observed that verbs composed of two meanings correspond to different classes of aktionsart: one of them is dynamic while the second one is stative. The former is combined with the Preterit tense, the latter with the Imperfect tense. Lucchesi makes a very interesting observation: these meanings are also differentiated by
syntactic factors. Thus, animate subjects select the Preterit while inanimate ones select the Imperfect tense. The following examples will illustrate this claim:

**ANIMATE SUBJECT / PRETERIT**

Los actores **representaron** una comedia.  
La comida **representaba** una crítica social.

El conferencianente **comunicó** la muerte del actor. El telegrama **comunicaba** la muerte del actor.

Luis **midió** el terreno.  
El terreno **medía** 100m².

Antonio **pesó** las manzanas.  
Las manzanas **pesaban** 3 Kg.

El presidente **subió** los impuestos.  
Los impuestos **subían** un 50%.

El gobierno **disminuyó** la inflación.  
La inflación **disminuía** un 5%.

María **respondió** a los insultos.  
La carta **respondía** a los insultos.

El Sr. Romero **constituyó** una sociedad.  
La sociedad **constituía** un compromiso del Sr. Romero.

El doctor **reflejó** preocupación.  
La carta **reflejaba** preocupación.

El rey **expresó** su agradecimiento.  
El telegrama del rey **expresaba** su agradecimiento.

La gata **murió** de parto.  
Las colinas **moran** a lo lejos.

El dueño **amenazó** con tirar la casa.  
El terremoto **amenazaba** con tirar la casa.

Esteban **me dijo** el desorden en el que vivía. La estancia **decía** a las claras el desorden en que vivía su dueño².

The previous examples show that some verbs present two kinds of *aktionsart*. When the situation they designate is non-transitional (stative), the tense used is the
Imperfect and the subject an inanimate one. When the situation is transitional (dynamic),
the selected tense is the Preterit and the subject an animate one.

Lucchesi’s analysis fails to mention, however, that the dynamic (transitional)
meaning of these verbs can also be conjugated with the Imperfect. For instance:

Los actores representaban una comedia.

María respondía a los insultos.

However, it is not possible to say:

*La comedia representó una crítica social.

*La carta respondió a los insultos.

From the foregoing examples we can draw the conclusion that animate subjects
may be followed by a verb in the Preterit or the Imperfect tense; inanimate subjects can
only be followed by the Imperfect. This statement, however, needs some clarification. The
following examples will show that all animate subjects cannot be combined with the
Preterit:

*El niño midió 1.20 m.

*Antonio pesó 50 Kg.

Despite their animate subjects, the preceding cases illustrate that their association
with the Preterit is not possible.

We should find a different reason to explain why the preceding examples --which
contain an animate subject-- cannot be combined with the Preterit.

We have previously mentioned that situations associated with the Preterit are
dynamic --transitional--. The definition of a dynamic situation was stated (pp. 2-3) as the
event, act, process or activity which depends on an input of energy. If a situation is to be dynamic, then, the subject of the action or event must be responsible for this input of energy. In other words, the subject must be the agent --instigator-- of the action or event that the verb expresses.

If we return to the examples at the beginning of this section, we realize that all the subjects combined with the Preterit play the role of agent: los actores representaron, el doctor reflejó, la gata murió, etc. This list could be extended to those cases in which the subject is inanimate, but still, the agent of the action or event:

La máquina midió la presión barométrica.

El ordenador reflejó las últimas estadísticas sobre el aborto.

All the subjects mentioned so far are agents of the verbs in the Preterit. That would explain why

*El niño midió 1,20 m.

*Antonio pesó 50 Kg.

are incorrect. Neither Antonio nor el niño are agents of the action medir or pesar. They are, on the contrary, passive receptors of the actions indicated by the verbs. This same fact is repeated through the examples at the beginning of this section combined with the Imperfect. They have the feature [-agent]. The stative meaning that the verbs express with the Imperfect differs from its dynamic counterpart in that it describes an attribute of the subject which is specified by the object. It does not need, unlike dynamic meaning, an input of energy on the part of the subject.

