

Perfective, and Telicity in Brazilian Portuguese

It is commonly assumed in the literature that perfectiveness entails the achievement of the *telos* (Smith 1997, among others). However this may be language dependent, as suggested by Singh's (1991) and Arunachalam & Kothari's (2011) analysis of Hindi: in Hindi the perfective is neutral and the achievement of the *telos* is morphologically conveyed. In this paper we focus on the semantics of the perfective morpheme in Brazilian Portuguese (BrP), a language that morphologically distinguishes perfective and imperfective.

In the first section, we present several arguments that show that (1) does not entail (2), but it rather implies it:

- (1) João construiu a sua casa.
João build-PERF.3SG the his house.
- (2) A casa do João está pronta.
The house of João is ready/finished/completed.

Contrary to the predictions in the literature, perfective accomplishment predicates combine with 'por X tempo' (for X time) adverbs in BrP, resulting in an interpretation in which the *telos* of the event is not reached:

- (3) João construiu a sua casa por dois anos.
João build-PERF.3SGt the his house for two years.

The data about perfective accomplishments were empirically confirmed by two experiments: Basso (2007, 2008) and Pires de Oliveira *et al.* (manuscript).

The second section is devoted to a comparison between perfective and imperfective forms, exemplified in (3) and (4), respectively:

- (4) # João estava construindo a sua casa por dois anos.¹
João be-IMPF.3SG build-GER the his house for two years.

Basso and Pires de Oliveira (2011) claim that the perfective is neutral with respect to the achievement of the *telos*, whereas the imperfective entails that the *telos* was not achieved. However, this is not correct, since (4) is compatible with a situation in which the house is completed. Out of the blue, (4) is not felicitous as indicated by #, since imperfective asks for an anchor. (4) conveys that the building was going on for two years, and implies that the house is not ready yet. Sentence (3), on the other hand, needs no anchoring, and it conveys that the building event is no longer the case, though the house is not finished. The contrast is stronger with "when" clauses, which interrupt the event that is going on, (5); a reading that is not available for the perfective, in (6):

- (5) João estava construindo a sua casa, quando a Maria morreu.
João be-IMPF.3SG build-GER the his house, when the Maria died.
- (6) João construiu a sua casa, quando a Maria morreu.
João build-PERF.3SG the his house, when the Maria died.

(7) conveys that the event is ongoing, and implies that the house is not finished yet:

- (7) # João estava construindo a sua casa.
João be-IMPF.3SG build-GER the his house

Finally, in contrast with (3), sentence (1) conveys that the building event is no longer the case, and implies that the house is finished. Thus, the perfective and the imperfective differ with respect to the presupposition of an anchor, and with respect to implicatures: the perfective implies that the *telos* was achieved, unless it is combined with a 'por X tempo' (for X time) phrase, whereas the imperfective always implies that the *telos* was not achieved.

¹ In BrP there is also the morphological imperfective 'construía', but it is more formal than the periphrasis, and it is specialized for generic interpretation, whereas the periphrasis express progressiveness.

The third section is devoted to the semantics and pragmatics of these morphemes. We argue that the imperfective morpheme presupposes a time interval (*i*), which is the time of the anchoring event. The event introduced by the main verb (*e*) includes the time interval, in a first approximation: $[[\text{imp}]] \lambda i \lambda e: \exists i . i \subset e$ (where *i* indicates a time interval). Thus, the main event is conceived as ongoing, and may extend over the speech time. The perfective introduces a closed time interval which, normally, antecedes the speech time; thus it does not extend beyond the end boundary of the time interval: $[[\text{perf}]] = \lambda i \lambda i^* \lambda e: i < i^* \wedge e \subset i$

Moreover, the perfective is about the actual world, whereas the imperfective opens world alternatives since the event is ongoing. This explains why only the imperfective combines with ‘*ainda*’ (yet):

(8) João **ainda* constru-*iu* / *ainda* está construindo a sua casa.
 João yet build-PERF.3SG / yet be.PRS build-GER the his house

Only the imperfective opens a world alternative where the house is built. The perfective conveys that the building event is no longer the case and opens no world alternative. Thus, it implies that the event is over, though it is compatible with a situation where the house is not complete. The implicature of completeness triggered by the perfective can be derived, as we will show, by exploring prototypicality, based on Levinson (2000): telic predicates carry a natural end point, the perfective introduces a close time interval, thus their combination implies the coincidence between the two end points.

The world alternative conveyed by the imperfective allows its use when the event of building the house is in its very preliminary phases. In this situation a perfective sentence is false. Thus, although there is no need for a complete house in order for (1) to be true, it is the case that the building cannot be in the preliminary phases.

In the conclusion, we explore the relation with *for* and *in* adverbials in order to explain why sentence (3) conveys that the house is not finished. *In* adverbials are incompatible with the imperfective (unless an iterative reading is attributed to the sentence), because, according to Basso (2007), they presuppose an end point, whereas *for* phrases introduce an end point. The excess of end points in (3) (i.e., the *telos* and the one introduced by the *for* phrase) indicates that there is no coincidence between the end point of the telic predicate and the end point of the perfective predicate.

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