

## The preterit and the imperfect as grounding predications\*

*Aintzane Doiz-Bienzobas*

Primarily, the contrast between the two past tenses in Spanish, i.e. the *pretérito indefinido* (henceforth, preterit) and the *pretérito imperfecto* (henceforth, imperfect), has been studied in the literature under three perspectives: temporal, aspectual, and discourse-oriented.<sup>1</sup> This paper takes a different perspective and characterizes the preterit and imperfect as grounding predications, as a result of which parameters other than aspectual, temporal, or discourse-oriented will be proposed as essential for the characterization of the two forms.

Grounding predications have the following three properties (Langacker 1991, this volume). (i) They are highly grammaticized elements which constitute the final step in forming a finite clause. (ii) They profile the grounded entity rather than the grounding relationship which provides their conceptual content. (iii) Their conceptual import relates the process they designate to the ground (i.e. the speaker and her circumstances).

The focus of this paper is to specify and articulate the way in which the conceptual import of the preterit and the imperfect relates a state of affairs to the ground. In order to do so, I work within Langacker's theory of grounding, whereby I refer to two idealized cognitive models, the timeline model and that of the structured world (Langacker 1991: 242). In addition, I analyze the role of the two predications as discourse tracking devices within the framework of Mental Spaces (Fauconnier [1985] 1994).

From an empirical point of view, the analysis I present here accounts for a wide range of data, which includes the following: (i) a number of semantic contrasts between the preterit (PRET) and the imperfect (IMPF) which have not been generally discussed in the literature (examples 1–3); (ii) the use of the imperfect for the description of nonpast situations, such as future scheduled situations (4); (iii)

the use of the imperfect for the expression of irrealis, e.g. wishes, preludic, dreams (5); and (iv) the choice of the imperfect for the expression of past habituals and generics and of the preterit for repetitives and nongenerics (6).

- (1) *Todas las mujeres cogieron un tren que*  
all the women took a train which

*salió/salía temprano.*

**left-PRET/IMPF** early.

- a. PRET: 'All the women took a train which left early.' (the same train: wide scope)  
b. IMPF: 'All the women took a train which left early.' (the same/different train: wide, narrow scope)

- (2) *El coche me costó/costaba dos millones.*  
the car me **cost-PRET/IMPF** two millions

- a. PRET: 'The car cost me two million.' → (I bought it)  
b. IMPF: 'The car cost me two million.' → (maybe I bought it, maybe I didn't)

- (3) *Oí que alguien entró/entraba.*

heard that someone **entered-PRET/IMPF**

- a. PRET: 'I heard someone entered.'  
b. IMPF: 'I heard someone enter/entering.'

- (4) *Al año siguiente había fiestas, pero al final*  
to year following **were-IMPF** festivities but at the end

*se cancelaron.*

Reflx canceled-PRET

'The following year there were some festivities, but eventually they got canceled.'

- (5) *Soñé que ganaba/\*gané el premio Nobel de*  
dreamt that **won-IMPF/\*PRET** the prize Nobel of

*literatura.*

literature

‘I dreamt that I won the Nobel Prize for literature.’

- (6) *El año pasado iba/fui a nadar todos los*  
the year last **went-IMPF/PRET** to swim all the

*días.*

days

a. IMPF: ‘I used to go swimming every day last year.’ (habitual)

b. PRET: ‘I went swimming every day last year.’ (nonhabitual repetitive)

The need to provide an accurate characterization of the preterit-imperfect contrast is further motivated by the realization that some of the uses of the Spanish imperfect that I consider in this paper are also shared by imperfective forms in other languages. A case at hand is provided by De Mulder and Veters (this volume), who analyze the nonpast uses of the French *imparfait* (e.g. its occurrences in indirect speech), its modal uses (e.g. the politeness form, the preludic form, the expression of wishes and desires), and its occurrence in expressing imaginary events (e.g. conditional sentences with *si* ‘if’).<sup>2</sup>

From a theoretical point of view, I intend to generalize over all the uses of the imperfect by providing a comprehensive analysis. At a more specific level, I intend to explore the role of epistemic notions in the characterization of the preterit and the imperfect and to determine their role as discourse builders.

The core of the analysis is presented in the first three sections of the paper. Section 1 deals with the notion of *distance* within Langacker’s (1991) timeline model. Section 2 centers around the notion of *structure of the world* within the model proposed by Langacker (1991, 1999). Section 3 introduces the cognitive function of the two forms as discourse tracking devices within the framework of Mental

Spaces (Fauconnier 1994). Finally, some concluding remarks are provided in section 4, where the parameters and notions introduced in the previous sections are brought together.

### 1. Distance: Past situation vs. past viewpoint

Past tense forms (*-ed* forms) indicate a “distance with reference to the time-line model, where non-immediacy is translated into past time exclusively” (Langacker 1991: 249).<sup>3</sup> Drawing on the notion of distance proposed by Langacker, I introduce the following two parameters for the characterization of the two past forms in Spanish: distance of the *situation* with respect to the ground, and distance of the *conceptualizer* to the ground. In particular, I will be arguing that:

- (i) the preterit indicates distance of the situation with respect to the (surrogate) ground;
- (ii) the imperfect evokes the presence of a distant conceptualizer apprehending the situation with respect to the ground.

#### 1.1. Distance of the situation to the (surrogate) ground

The preterit designates a distal situation; its role is to indicate that the situation occurred in the past. In direct speech, in particular, the preterit designates situations which must be past or distant with respect to the ground, as shown by the ungrammaticality of the preterit in combination with the adverbs for ‘now’ and ‘tomorrow’ in (7).

- (7) *Juan estuvo aquí la semana pasada, \*ahora, \*mañana.*  
 Juan **was-RET** here the week last, \*now, \*tomorrow  
 ‘Juan was here last week, \*now, \*tomorrow.’

In indirect speech, the preterit designates a situation removed from the surrogate ground, i.e. the time designated by the speech verb in the main clause, as illustrated by the grammaticality judgments of

(8), (9), and (10). Thus, the ungrammaticality of (8) is due to the occurrence of the situation designated by the preterit at a time posterior to the *SG*, as represented in Figure 1 (*SG* stands for “surrogate ground”, *G* for “ground”, *sit* for “situation” and *t* for “time axis”).

- (8) \**Hace dos días dijo que ayer estuvo en casa.*  
 ago two days said that yesterday **was-PRET** in home  
 ‘Two days ago he said that yesterday he was home.’

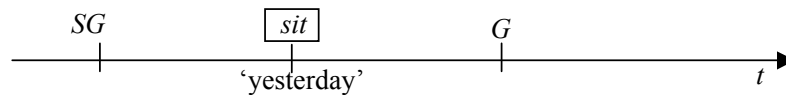


Figure 1. Sentence (8)

By contrast, in (9) and (10) the situations designated by the preterit are prior to the *SG*, and consequently, the sentences are grammatical.

- (9) *Juan nos dirá el lunes que no estuvo aquí hace*  
 Juan us tell the Monday that not **was-PRET** here ago

*dos días.*

two days

‘Juan will tell us on Monday that he was not here two days ago.’

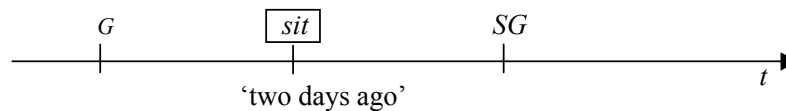


Figure 2. Sentence (9)

- (10) *Juan nos dirá mañana que hoy no estuvo aquí.*  
 Juan us tell tomorrow that today not **was-PRET** here  
 ‘Juan will tell us tomorrow that he was not here today.’

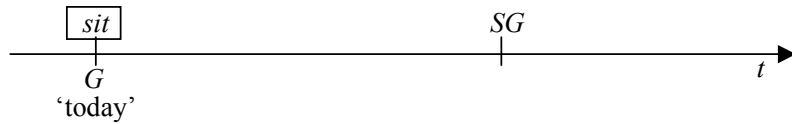


Figure 3. Sentence (10)

In the light of data such as (8–10), it can be concluded that the function of the preterit is to designate the distance of the situation to the ground or surrogate ground. Stated in more traditional terms, the preterit is a past tense marker; it indicates that the event it designates is located in the past with respect to a reference point.