According to Klooster, the stative meaning of these verbs act as a link between
subject and object. His assumption is stressed by the fact that they can be paraphrased by the expression "to be + complement". For instance, medir: "ser de Xm de altura / de longitud"; pesar: "ser de XKg de peso"; representar: "ser una representación de algo".

If we return to the examples at the beginning of this section, we notice that the direct objects of all cases describe a characteristic of the subject of the sentence:

El terreno medía 100 m².

La carta reflejaba preocupación.

Los impuestos subían un 50%.

This section has illustrated the importance of the subject in the choice between the Preterit and the Imperfect. Having as a starting point the theory by Lucchesi that animate subjects select the Preterit tense and inanimate ones the Imperfect tense, some specifications have been made.

We have stated that it is subjects which contain the feature [+agent] that select the Preterit tense (e.g. María contestó a los insultos), while subjects having the feature [-agent] choose the Imperfect (e.g. La carta contestaba a los insultos). While [+agent] subjects are instigators of the action or event that the verbs indicate (e.g. María), [-agent] subjects are passive receptors, affected by the action of the verb (e.g. La carta).
3.1.2. Adverbials

3.1.2.1. Adverbials related to the perfective Aspekt (Preterit)

As it has been shown in Chapter II, the choice of the perfective aspekt depends on the speaker’s viewpoint. The Preterit is selected when the speaker observes a past action or event as a spectator. S/he conceives the action or event as an entity with a beginning, a middle and an end.

The studies by Martin and Klum, among others, reveal that certain adverbials are more likely to appear with the Preterit tense. These studies illustrate that the speaker’s choice is restricted by the appearance of certain adverbials.

Adverbials that tend to combine with the Preterit indicate the past period in which an action or event took place (e.g. the Preterit cannot be combined with adverbials like "mañana"). This feature is shared with the Imperfect since both belong to the past tense. Adverbials that appear frequently with the Preterit tense are presented below:

-ADVERBIALS WHICH INDICATE DEFINITE LIMITS: These adverbials stress the fact that the action the Preterit indicates took place within a context that the speaker views as closed:

Ayer un terremoto arrasó la costa oeste de EEUU.
Esta mañana hubo un robo a mano armada en la Caja de Ahorros de la calle Sierpes.
La medicina se fue afianzando en los siglos xv y xvi.
La situación fue mejorando a lo largo del día.
Don Juan Tenorio se representó con éxito desde 1985 a 1990 en el Teatro Lope de Vega.

La charla sobre el aborto duró de 5 a 8 de la tarde.

-ADVERBIALS WHICH LOCATE THE VERBAL ACTION OR EVENT IN A PROCESS ("primero", "después", "entonces"): These adverbials illustrate the fact that the Preterit appears more frequently to describe a succession of actions or events.

En primer lugar, hizo las maletas y se marchó de casa.

Luego, buscó algún lugar en el que quedarse.

Los enanitos lloraban la muerte de Blancanieves. Entonces, llegó el príncipe.

Julián estaba muerto de frío. En ese momento, llegó su padre con una taza de té caliente.

-DURATIONAL ADVERBIALS: These adverbials indicate the duration of an action or event. They stress, at the same time, the claim that duration is not always related to the Imperfect. The following examples will show that, by means of adverbials, the Preterit can be used to express duration.

Juan Manuel se levantó por un par de horas.

Lucía estuvo enferma con hepatitis durante dos meses.

En aquella situación vivimos tres semanas.
3.1.2.2 Adverbials related to the imperfective *aspekt* (Imperfect)

When the speaker selects the Imperfective *aspekt*, his / her mind follows the development of the action or event, which has no explicit beginning or end. As in the case of the Preterit, some adverbials tend to be associated with the Imperfect. These call attention to the fact that the temporal limits of the interval during which the action takes place are not limited:

- **ADVERBIALS WHICH INDICATE THE BEGINNING OF AN ACTION, BUT NOT ITS ENDPOINT**: These adverbials illustrate the fact that actions or events expressed by means of the Imperfect may continue into the Present:

  - **Hacia dos días** que no *comía*.
  - **Desde la muerte de su mujer** no *comía*.
  - **Desde hacia tres meses** no lo *veía*.
  - **Llevaba dos horas** sin beber alcohol.

- **ADVERBIALS WHICH INDICATE SIMULTANEOUS ACTIONS**:

  - **Estaba** todavía *leyendo* el periódico **cuando** llamaron a la puerta.
  - **Mientras** se *tomaba* el café, *observaba* a la gente que paseaba por la avenida.
  - **Justo cuando** *iba* a acostarme, sonó el teléfono.
  - **En el momento en que** todo *parecía* resuelto, apareció el inspector con una nueva pista.
ADVERBIALS CALLED "SPRING-BOARD PHRASES": These adverbials are used to introduce the reader/listener to the verbal action⁵. Their use is very frequent in literary texts:

Al día siguiente, llegaba el forastero a la estación.

A la semana siguiente, un amigo la llamaba para decirle que su hijo se encontraba bien.

Algunas horas más tarde, sonaba el teléfono.

Ese mismo día, ya se conocían los resultados de las elecciones.

Un mes después de su boda, don Hellmuth se suicidaba.

Algunos días después de la huelga, los obreros empezaban a organizarse.

Antes de medianoche, Marfa ya traía las rosas envueltas en papel transparente.

"AHORA" and "TODAVÍA": The use of the adverbials "ahora" and "todavía" with the Imperfect shows the similarities that can be established between the Present and the Imperfect.

Ahora la casa estaba más sola que nunca.

Ahora sabía lo que era estar enfermo.

Todavía existía el parque por el que nos paseábamos de niños.

Todavía recordaba los detalles del accidente.
3.2. *Aktionsart* / context interaction

Verbal *aktionsart* in Spanish has been described as an open system, with unlimited different kinds of situations. The categories, however, have been divided into two groups: transitional and non-transitional situations. The former mark the change into another state, the latter do not indicate such a change.

In its relationship with context, *aktionsart* may change. If a change in *aktionsart* takes place, the result will be called marked aspect. If, as a consequence of this interaction, *aktionsart* is not altered, aspect will be unmarked.

3.2.1. Specified / Unspecified Subject

In this section, the subject will be studied as an important component of the category of aspect and its relationship with *aktionsart* will be analyzed. As Verkuyl\(^6\) has pointed out, the feature +/- specified quantity of something is significant in determining the aspect of a given sentence. Let us consider how this feature may change a given *aktionsart*.

Change from SEMELFACTIVE to ITERATIVE *aktionsart*:

A verb like *expolar* of semelfactive *aktionsart* (one that takes place only once) can shift to an iterative *aktionsart* (one that takes place more than once) because of the subject. Consider the following examples:

1. *Expolaron varias bombas* cerca de mi casa.
2. *Exploó una bomba* cerca de mi casa.

The difference between 1. and 2. lies in the fact that 1. describes an unspecified
quantity of bombs, while 2. designates a specified quantity of them. Because of this
difference, sentence 2. describes a semelfactive *aktionsart* (transitional), while in sentence
1. the *aktionsart* is iterative (non-transitional). One fact that stresses this statement is that
2. cannot be extended indefinitely in time while 1. can:

1. *Explosion varias bombas cerca de mi casa durante todo el día.*

2. *Exploot una bomba cerca de mi casa durante todo el día.*

   In the same sense, 1. accepts the progressive form, while 2. does not:

1. Estuvieron explotando varias bombas cerca de mi casa.

2. *Estuvo explotando una bomba cerca de mi casa.*

   The previous examples show that the presence of the feature +/- specified subject
is determinant for the aspect of a given sentence.

Change from TELIC to ATELIC *aktionsart*:

   The subject may also influence the telicity (whether the situation has built into a
terminal point or not) of a given sentence. Let us consider the following cases:

1. Un hombre salió de la tienda.

2. Un hombre rubio salió de la tienda.

3. Estos dos hombres salieron de la tienda.

   The preceding examples consist of a specified subject linked to a telic *aktionsart.*

In all cases, verbal actions have achieved a terminal point: after reaching a certain step,
the terminal point of *salir* is attained. Therefore, durational adverbials are not used with
these cases:

1. *El hombre salió de la tienda durante tres días.*
2. *El hombre rubio salió de la tienda durante tres días.