Unlike the preterit, and counter to standard analyses of the imperfect, I propose that the imperfect is not a past time marker. That is, sentences occurring with the imperfect need not be removed from the ground or the surrogate ground in direct and indirect speech, respectively. In fact, situations designated by the imperfect may be prior to, simultaneous with, or posterior to the (surrogate) ground, as illustrated by the grammaticality judgments of sentences (11) through (13).<sup>4</sup>

- (11) *Ayer me dijo que el otro día/en ese momento estaba ocupada.*  
 yesterday me told that the other day/in that moment **was-IMPF** busy  
 ‘Yesterday she told me that the other day/at that moment she was busy.’
- (12) *Ayer me dijo que hoy estaba ocupada.*  
 yesterday me told that today **was-IMPF** busy  
 ‘Yesterday she told me that today she was busy.’
- (13) *Ayer me dijo que mañana estaba ocupada.*  
 yesterday me told that tomorrow **was-IMPF** busy  
 ‘Yesterday she told me that tomorrow she was busy.’

While the situations with the imperfect may have different temporal relationships with respect to the ground or surrogate ground, as illustrated by examples (11) through (13), situations with the imperfect convey some notion of pastness or conceptual distance that has led to the traditional characterization of the imperfect as a past tense marker. I will argue that the sense of pastness associated with (past and nonpast) events designated by the imperfect results from the presence of the second parameter characterizing the imperfect/preterit contrast, namely, distance of the viewpoint or conceptualizer apprehending the situation with respect to the ground. I consider this parameter next.

1.2. *Distance of the conceptualizer or viewpoint with respect to the ground*

The differences in the degree of distance or proximity between the ground and the viewpoint (i.e. the conceptualizer apprehending the situation) are responsible for the viewing arrangements which characterize the preterit and the imperfect. The following two characterizations will be argued for.

- (i) Situations with the preterit are apprehended by a viewpoint which is *proximal* to the ground. That is to say, the preterit imposes a *present* viewpoint onto the situation it designates.<sup>5</sup>

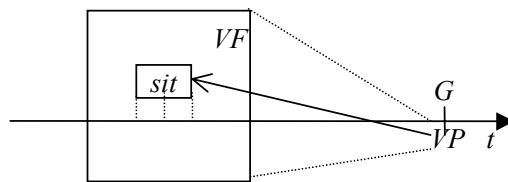


Figure 4. The preterit and proximal viewpoint

- (ii) Situations with the imperfect are conceptualized by a viewpoint which is *distal* or removed with respect to the ground. That is,

the imperfect imposes a *past* viewpoint onto the situation it designates. Generally, the past viewpoint is located *at* the situation time or at a time *prior to* situation time, as represented in Figure 5.<sup>6</sup>

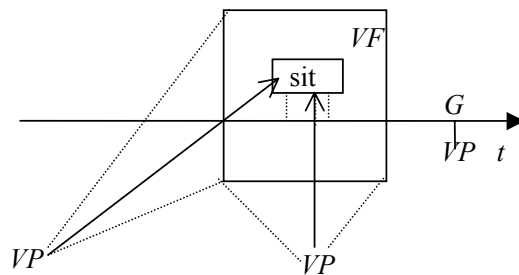


Figure 5. The imperfect and distal viewpoint

The role played by the tense-aspect categories in the conceptualization of situations has been dealt with in the literature previously, specifically in the study of narratives, where the role of tense-aspect categories has been considered to be distinct from their role in oral discourse situations. Thus, according to Fleischman (1990, 1991), in narratives tense-aspect categories are freed from their referential (aspectual) functions (i.e. to present the situation as bounded or unbounded) and take on pragmatic/expressive values. One of their expressive functions is to determine the nature of the situation's focalization (i.e. the way a situation is perceived): the speaker portrays herself or a character either as a *consciousness*, an experiencing self in the development of the situation (internal focalization), or as a *narrator* detached from the events represented (external focalization). The sentences in (14) illustrate the difference between the two types of focalization in French (the examples are from Banfield 1982: 157).

- (14) a. *Elle vit la lune.*  
 she **saw-passé simple** the moon  
 b. *Elle voyait la lune maintenant.*  
 she **saw-imparfait** the moon now



In (14a), where the *passé simple* (similar to the Spanish preterit) is used, the speaker is detached from the situation and reports its occurrence from an external point of view. There is an external “narrating self”. In (14b), the use of the *imparfait* (similar to the Spanish imperfect) implies that the event of looking at the moon “has been experienced at some moment, and reports it by representing an experience of it” (Fleischman 1991: 301). There is an “experiencing self” which apprehends the situation from the past time in which it occurred, as reflected by the use of the adverb ‘now’ to refer to a past time.<sup>7</sup>

In this paper, I propose that the expression of a viewpoint is not just a pragmatic function of the preterit and the imperfect which surfaces in certain contexts only. Rather, I will be arguing that the expression of viewpoint as characterized in Figures 4 and 5 is one of the defining properties of the imperfect-preterit contrast. Evidence for the proposed viewing arrangements comes from the study of the interaction of the two forms with the temporal adverbial expression *al x siguiente* ‘the following x’ (e.g. ‘the following year’, ‘the following month’, etc.) and with the proximal deictic ‘this’.

#### 1.2.1. *Al x siguiente* ‘the following x’

The adverbial expression *al x siguiente* ‘the following x’ may occur in combination with the preterit or with the imperfect (15). However, the reading of the sentence is very different with one or the other tense: when the preterit is used, the sentence designates a past situation (15a); when the imperfect is used, it designates an anticipated scheduled situation (15b).

- (15) *Al año siguiente hubo/había fiestas.*  
to year following were-PRET/IMPF festivities  
a. PRET: ‘The following year there were festivities.’ → they took place  
b. IMPF: ‘The following year there were festivities.’ → maybe they took place, maybe they did not

The reading of the sentence with the preterit in (15a) is accounted for by the analysis of the preterit in terms of viewpoint, which states that the preterit provides a present viewpoint at the ground from where the situation is necessarily conceptualized as past. Figure 6 represents this reading of (15a).

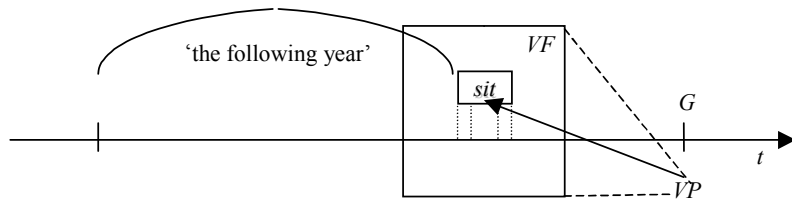


Figure 6. Sentence (15a)

The specific viewing arrangement imposed by the preterit accounts for the unacceptability of example (16), where the sentence ‘but due to the rain they were canceled’ is added.

- (16) \**Al año siguiente hubo fiestas, pero debido*  
to year following were-**PRET** festivities but due  
*a la lluvia cancelaron.*  
to the rain REFLX canceled  
\*‘The following year some festivities took place, but due to the  
rain they were canceled.’

On the one hand, the clause ‘some festivities took place’ states that the festivities have taken place in the past as evidenced by the speaker’s description of the situation from the ground. On the other hand, the second half of the sentence, ‘due to the rain they were canceled’, states that the festivities did not take place, contradicting the state of affairs depicted in the first part of the sentence. The presence of contradictory information accounts for the unacceptability of the sentence.

When the imperfect is used, the viewing arrangement associated with it states that the situation is apprehended through a past viewpoint prior to the situation time. This viewing arrangement accounts for the possibility of adding ‘but due to the rain they were canceled’ in (15), as illustrated in (17).

- (17) *Al año siguiente había fiestas, pero debido a la lluvia se cancelaron.*  
 to year following were-IMPF festivities but due to the rain REFLX canceled  
 ‘The following year some festivities were going to take place, but due to the rain they were canceled.’

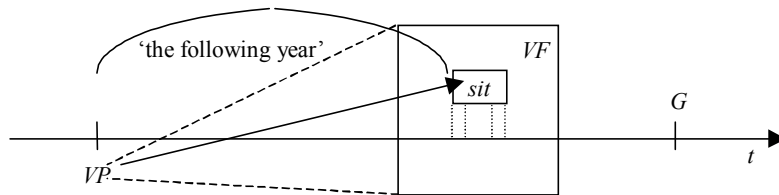


Figure 7. Sentence (17)

The apprehension of the situation by the viewpoint from a time prior to its occurrence prevents the speaker from portraying the situation as past. Consequently, the situation is construed as an anticipation, as reflected in the interpretation of the sentence in (17).<sup>8</sup>

### 1.2.2. The proximal demonstrative *este* ‘this’

Deictic expressions, such as the demonstratives ‘this’ and ‘that’, “hinge on the position of the speaker rather than the subject” (Givón 1984: 121) with respect to some entity. Accordingly, the demonstrative in (18) below can only be interpreted as referring to the window

which is close to the speaker but not to Sarah (example taken from Langacker 1991: 256).

(18) *Sarah said that **this** window is stuck.*

When the proximal deictic ‘this’ occurs in sentences with past tense verbs as in (19), Janssen (this volume: 180) proposes that the sentences are characterized by a sense of empathy between the speaker and the situation.

(19) *“They must go by the carrier,” she thought; “and how funny it’ll seem, sending presents to one’s own feet! And how odd the directions will look! ...”*  
*Just at this moment her head struck against the roof of the hall....*

Crucially for our purposes, sentences containing the proximal demonstrative ‘this’ may occur with the imperfect but not with the preterit (20).

(20) *(Este era el día de mi boda.) ¡Este día*  
 this was the day of my wedding this day  
  
*\*fue/era el día más feliz de mi vida!*  
 was-**\*PRET/IMPF** the day more happy of my life  
 ‘(This was the day of my wedding.) This day was the happiest day of my life!’

As stated by the analysis proposed here, the preterit provides a viewpoint which apprehends the past situation from the ground. That is to say, the viewpoint is distant from the past situation, as reflected in the sense of a detachment between the occurrence of the situation and its description by the speaker. This sense of detachment characterizing the construal of the situation designated by the preterit clashes with the sense of empathy between the speaker and the situation created by the use of ‘this’ and results in the incompatibility of the preterit

and ‘this’. By contrast, our analysis states that the imperfect provides a past viewpoint from where situations are apprehended. That is to say, in (20) the speaker or conceptualizer is an experiencing self reliving her wedding day as it occurred at the time: she tells the reader about her wedding day and the description of her feelings as they crossed her mind at the time in the past. The sense of closeness between the viewpoint and the situation evoked by the imperfect is highly compatible with the empathy provided by the occurrence of ‘this’ in sentences with past tense verbs, thereby accounting for the acceptability of ‘this’ with the imperfect.

*1.3. The preterit and the imperfect as distance markers of a different kind: Past situation vs. past viewpoint*

The following statements summarize the main ideas presented in section 1. The preterit is a past tense marker; its role is to locate the situation it designates in the past. In addition, its viewpoint construes the situation from the ground, creating a sense of detachment between the speaker and the situation. By contrast, the role of the imperfect is to provide a past viewpoint from where the situation it designates is construed, and no specific temporal relationship between the situation and the ground is stated. This characterization accounts for the use of the imperfect in past and nonpast situations in sentences (11) through (13), repeated here under (21), and for the sense of pastness associated with them. Thus, in (21) the description of the situation through a viewpoint from the surrogate ground in the past confers a sense of pastness upon the situation.

(21) *Me dijo que ayer/ hoy/ mañana estaba*  
me told that yesterday/ today/ tomorrow **was-IMPF**

*ocupada.*

busy

‘She told me that yesterday/today/tomorrow she was busy.’



gacker 1991: 251). These are anchored to the timeline and, accordingly, may express a past situation or a situation with future potentiality. On the other hand, the structural plane comprises event instances which characterize how the world is made but which do not have any existence outside of the structural plane. These event instances are arbitrary and, as Langacker (1999: 251; emphasis omitted) proposes, are ““conjured up” just for some local purpose, with no status outside the mental space ... thus created”. Arbitrary instances may be found in numerous linguistic phenomena, as in the sentence in (23) provided by Langacker.

(23) *Zelda wants to buy a fur coat.*

On the nonspecific reading of (23), there is no particular coat that Zelda wants to buy: it is an arbitrary instance which is created with the only purpose of referring to Zelda’s desire. Outside of the mental space of her desire, it has no existence. Along the same lines, events in the structural plane are “arbitrary instances conjured up just for purposes of characterizing the world’s structure” (Langacker 1999: 251). Crucially, these arbitrary instances are not anchored to any particular point in time.

In this section, I will be arguing that:

- (i) the role of the preterit is to include the situation it designates in the actual plane. That is, situations taking a preterit are actual and located at a specific moment in the past;
- (ii) the role of the imperfect is to state that the situation it designates is interpreted in the structural plane. That is, sentences with the imperfect designate a state of affairs which does not have a direct link to the timeline and which portrays the way things work/are in the world.

The occurrence of correspondences similar to those between the Spanish preterit and the notion of an actual plane, and between the Spanish imperfect and a structural plane, can be observed cross-

linguistically. A case at hand is provided by the study of the two types of future use of the nonpast tenses in Polish by Kočańska (this volume). In particular, Kočańska argues that while the nonpast perfective profiles a future actual event, the nonpast imperfective profiles a future event as a virtual document in the structural plane.

Language-internal evidence in support of the correspondences between the imperfect/perfective tenses and the two planes distinguished above comes from the consideration of three kinds of data in Spanish: (i) the expression of past habituals and generics; (ii) the grammaticality judgments of low-transitive sentences; (iii) the consideration of certain implicatures associated with the choice of the imperfect and the preterit.

### 2.1. *The expression of past habituals and past generics*<sup>11</sup>

In Spanish, the imperfect is used for the expression of past habitual situations (24a), the preterit for nonhabitual repetitives (24b).

- (24) *El año pasado iba/fui a nadar todos los*  
 the year last **went-IMPF/PRET** to swim all the

*días.*

days

a. IMPF: 'I used to go swimming every day last year.' (habitual)

b. PRET: 'I went swimming every day last year.' (non-habitual repetitive)

In addition, the imperfect may be used to express generic statements (25a), i.e. statements in which a property is valid for all the members of the class the subject belongs to (Langacker 1999: 254), or statements which do not refer to a specific situation (Kuroda 1992).<sup>12</sup> When the preterit is used, a specific reading is more likely to occur, whereby reference is made to a specific event at a point in time (25b).



- (25) *Los barberos sacaban/sacaron muelas.*  
 the barbers **took out-IMPF/PRET** teeth  
 a. IMPF: ‘Barbers took out teeth.’ (generic reading)  
 b. PRET: ‘The barbers took out teeth.’ (specific, nongeneric reading)

The correspondences between the imperfect and habituality/genericity on the one hand, and those between the preterit and nonhabituality/nongenericity on the other, follow from an analysis of these notions within the model of the structured world provided by Langacker (1991, 1999) and from the characterization of the preterit and the imperfect within this model, as I will show next.

Nonhabitual repetitives such as *John read his book every day last week* are part of the actual plane. Their structure is given in Figure 8 (the figure is provided in Langacker 1999: 252).