   Since the verb salir denotes in these cases a telic aktionsart, a durational adverbial (durante tres días) is not possible. In opposition to this fact, unspecified subjects shift verbal aktionsart to an atelic one and durational adverbials are accepted:

   1. Algunos hombres salieron de la tienda durante tres días.

   2. Muchos hombres salieron de la tienda durante tres días.

   3. Varios hombres rubios salieron de la tienda durante tres días.

   The unspecified nature of the subjects in the preceding sentences shift aktionsart from a telic situation (transitional) to an atelic one (non-transitional).

   A similar case can be observed in the following sentences:

   Cristóbal Colón descubrió América.

   *Cristóbal Colón descubrió América en distintas expediciones.

   The specified nature of the subject marks the inaccuracy of the second sentence.

   Once Colón discovered America, the action descubrir reached its end. The verb descubrir shows a telic aktionsart (transitional) which cannot be prolonged. This sentence stands in opposition to:

   Los pueblos amerindios descubrieron América.

   Los pueblos amerindios descubrieron América en distintas expediciones.

   The unspecified feature of the subject makes possible the repetition of the same action, extending the duration of the situation performed by the verb.

   It can be said, then, that
1. Unspecified subject + transitional *aktionsart* > non-transitional *aktionsart*

2. Specified subject + transitional *aktionsart* > transitional *aktionsart*
   
   1. results in marked aspect, 2. in unmarked one.

3.2.2. Direct Object

The direct object of a given sentence is described in generative terms as the NP (noun phrase) directly dominated by VP (VP (verb phrase) belongs to a higher node in the tree diagram) and ruled by V (V (verb) and O (object) come from a common higher node VP)\(^7\). In brief:

```
S
  /   
/    
NP  VP
  /  
V   O
```

Concerning the classification of direct objects, Alcina Blecua\(^8\) distinguishes between two groups:

1. Direct objects which exist before the action of the verb is performed. These NPs combine with verbs such as the following: *ver, oler, tener, poseer*, etc.

2. Direct objects whose existence is a consequence of the action performed by the verb: *construir, fabricar, hacer*, etc.

Examples will show that this division does not depend on the nature of the direct objects but on the different features of the verbs with which they are used. For instance,

a. El arquitecto *vio una casa.*
b. El arquitecto construyó una casa.

Although both sentences have a similar syntactic pattern SVO, and subject and direct object are common to both of them, their behavior is different. Thus,

El arquitecto veía una casa = implies = El arquitecto vio una casa.

However,

El arquitecto construyó una casa / does not imply / El arquitecto construyó una casa. (He may have been interrupted and have never finished the construction)

The difference between the two sentences should be focused, then, on the verb. Sentence a. designates a situation that can be stopped at any time or maintained for a long time. The verbal action of Sentence b., on the other hand, cannot be stopped or maintained indefinitely. If the action is stopped or prolonged, the action is not achieved.

Sentence a. is composed of a non-transitional verb, while the verb in b. is transitional. Besides, Ver is a non-transitional verb which implies no change before and after it is performed. The action ver una casa does not imply a beginning or an end and, therefore, can be extended indefinitely in time.

Construir, on the other hand, indicates a transitional situation since it shows that the action has a beginning and an end (la casa). The action construir una casa, unlike ver una casa, will not be accomplished till the house has been completely built.

The +/- transitional nature of verbs is, therefore, responsible for the classification of direct objects.
3.2.2.1. Transitive versus Intransitive Verbs

Originally, a transitive verb was the component of a transitive sentence; that is, the verb which could transfer from an active to a passive construction. Later, the term "transitive" indicated those verbs which transferred to the object the action performed by the subject. According to this definition, an intransitive verb could not transfer the action performed by the subject to the object.

More recent studies tend to prove the opposite. The distinction between transitive and intransitive verbs does not exist as such. Two main reasons confirm this assumption:

The first one is that many verbs could be classified as either transitive or intransitive since they sometimes are used with a direct object and sometimes not. That is the case of verbs like comer, beber, correr, saltar. For instance

¿Qué hizo Marfa? Marfa comió.

¿Qué hizo Marfa? Marfa comió un trozo de pastel.

¿Nadó Luis ayer? -No, Luis corrió.

¿Nadó Luis ayer? -No, Luis corrió dos kilómetros.