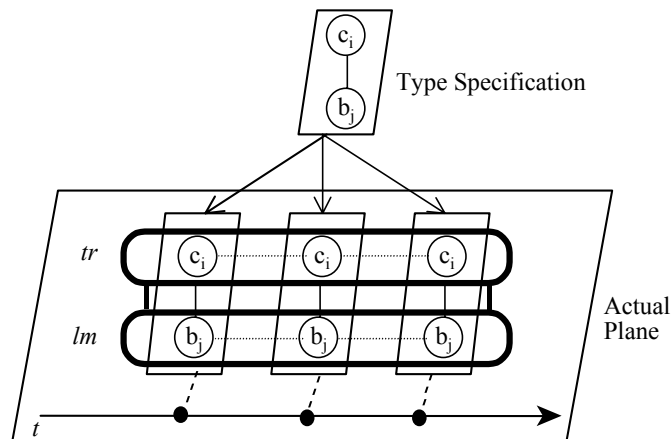


Figure 8. Repetitive

As schematized in Figure 8, a repetitive profiles a higher-order event which is represented by the lines in boldface surrounding and linking all trajectories (*tr*), *John*, and landmarks (*lm*), *his book*. The higher-order event comprises multiple-event instances of the same event type (e.g. ‘John read his book’), and connects the higher-order trajec-

tory, comprising the trajectors of all the component event instances, to the higher-order landmark comprising the landmarks of all the component event instances. The dotted correspondence lines linking the trajectors and the landmarks indicate that the subjects (*John*) and the objects (*his book*) are the same throughout. Finally, the event instances of ‘*John reading his book*’ are conceived of as being actual, and hence each one of these event instances is anchored to particular points in time, as indicated in Figure 8.

By contrast, habituais and generics “designate an imperfective process defined by its stable role as part of the scripts of how the world is expected to work” (Langacker 1991: 266), and are therefore part of the structural plane. In particular, a habitual profiles a higher-order event in the structural plane. The higher-order event is made up of component events of the same type in which the particular individuals (landmarks and trajectors) are the same, as indicated by the dotted lines linking all the trajectors and all the landmarks. Since the relationship of habituality is situated at the structural level, the component events are arbitrary and are not anchored to any particular point in time. Figure 9 contains the structure associated with habituais (e.g. *John reads his book everyday*).

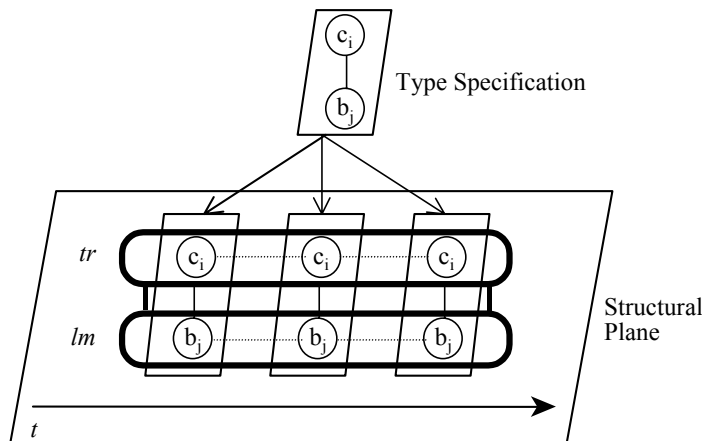


Figure 9. Habitual

Finally, a plural generic statement summarizes over arbitrary instances of potential trajectors and landmarks in the structural plane: for any entity which belongs to the class denoted by the trajector, the situation designated by the sentence follows. A sentence such as *Cats stalk birds* (Langacker 1999: 251) is a generic statement, and Figure 10 sketches its structure. It should be noted that the absence of a dotted correspondence line uniting all the trajectors (*cats*) and all the landmarks (*birds*) of the event type ‘cat stalk bird’ indicates that different instances of cats and birds are involved. Like in the case of habituais, the event instances are not anchored to points in time.

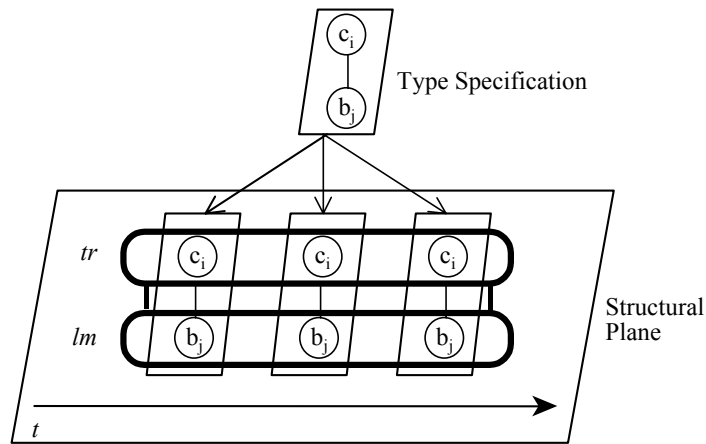


Figure 10. Plural generic

Based on the characterizations of habituais and generics, readings of habituality and genericity in sentences with the imperfect (24a, 25a) indicate that the role of the imperfect is to designate a situation within the structural plane.<sup>13</sup> Along the same line of reasoning, it may be concluded that the role of the preterit is to designate a past situation within the actual plane, since clauses with the preterit designate repetitives (24b) and nongeneric sentences (25b), that is, situations which are part of the actual plane.

2.2. *Low-transitivity sentences: Nonagentive subjects and nonaffected objects*

Hopper and Thompson (1980: 251) argue that “transitivity is traditionally understood as a global property of an entire clause such that an activity is “carried over” or “transferred” from an agent to a patient”. Building upon this characterization, one of their objectives is to isolate the component parts of the *transitivity* notion, “each of which suggests a scale according to which clauses can be ranked” (Hopper and Thompson 1980: 251). Two of the multiple component parts of the notion of transitivity identified by Hopper and Thompson are the agency of the subject and the affectedness of the object.

In Spanish, low-transitivity sentences with nonagentive subjects are compatible with the imperfect but not with the preterit (26, 27).

- (26) *La carta \*dijo/decía hola.*  
 the letter **said**-\*PRET/IMPF hello  
 a. PRET: \*‘The letter uttered the word “hello”.’ (actual occurrence reading)  
 b. IMPF: ‘The letter said hello.’ (property reading)
- (27) *El vestido \*llevó/llevaba perlas.*  
 the dress **took**-\*PRET/IMPF pearls  
 a. PRET: \*‘The dress carried pearls.’ (actual occurrence reading)  
 b. IMPF: ‘The dress had pearls sewn into it.’ (property reading)

When the preterit is used, the *actual occurrence* reading surfaces, designating actual events which have taken place at a specific point in time. Thus, in (26a) there is an instance of the event of saying hello (the letter said “hello”), and in (27a) there is an instance of the event of carrying pearls at some point in the past (the dress carried some pearls). Obviously, these situations are pragmatically unlikely, as reflected by the asterisk mark next to the examples. By contrast, when the imperfect is used the *property* reading surfaces; that is, the

sentences designate a property ascribed to the subjects. Under this reading there is no activity involved in the events described and the subjects do not take on an agentive role: in (26b) the letter had the property of saying hello (I read it), in (27b) the dress had the property of having pearls sewn into it (I saw it or I was told about it).

The correlations between the property reading and the imperfect, and between the actual occurrence reading and the preterit, are reflections of the two different conceptions of the world imposed by the imperfect and the preterit, as stated within the analysis proposed here. On the one hand, the property reading associated with the imperfect describes the way the world or an entity in the world is in the structural plane. It describes a state of affairs which is not stated of a specific point in time, e.g. it is not the case that the letter said hello yesterday but not today (26a). On the other hand, the actual occurrence reading associated with the preterit portrays an event which is anchored to a specific past point in the actual plane. Under this construal, the subject takes an agentive role and it is held responsible for the occurrence of the situation, as evidenced by the unacceptability of (26b) and (27b).

Additional evidence for the characterizations of the preterit and the imperfect along the terms proposed here comes from the consideration of low-transitivity sentences of a different kind, namely, those with nonaffected objects. These sentences are characterized by the absence of a direct object in sentences which contain a transitive verb (28), or by the nonspecificity of the instance designated by the direct object (29). Like low-transitivity sentences with nonagentive subjects, sentences with nonaffected objects tend to occur with the imperfect. Consider the sentences in (28) and (29).

- (28) *Juan oía/\*oyó, María no.*  
Juan **heard-IMPF/\*PRET** María not  
a. IMPF: ‘Juan was capable of hearing, María was not.’  
b. PRET: \*‘Juan heard, María did not.’

- (29) *Juan escribía/escribió una novela en dos días.*  
 Juan **wrote-IMPF/PRETa** novel in two days  
 a. IMPF: ‘Juan was able to write a novel in two days.’  
 b. PRET: ‘Juan wrote a novel in two days.’

When the preterit is used in (28b), the sentence designates an actual occurrence of the event of hearing located at some point in the past. That is, the speaker portrays a situation in which the subject, *Juan*, carried out a conscious act of perception, e.g. Juan heard something at some point in the past. It is an actual event in the actual plane. However, since there is no object of perception, the sentence is unacceptable.<sup>14</sup> By contrast, when the imperfect is used (28a), the sentence does not describe an activity; it describes a property of the subject which is not located at a specific point in time. In the present case, the sentence states that Juan had the property of hearing, i.e. of being capable of hearing, a state of affairs which does not require the explicit presence of an object of perception. The situation describes the way things are in the structural plane.

Similarly, when the imperfect is used in (29a), reference is not made to one specific novel or to a specific ‘novel-writing’ event. In fact, it could be the case that Juan had never written a novel in his life, but we may be hypothesizing that he would have been able to write it in two days if he had wanted to. Thus, the property reading which is associated with the way things are in the structural plane surfaces.<sup>15</sup> By contrast, when the preterit is used (29b), the sentence designates an actual occurrence of the event anchored to a point in time: the speaker states that Juan actually wrote a novel in two days. The actual occurrence reading which belongs in the actual plane surfaces in this case.

As a summary of the previous discussion it may be stated that a low degree of transitivity correlates with the nonactualization of the situation designated by the sentences and hence, with the property reading within the structural plane. From a formal point of view, this reading is associated with the choice of the imperfect, as accounted for by the analysis proposed here. By contrast, the occurrence of the

preterit with low-transitivity sentences results in the actual occurrence reading as stated by our analysis.

2.3. *Presence and absence of implicatures with the preterit and the imperfect*

The two different conceptions of the world imposed by the imperfect and the preterit (reflected in the property reading and the actual occurrence reading, respectively) are directly responsible for the presence or the absence of implicatures of a certain kind. Consider the sentences in (30) and (31).

- (30) *El coche me costó/costaba dos millones.*  
the car me **cost-PRET/IMPF** two millions  
a. PRET: ‘The car cost me two million.’ → (I bought it)  
b. IMPF: ‘The car cost me two million.’ → (maybe I bought it, maybe I did not)
- (31) *La película fue/era interesante.*  
the movie **was-PRET/IMPF** interesting  
a. PRET: ‘The movie was interesting.’ → (I saw the movie)  
b. IMPF: ‘The movie was interesting.’ → (maybe I saw it, maybe not)

When the preterit is used, the sentences designate situations which are anchored to a specific point in time in the actual plane, giving rise to the implicatures ‘I bought the car’ in (30a) and ‘I saw the movie’ in (31a). When the imperfect is used, the property reading surfaces and the situations are interpreted within the structural plane where no connection to the timeline is established. Thus, in (30b) the speaker states that the car had the property of being worth a certain amount of money. This property is not stated of a specific point in time, and consequently the interpretation that the speaker has bought the car does not surface. Similarly, in (31b) the speaker states that the movie has the property of being interesting, and since the property is not

associated with a specific point in time, the implicature ‘I saw it’ does not appear.

#### *2.4. The structure of the world and viewing arrangement*

Based on the claims made in sections 1 and 2, the following characterizations of the preterit and the imperfect are proposed. On the one hand, the imperfect is used to describe the way things are in the world, as reflected in the property reading characterizing sentences with the imperfect. The properties ascribed to the subjects of sentences with the imperfect are apprehended through a past viewpoint which is responsible for the sense of pastness associated with the designated situations. Thus, the sentence *The letter said hello* designates the property of the letter ‘saying hello’ as apprehended by the speaker at a past time, for example, at the time in the past in which she read the letter. On the other hand, the preterit is used to talk about actual occurrences that happened in the world in the past, as perceived through a viewpoint which is distant from the situation.

### **3. Discourse tracking devices: Space accessibility**

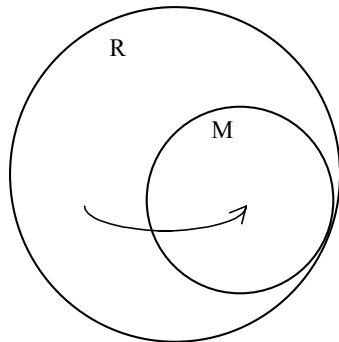
Language involves the construction of mental spaces, relations between them, and relations between elements within them (Fauconnier 1994: 2). Mental spaces are separate domains of referential structure which contain partial state descriptions conveyed by the discourse (Fauconnier 1994: xi–xxxvi) and are built up in accordance with instructions provided by linguistic expressions. The default space in the organization of the information provided in a discourse is the speaker’s reality space, R: “the speaker’s mental representation of reality” (Fauconnier 1994: 15), which does not necessarily coincide with the real world. Additional spaces are created by space builders as the discourse progresses (e.g. prepositional phrases such as *in the movies*, which create a movie space; adverbs such as *probably* and *possibly*, which create a probability space; and subject-verb combina-



tions such as *Max believes* \_\_\_\_\_, which create a belief space; Fauconnier 1994: 17).

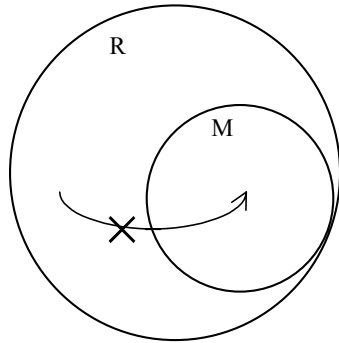
Discourses may be characterized by the presence of several spaces such as the default space, R, and spaces different from R (e.g. a belief space, a probability space, an irrealis space, and so on), such that the linguistic elements in them may be interpreted in one or another space. Following Doiz-Bienzobas (1995) and Doiz-Bienzobas and Mejías-Bikandi (2000), I propose that the role of the preterit and the imperfect is to provide instructions which determine the identity of the space where the situations they designate are to be interpreted. In particular, the following two characterizations are argued for.

- (i) The role of the imperfect is to render accessible a space M different from the speaker's reality space R for the interpretation of the situation it designates (Figure 11).



*Figure 11.* The imperfect

- (ii) The role of the preterit is to state that the situation it designates is interpreted in the matrix clause, the speaker's reality space R. A space different from R is not accessible for the interpretation of the situation designated by the preterit (Figure 12).



*Figure 12.* The preterit

The properties of space accessibility associated with the preterit and the imperfect, represented in Figures 11 and 12, are closely related to the viewing arrangements of the two forms. On the one hand, when a situation is perceived through a viewpoint proximal to the ground (e.g. the speaker's here-and-now), as with the preterit, the situation is more likely to be interpreted within the space in which the speaker is, the speaker's reality space. On the other hand, the construal of a situation from a distal viewpoint, as in the case of the imperfect, facilitates access into a space different from the speaker's reality space for the interpretation of the situation designated. That is to say, when a situation is construed from a vantage point distant from the speaker's here-and-now, the situation may be interpreted as part of a space other than the speaker's reality space.

Evidence for the characterizations of the imperfect and the preterit in terms of space accessibility as stated here comes from the consideration of four groups of linguistic phenomena: subject identification, determination of quantifier scope, the expression of irrealis, and the interpretation of sentences with perception verbs.