The second argument to reject the distinction between transitive and intransitive verbs is based on the fact that many intransitive verbs can be replaced by a verb + direct object:

Gritar: 'dar un grito'.

Pasear: 'dar un paseo'.

Saltar: 'dar un salto'.

Premiar: 'dar un premio'.

Besar: 'dar un beso'.

Therefore, it would be more appropriate to distinguish between transitive and intransitive structures instead of verbs. Transitive structures consist of a verb which needs a noun (direct object) to restrict or to complete its meaning. Verbs belonging to this group have a general meaning which the direct object helps to restrict. For instance: hacer, dar, tener (e. g. Ana hace los deberes para mañana)

The meaning of some other verbs is completed by means of the direct object: comer, cenar, beber (e. g. El policía bebe un refresco)

Intransitive structures, on the other hand, consist of a single verb. Usually, its meaning does not require a direct object: nacer, crecer, venir, caer (e. g. La portera vino a las tres)

3.2.2.2. Noun Phrase as direct object

As stated in the last section, the direct object belongs to a transitive structure and its function is to restrict or to complete the meaning of the verb it accompanies. In this section, the important role that direct objects may play in relation to Aktionsart will be analyzed:

Change from TELIC to ATELIC aktionsart:

Consider the following examples:

Eduardo fumó un cigarrillo.

Eduardo fumó varios cigarrillos.

Again, the feature +/- specified quantity of something is shown to be important
in the preceding examples. The telic **aktionsart** of the first sentence has in the cigarette (un cigarrillo) its terminal point, while in **varios cigarrillos** there is not such a point due to its unspecified nature.

That being so, it is possible to say with an atelic construction:

Eduardo **fumó varios cigarrillos** sin parar durante todo el día.

But the same sentence is not possible with a telic situation:

*Eduardo **fumó un cigarrillo** sin parar durante todo el día.

Change from NON-HABITUAL to HABITUAL **aktionsart**:  
The unspecified nature of the direct object may also contribute to the habitual character of a sentence, as the following examples show:

Eduardo **fumaba un cigarrillo**.

Eduardo **fumaba cigarrillos**.

The second sentence acquires habitual **aktionsart** by way of the unspecified quantity of cigarettes that Eduardo used to smoke. Thus, the VP **fumaba cigarrillos** describes an attribute of the subject **Eduardo**:

Eduardo **era fumador. Fumaba cigarrillos**.

However, this cannot be applied to the first sentence:

*Eduardo **era fumador. Fumaba un cigarrillo**.

Change from ITERATIVE to SEMELFACTIVE **aktionsart**:

The direct object may be also responsible for the iterative **aktionsart** of a sentence like:

Marta **acertó muchas adivinanzas**.
This sentence conveys an iterative *aktionsart* since the guessing of the riddles was repeated several times. In contrast:

**Marta acertó la adivinanza.**

The specified nature of the object does not allow an iterative reading but a semelfactive one.

Change from DURATIVE to PUNCTUAL *aktionsart*:

Intransitive structures that allow a transitive paraphrasis, such as *gritar* = 'dar un grito', *saltar* = ('dar un salto') show different *aktionsart* depending on the use of the transitive or intransitive pattern:

David *pasea* con frecuencia.

David *da* paseos con frecuencia.

While the first sentence stresses the duration of the action *pasear*, the second one is punctual due to the object adjacent to it.

A similar case of durative shifting to a punctual *aktionsart* can be appreciated in the following sentences:

*S*Juan *escribió su primera novela* a las 12.

Juan *escribió su nombre* a las 12.

The reason why the first sentence cannot be combined with a punctual adverbial like "a las 12" is due to the fact that the direct object, *su primera novela*, unlike *su nombre* in the second sentence, does not convey a punctual action but rather a durational process.
3.2.3. Indirect Object

The indirect object is described as a Prepositional Phrase (PP) which has as nucleus the preposition a. It is directly dominated by VP and ruled by a transitive dative verb.

\[
\text{S} \rightarrow \text{NP} \rightarrow \text{VP} \rightarrow \text{V} \rightarrow \text{PP} \rightarrow \text{P} \rightarrow \text{NP}
\]

The role the indirect object performs regarding aktionsart is shown in the following examples. As in the cases of the subject and direct object, the feature +/- specified quantity of something becomes relevant:

Change from SEMELACTIVE to ITERATIVE aktionsart:

María le \textbf{dio a Alberto} el folleto.