3.1. Subject identification

The choice of the imperfect or the preterit may determine the identity of the subject in sentences lacking an overt one. Thus, even though the second sentences in examples (32a) and (32b) do not have an overt subject, the identity of the subject of the event of smiling is clear to the hearer: María with the imperfect (32a), Juan with the preterit (32b).<sup>16</sup>

- (32) a. *Juan vio a María. Sonreía.*  
 Juan saw-PRET to María **smiled-IMPF**  
 ‘Juan saw María. She was smiling.’
- b. *Juan vio a María. Sonrió.*  
 Juan saw-PRET to María **smiled-PRET**  
 ‘Juan saw María. He smiled.’

Under a Mental Space representation, the sentence in (32) cues the construction of two spaces, the speaker’s reality space and the embedded perception space created by the subject-verb combination ‘Juan saw \_\_\_\_’. Accordingly, ‘Juan saw María’ is introduced into the base or the speaker’s reality space, and the object of perception, *María*, into the perception space, as represented in Figure 13.<sup>17</sup>

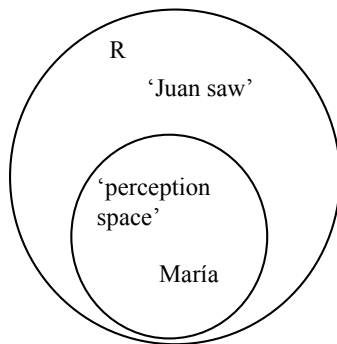
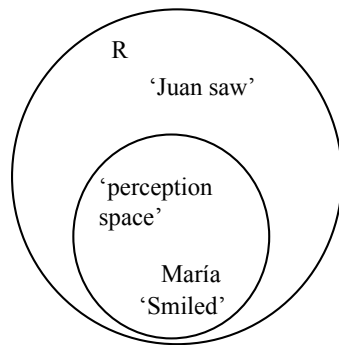


Figure 13. ‘Juan saw María.’

The spatial configuration in Figure 13 is characterized by the presence of two spaces, both of which are accessible for the interpretation of the discourse.

The analysis proposed here states that the role of the preterit and the imperfect is to determine the space relevant for the interpretation of the sentence in configurations like the one provided in Figure 13. In particular, the imperfect allows access into a space different from R for the interpretation of the clause it modifies. Accordingly, the event of smiling designated by the imperfect in (32a) is interpreted in the perception space. Figure 14 represents this configuration, which automatically accounts for the interpretation of (32a), namely, Juan saw María and he saw her smiling.



*Figure 14.* Sentence (32a) and the imperfect

By contrast, the preterit does not allow access into a space different from R for the interpretation of the situation it designates. Thus, the event of smiling is interpreted in the speaker's reality space R, as represented in Figure 15. Like in the previous case, the representation of (32b) provided in Figure 15 reflects the reading associated with the sentence, namely, Juan saw María and he smiled.

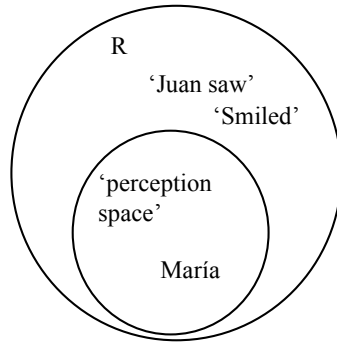


Figure 15. Sentence (32b) and the preterit

### 3.2. The determination of quantifier scope

The sentences in (33) and (34) illustrate the interaction between the imperfect and the preterit, and the determination of the scope of the quantifier. On the one hand, when the preterit is used (33), the wide scope reading surfaces. That is, the universal quantifier is within the scope of the existential quantifier, as reflected in the logical representation of the sentence. On the other hand, when the imperfect is used (34), the narrow scope reading is also given, whereby the existential quantifier is within the scope of the universal quantifier.

- (33) *Todas las mujeres cogieron un tren que*  
 every the women took a train which

*salió temprano.*

**left-PRET** early

‘All the women took a train which left early.’

$\exists x [\text{train}(x) \ \& \ \forall y [\text{woman}(y) \ \longrightarrow \ \text{took}(y)(x)]]$  (wide scope)

- (34) *Todas las mujeres cogieron un tren que salía*  
 every the women took a train which **left-IMPF**

*temprano.*

early

‘All the women took a train which left early.’

- a.  $\exists x$  [train (x) &  $\forall y$  [woman (y)  $\rightarrow$  took (y) (x)]] (wide scope)  
 b.  $\forall y$  [woman (y)  $\rightarrow \exists x$  [train (x) & took (y) (x)]] (narrow scope)

The logical representations for the wide and the narrow scope reading provided in (33) and (34) reflect the semantic differences between the two sentences. However, they do not account for the relationship between quantifier scope and the imperfect and the preterit, or for the specific correspondences that have been observed. Doiz-Bienzobas (1995) and Doiz-Bienzobas and Mejías-Bikandi (2000) show that an analysis of the data within the framework of Mental Spaces accounts for the existence of these particular correspondences.

Quantified expressions introduce a new embedded space Q (Fauconnier 1994: 166). The narrow and wide scope readings of quantified expressions differ with respect to the identity of the space, Q or R, into which an indefinite phrase introduces its element. Under the narrow scope reading, the indefinite phrase introduces its element directly into the quantifier space as in the case of (34b), schematized in Figure 16 (adapted from Fauconnier 1994: 166). The indefinite phrase ‘a train’ (t) is introduced directly in Q. *t* and *w* are roles, i.e. they do not have a fixed value in R.<sup>18</sup> Thus, when *w* is filled in by a counterpart in R, *t* takes some potentially different value in R. That is to say, for every woman who took a train, there is a train in Q, such that the trains are different in R (or at least not necessarily the same).

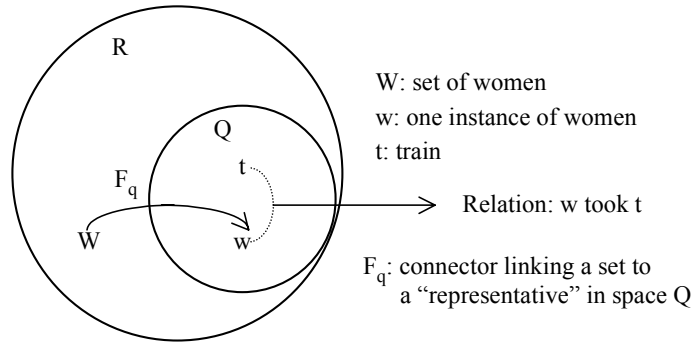


Figure 16. Narrow scope reading of the sentence in (34)

Under the wide scope reading of quantified expressions, the indefinite phrase introduces an element  $t_o$  ('train') in R, as represented in Figure 17. Since  $t$  has a counterpart in R ( $t_o$ ), the indefinite phrase 'a train' gets a fixed value in R. This configuration is translated into the reading 'every woman took the same train'.

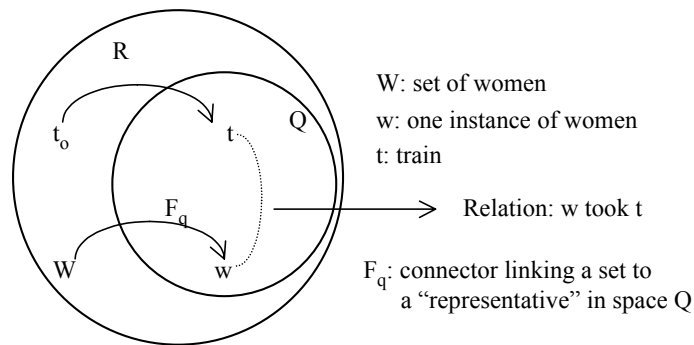


Figure 17. Wide scope reading of the sentence in (33)

The correspondences between the preterit and the wide scope reading and the imperfect and the narrow scope reading are automatically accounted for under the analysis of the imperfect and the preterit within the framework of Mental Spaces. According to our char-

acterization, the preterit does not allow access into a space different from R. Thus, the indefinite phrase (e.g. ‘a train’) and the clause it occurs in are interpreted in the speaker’s reality space as represented in Figure 17. The wide scope reading surfaces. Since the sentence in (34) with the imperfect also has the wide scope reading, it must be the case that the imperfect also allows access into R. By contrast, the imperfect allows access into an embedded space Q for the interpretation of the indefinite nominal and the clause it occurs in. This configuration corresponds with the narrow scope reading represented in Figure 16 and therefore the narrow scope reading of the quantified expression surfaces, as in the case of the sentence in (34).<sup>19</sup>

### 3.3. *The expression of irrealis*

In addition to the more frequently discussed use of the imperfect for the expression of children’s pretend games, the following four contexts are considered for the notion of irrealis: the expression of movies, counterfactuals, dreams, and wishes. In all of these cases the imperfect is used.

#### 3.3.1. Movies

The choice of the preterit or the imperfect affects the readings of the sentences in (35) in an interesting way.

- (35) *Juan tenía/tuvo muchos problemas en la película.*  
 Juan **had-IMPF/PRET** many problems in the movie  
 a. IMPF: ‘Juan had a lot of problems in the movie.’ (it is part of the movie script)  
 b. PRET: ‘Juan had a lot of problems in the movie.’ (e.g. in the movie-making process)

When the imperfect is used (35a), the situation ‘had problems’ is part of irrealis (i.e. the movie): the character played by Juan has a number



of problems which are part of the movie script. When the preterit is used (35b), the situation is part of reality: Juan's problems are associated with the movie-making experience and are part of real life (e.g. remembering his lines, problems with the director and other actors).

Within the framework of Mental Spaces, linguistic expressions such as 'in the movie' cue the construction of an embedded space, the *movie space*. As stated above, the imperfect allows access into the embedded movie space for the interpretation of the situation it designates, namely, 'had problems', as a result of which Juan's problems are interpreted within the movie script, that is, as irrealis. On the other hand, the preterit does not allow access into the embedded space and it indicates that the situation 'had problems' belongs in the speaker's reality space. Consequently, Juan's problems are part of (his) reality.

### 3.3.2. Counterfactuals

The grammatical expression *if* cues the construction of an embedded *hypothetical space* (H). Given this configuration characterized by the existence of two spaces, H and R, our analysis predicts the grammaticality of the imperfect and the ungrammaticality of the preterit in the apodosis of the hypothetical sentence. The two predictions are borne out as illustrated by the grammaticality judgments of the sentence in (36).

- (36) *Si tuviera dinero, me compraba/\*compré una casa.*  
if had-SUBJ money, me buy-IMPF/\*PRET a house  
a. IMPF: 'If I had money, I would buy a house.'  
b. PRET: \*'If I had money, I bought a house.'

As previously stated, the imperfect allows access into the embedded hypothetical space for the interpretation of the situation in the apodosis. Consequently, the situation is interpreted in the hypothetical space in accordance with the expectations set up by the hypothetical situation expressed in the protasis. By contrast, when the preterit is

used the situation is interpreted in the speaker's reality space (running counter to the expectations created by the protasis) and thus, the sentence is ungrammatical.

Unlike in (36), the situation designated by the protasis of a hypothetical sentence may be part of R in some contexts. In such cases, the apodosis is also interpreted in R and our analysis predicts the grammaticality of the preterit. This prediction is confirmed by the grammaticality judgment and the interpretation of the sentence in (37).

- (37) *Si Pedro estuvo en París, robó el banco.*  
 if Pedro was in Paris, **robbed-RET** the bank  
 'If Pedro<sub>i</sub> was in Paris, he<sub>i</sub> robbed the bank.'

In (37) the speaker does not know whether Pedro was in Paris or not. However, if it is the case that he was in Paris, it is also the case that he robbed the bank. That is, if the condition of being in Paris is met in R, the apodosis 'he robbed the bank' is also satisfied in the speaker's reality space (R), thereby accounting for the use of the preterit in the embedded clause.

### 3.3.3. Dreams

The description of dreams evokes the presence of two spaces, the reality space R and the *dream space* which is set up by the subject-verb combination 'I dreamt that \_\_\_\_'. As predicted by our analysis, dreams are described with the imperfect in Spanish, not with the preterit (38).

- (38) *Soñé que ganaba/\*gané el premio Nobel de literatura.*  
 dreamt that **won-IMPF/\*RET** the prize Nobel for  
 literature  
 literature  
 'I dreamt that I won the Nobel Prize for literature.'

The imperfect allows access into the dream space and consequently, the situation it designates is interpreted as part of the speaker's dream. By contrast, situations designated by the preterit are directly introduced into R and are not interpreted as part of the dream.

The choice of the imperfect or the preterit in relative sentences describing the contents of dreams also affects the interpretation of the sentences, as illustrated in (39) (based on Mejías-Bikandi 1993).

- (39) a. *En el sueño, la señora que trajo el libro era mi tía.*  
 in the dream the lady who brought-**PRET** the book was-**IMPF** my aunt  
 'In my dream, the lady who brought the book was my aunt.'

- b. *En el sueño, la señora que traía el libro era mi tía.*  
 in the dream the lady who brought-**IMPF** the book was-**IMPF** my aunt  
 'In my dream, the lady who brought the book was my aunt.'

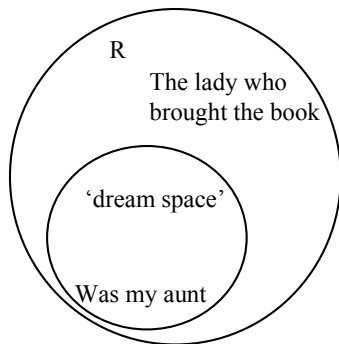


Figure 18. The preterit and the dream space

In accordance with the analysis proposed here, the situation designated by the imperfect ‘was my aunt’ in (39a) and (39b) is interpreted as part of the speaker’s dream. That is to say, the lady is the speaker’s aunt in her dream. However, the difference between (39a) and (39b) resides in the interpretation of the relative clause, ‘the lady who brought-IMPF/PRET the book’. When the preterit is used (39a), the sentence is interpreted in R. That is, the lady was the speaker’s aunt in her dream but she brought the book in reality, as represented in Figure 18. When the imperfect is used (39b), the embedded sentence is interpreted in the dream space, as represented in Figure 19. That is, the lady was the speaker’s aunt in her dream and she brought the book in her dream as well.

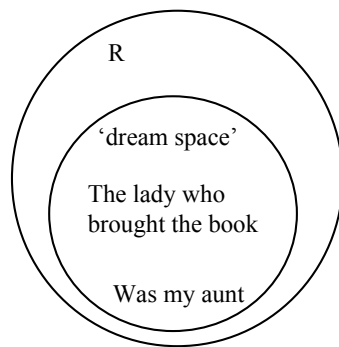


Figure 19. The imperfect and the dream space

#### 3.3.4. Children’s pretend games

In contexts where a *pretend space* is set up, as in the discourse provided in (40), the use of the imperfect is required (example cited in Fleischman 1989: 16, from Warnant 1966: 349).

- (40) *Vamos a jugar a policías y ladrones: Yo **era** el jefe de la banda; éste **era** el que **abría** la caja fuerte; vosotros los que **dábais** el asalto y éstos los guardias civiles.*

Let's play cops and robbers: I **was-IMPF** the leader of the gang; this one **was-IMPF** the one who **opened-IMPF** the safe; you **gave-IMPF** the attack and these the police.

'Let's play cops and robbers. I'll be the leader of the gang; he'll be the one who opens the safe; you[']ll be] the ones who carry out the attack and they[']ll be] the police.'

The use of the imperfect in this context follows automatically from our analysis. The imperfect allows access into the pretend space, and the situations it designates are interpreted in this space. By contrast, the use of the preterit denies access into the pretend space and consequently, the situations are interpreted in the speaker's reality space.