María les \textbf{dio a los asistentes} el folleto.

In the first sentence, the verb \textit{dar} designates a semelfactive situation, that is, one that takes place just once, as indicated by the specified indirect object \textit{a Alberto}. This being so, the action of \textit{dar} cannot be extended in time:

*María le \textbf{dio a Alberto} el folleto durante dos horas.

The second sentence, however, gains iterative aktionsart (one that takes place more than once) by means of the unspecified indirect object \textit{a los asistentes}. Being iterative, this situation can be extended in time, as the following example shows:

María les \textbf{dio a los asistentes} el folleto durante dos horas.
3.2.4. Adverbials

Adverbials may vary the *aktionsart* of a given verb, as the following examples show:

**INGRESSIVE *aktionsart***:

Adverbials may denote the beginning of the state, event or action expressed by the verb:

*Al son de la música*, los pájaros *cantaron*.

*De repente*, los músicos *sacaban* sus instrumentos y *ensayaban*. (=Empezaban a sacar sus instrumentos y se ponían a tocar)

As the preceding examples show, adverbials are the cause of the ingressive value of the verbs *cantar*, *sacar* and *ensayar*. The second sentence could be also appear with the Preterit:

*De repente*, los músicos *sacaron* sus instrumentos y *ensayaron*.

The choice between Preterit and Imperfect is not based, in this case, in the association of the former with ingressive situations. The difference between the two cases is the habitual *aktionsart* which is given to the example with the Imperfect. The sentence with the Preterit lacks this habitual meaning.

**TELIC *aktionsart***:

Adverbials may also designate the terminal point of a situation:

*María caminó por el parque*.

*María caminó hasta la escuela*.

The adverbial *hasta la escuela* is the terminal limit of the action *caminar* and,
therefore, turns it into a telic situation. This characteristic does not appear in the first sentence.

ITERATIVE aktsionsart:\n
Adverbials may indicate that the event, process or action indicated by the verb takes place more than once:

- Linda te llamó varias veces anoche.
- Todos los días venía a las cinco a visitarnos.
- Todos los días se fumaba un paquete de cigarrillos.
- A diario, llegaban noticias del Anticristo.\n
HABITUAL aktsionsart:

Adverbials may denote that the state or action expressed by the verb takes place so often that it becomes a feature of the agent of the action or of the participant in the state:

- Cada mañana, se levantaba con el ruido de las campanas.
- Tres veces por semana, iba a misa.
- Siempre llevaba la misma chaqueta.

These sentences can be also combined with the Preterit:

- Cada mañana, se levantó con el ruido de las campanas.
3.2.5. Periphrastic verb forms

Another syntactic means of modifying the aktionsart of a given verb is through periphrastic verb forms. These are defined by Roca Pons as "unión de un verbo auxiliar -más o menos gramaticalizado-- con una forma nominal de un verbo conceptual"17 Periphrastic verb forms may shift a given aktionsart as the following examples will show:

INGRESSIVE aktionsart:

El público empezó a aplaudir.

El niño rompió a llorar.

Entonces, se puso a llover.

DURATIVE aktionsart:

Estuvo lluyendo durante toda la mañana.

Andrés andaba buscando trabajo.

Estuvo haciendo planes para el fin de semana.

El charlatán siguió contando su historia.

Llevaba tres horas rezando, con las manos abiertas invocando al cielo.

Esteban se quedó pensando en las palabras del mendigo.

ITERATIVE aktionsart:

La madre de Joaquín volvió a contársela misma historia.

TERMINATIVE aktionsart:

Dejé de mirarlo y me dirigí al café Gijón.

Acabé por ir a la casa de Manuel.

HABITUAL aktionsart:
Luis solía venir a casa después de comer.

Acostumbraba a salir por las tardes a dar un paseo y charlar con los amigos.