### 3.3.5. Wishes

The imperfect is also used for the coding of wishes (41) where, in addition to the speaker's reality space, an embedded *wish space* is cued. As predicted by our analysis, the preterit may not be used.

- (41) *¡De qué buena gana me bebía/\*bebí un vaso de*  
how gladly me **drank-IMPF/\*PRET** a glass of

*agua!*

water

'How gladly I would drink a glass of water!'

As a summary of this section on the irrealis, it can be stated that sentences expressing wishes, pretend games, dreams, counterfactuals, and movies create an additional irrealis space in which the situation designated by the imperfect is interpreted. In all these contexts the situations designated by the preterit are interpreted in the speaker's reality space. It should be emphasized that the analysis proposed here accounts for the grammaticality judgments as well as for the subtle semantic differences between sentences with the imperfect and the preterit.

### 3.4. *The interpretation of perception verbs*

The perception verb *hear* has two meanings, ‘the thing heard’ (42a) and ‘the content of heard speech’ (42b) (Sweetser 1990: 35).<sup>20</sup>

- (42) a. *I heard John fall/falling.*  
 b. *I heard that John fell.*

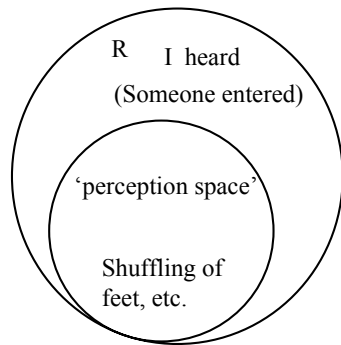
Kirsner and Thompson (1976) and Barwise (1978) talk about the contrast in meaning between sentences such as (42a) and (42b) as a general property of *-ing* and “plain form” constructions with sensory verbs, and of “*that*-clause + sensory verb” constructions, respectively. In particular, Kirsner and Thompson refer to the meaning associated with the constructions in (42a) as “direct perception” and to that in (42b) as “indirect perception”; Barwise refers to sentences such as (42a) as containing an “epistemically neutral perception report” and, for (42b), as containing an “epistemically positive perception report”.

In Spanish the distinction between direct and indirect perception, or epistemically neutral and positive perception reports, may be expressed through the choice of the preterit or the imperfect, as shown by the sentence in (43).

- (43) *Oí que alguien **entraba/entró.***  
 heard that someone **entered-IMPF/PRET**  
 a. IMPF: ‘I heard someone enter/entering.’  
 b. PRET: ‘I heard (that) someone entered.’

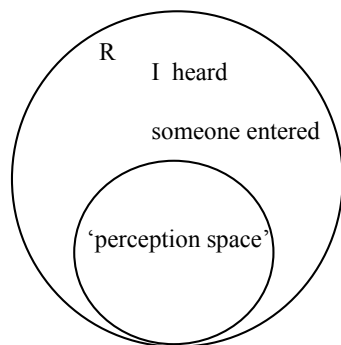
Under a Mental Space representation, perception verbs partition information into the base (or the speaker’s reality space) and an embedded perception space. The base space contains the act of auditory perception; the perception space contains the object of perception itself. According to the analysis proposed here, in (43a) the choice of the imperfect renders the perception space accessible for the interpretation of the embedded clause ‘that someone entered-IMPF’. That is to say, the embedded sentence with the imperfect designates the ob-

ject of perception (e.g. feet shuffling or the slamming of a door) recognizable as the noises made by someone entering a house.<sup>21</sup> This interpretation is represented in Figure 20.



*Figure 20.* 'Hear' and the imperfect

By contrast, when the preterit is used our analysis states that the embedded clause it occurs in, 'that someone entered-PRET', does not belong in the perception space. That is, the embedded sentence does not designate the noises that are associated with someone entering a house, but rather a state of affairs in R, namely, 'someone entered', as represented in Figure 21.



*Figure 21.* 'Hear' and the preterit

Figure 21 represents the occurrence of an act of perception which does not have a corresponding object of perception, an unlikely state of affairs given the acceptability of the sentence. However, the “hearsay” interpretation of the verb ‘hear’ in (43b) reveals the existence of an inferred object of perception, namely, a linguistic utterance: I heard a linguistic utterance which stated that someone had entered. Accordingly, Figure 22 reflects the meaning of the sentence in (43b) more accurately than Figure 21.

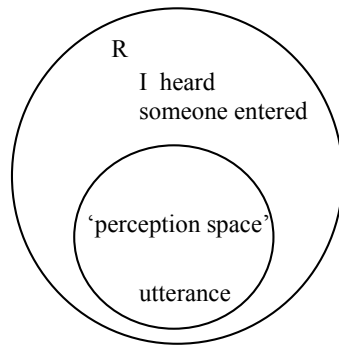


Figure 22. “Hearsay”

To conclude this section, I would like to emphasize the fact that the analysis of the preterit and the imperfect within the framework of Mental Spaces has allowed us to generalize over linguistic phenomena of quite a different nature, and to account for subtle semantic contrasts most of which have not been explained in the literature before.

#### 4. Concluding remarks

In this paper I have characterized the preterit and the imperfect as grounding predications, and I have provided an analysis which establishes the way in which these predications relate a state of affairs to the ground. In order to do so, I have resorted to the use of epistemic



notions, such as distance and viewpoint, within the timeline model and the model of the structured world (Langacker 1991, 1999). In addition, I have considered the role of the preterit and imperfect as discourse tracking devices (Fauconnier 1994), according to which the choice of the imperfect or the preterit determines the relevant domain for the interpretation of the situations they designate.

In particular, I have characterized the preterit and the imperfect as follows. On the one hand, the role of the preterit is to locate a situation in the past within the actual plane, where situations are descriptions of which things happen(ed) in the world. Situations designated by the preterit are construed through the speaker's viewpoint in the ground, creating a sense of detachment between speaker and situation. Finally, the presence of the viewpoint at speech time is directly related to the interpretation of the situations designated by the preterit within the speaker's reality space. On the other hand, the imperfect provides a past viewpoint removed from the ground from which the situation is construed, thereby providing a sense of pastness to the clauses modified by the imperfect. However, situations taking the imperfect are not temporally anchored; they describe the way things are in the world within the structural plane, as reflected in the property readings associated with these sentences. Finally, the presence of a distal conceptualizer apprehending the situation with respect to the ground is directly linked to the possibility of interpreting situations with the imperfect within a space that is different from the speaker's reality space.

The analysis I have provided does not include the aspectual, temporal, and discourse-related notions which have been traditionally proposed to characterize the two forms. While these notions provide partially correct descriptions, I believe that they are not fundamental for the characterization of the preterit and the imperfect. In fact, I propose that they are byproducts of the analysis I have presented in this paper. Thus, actual past situations which are viewed from the ground are necessarily bounded and anterior to a reference point, as stated under the aspectual and the temporal analyses of the preterit, respectively. Furthermore, actual past occurrences which are interpreted in a new matrix space tend to provide foregrounded informa-

tion. By contrast, situations which are perceived through a past viewpoint located at situation time are likely to be interpreted as unbounded and simultaneous to a past point in time, as stated by the aspectual and temporal analyses of the imperfect, respectively. However, situations designated by the imperfect need not be unbounded or simultaneous with some temporal point at all times, as shown by some of the data considered here. Finally, situations that elaborate the embedded spaces in a discourse and describe the way things are, tend to provide background information. I believe that a characterization of a more abstract nature, such as the one proposed here, is more satisfactory in these respects.

## Notes

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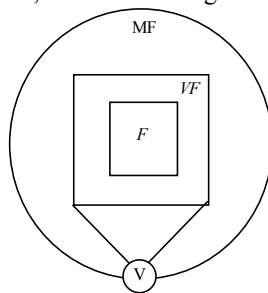


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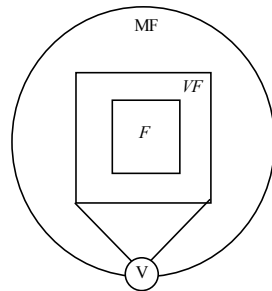


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