3.3. Final remarks and conclusion

Context is the syntactic component of aspect. It comprises the relationships that the verb establishes with other parts of the sentence, e.g. subject, direct and indirect objects, adverbials and periphrastic verb forms.

This chapter has considered the last two interactions which form the category of aspect: aspekt / context interaction and aktionsart / context interaction.

Regarding aspekt / context interaction, the subject has been shown to be relevant. If the subject is [+agent], the choice will be the Preterit. If, on the contrary, the subject is [-agent], the Imperfect will be used.

Adverbials have illustrated the important role they play in the choice between the Preterit and the Imperfect. If adverbials indicate the limits within which a given situation takes place, the Preterit will be used. If these do not have such an indication, the Imperfect will be selected.

Regarding aktionsart / context interaction, subject, direct and indirect objects, adverbials and periphrastic verb forms have been shown to play a major role. These act as a device modifying aktionsart. If aktionsart is altered, the result will be marked aspect. If there is no change in aktionsart, aspect will be unmarked.

In the first place, the subject may shift the aktionsart of a given verb depending on its specified / non-specified nature.
In the second place, we have indicated that direct and indirect objects may change verbal aktionsart according to the same feature + / - specified nature.

In the third place, adverbials have been analyzed as means of influencing aktionsart determining its telic, habitual, or iterative nature.

Finally, periphrastic verb forms have been shown to vary the aktionsart of a given sentence.
Chapter III: Notes


2Kenniston, Spanish Syntax List (New York: np, 1948) 183

3Klooster qtd. in H. J. Verkuyl, On the Compositional Nature of the Aspects, (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1972) 112


5Granville-Hatcher qtd in Klum, 191

6Verkuyl, 100-4

7F. D’Introno et al., Fundamentos de lingüística hispánica (Madrid: Playor, 1988)

8Alcina y Blecuá, Gramática española (Barcelona: Ariel, 1979) 864-867

9F. Lázaro Carreter, Diccionario de términos filológicos (Madrid: Gredos, 1953)

10E. Alarcos Llorach, "Sobre la estructura del verbo español," Estudios de gramática funcional del español (Madrid: Gredos, 1972) 113-4


13Verkuyl, 105

14C. Smith, 7


16Vargas Llosa, La guerra del fin del mundo (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1981) 94
Roca Pons, *Estudios sobre perífrasis verbales del español* (Madrid: Sucesores de Rivadeneyra, 1958) 10
Conclusions

This analysis has reached the following conclusions:

1. Aspect is a category consisting of three interrelated elements: aspekt, aktionsart and context.

2. In contrast to previous studies, the term aspect has been studied as the result of a triple interaction:
   a. Aspekt / aktionsart interaction
   b. Aspekt / context interaction
   c. Aktionsart / context interaction

3. Aspekt / aktionsart interaction has been studied as the basis to describe verbal aspect.

   Examples have illustrated that non-transitional situations tend to be conjugated in the Imperfect tense, while transitional situations select the Preterit tense. The reasons for this relationship have been found in the similarities that relate non-transitional situations to the Imperfect, namely the lack of limits and the fact that both can be extended in time.

   Transitional situations and the Preterit have in common the presence of limits and the fact that they cannot be extended in time. The result, in these cases, is unmarked aspect since aktionsart is not altered.

   When transitional situations combine with the Imperfect and non-transitional ones with the Preterit, there is a change of aktionsart. The result is marked aspect.

3. Aspekt / context interaction has illustrated that the subject and adverbials restrict the use of the Preterit and the Imperfect. Subjects with the feature [+agent] tend to appear with the Preterit, while [−agent] subjects are combined with the Imperfect.
Regarding adverbials, the Preterit is frequently associated with those which indicate the limits of the period during which the action extends. The Imperfect appears with adverbials that convey the indefinite limits of the action performed by the verb.

4. **Aktionssart** / context interaction has given the basis for the definition of aspect when the verb appears in context. The result is unmarked aspect if **aktionssart** does not change. If **aktionssart** is altered, the result is marked.

The feature +/- specified quantity of something has shown its relevance in determining the aspect of a given sentence. This feature has been analyzed in subject, direct and indirect objects.

Adverbials and periphrastic verb forms have also been studied as means to vary the **aktionssart** of a given sentence.
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