'True' imperfectivity in discourse

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A common intuition in the literature on grammatical aspect is that perfective (PF) aspect correlates with event completion, and this is commonly captured by a definition of PF as the event time or the temporal trace of the event being part of some reference time t, i.e. $e \subseteq t$ or $\tau(e) \subseteq t$. Cross-linguistically, in languages that have grammatical aspect markers, then, if an event has been or was completed in the past or will be completed in the future, PF forms are commonly used to describe such events, whereas imperfective (IPF) forms usually describe non-completed events or events in progress (as well as habitual events in some languages). This is also the common situation in Russian, which has both IPF and PF verb forms. However, there is one use of the IPF in Russian, the so-called general-factual use, where evidently completed events are nevertheless described with IPF forms, as in (1).

(1) Zimnij Dvorec **stroil** Rastrelli.   'It was Rastrelli who built the Winter Palace.'
     winter-.ACC palace.ACC built.IPF Rastrelli.NOM

In this example, it is common knowledge that the Winter Palace (the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg) was built completely, only once, the sentence is also not about the process of this building, nevertheless the IPF is used to describe this completed event.

The use of the IPF in examples like (1) is conditioned by a particular information structure, where the event itself is backgrounded (the verb is destressed) (cf. Paducheva 1996), and some new information about this event is in focus, in (1) the information that the agent of this event was Rastrelli. Grønn (2004) analyses backgrounding of the event as a presuppositional anaphor (following Geurts and van der Sandt 1997); this anaphor has to be bound in discourse, either by a previous description of the event by a PF verb form, or by accommodating that such an event is already part of the context (i.e. it is in the common ground).

Examples like these pose a problem for positive definitions of IPF in Russian, and traditionally the IPF is often seen as a kind of unmarked aspect (as opposed to the marked PF) that emerges in contexts of aspectual competition, in which both aspects can be used, so that the unmarked form wins over the marked one. Formally, this has led to the influential proposal by Grønn (2015), according to which the IPF in such contexts is 'fake' and rather has a PF semantics, leading him to the definition of PF, 'true' IPF and 'fake' IPF in (2).

(2) $[\![\text{PF}]\!] = \lambda t \lambda e.e \subseteq t$
     $[\![\text{IPF}_{ongoing}]\!] = \lambda t \lambda e.t \subseteq e$ ∼ 'True' IPF
     $[\![\text{IPF}_{factual}]\!] = \lambda t \lambda e.e \subseteq t$ ∼ 'Fake' IPF

In this talk, I argue that there is no need to postulate a 'fake' IPF in Russian. I show that event completion is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for PF in this language. I propose that by taking into account the discourse structure we can work with a single definition of the IPF ($t \subseteq \tau(e)$) while still capturing the intuition that overall the event is completed.

Examples like (1) show that event completion is not a sufficient condition for PF to arise. There are other contexts where completed events are described by IPF forms; nevertheless these are usually not called 'fake' IPF but a different reason is found for the use of IPF in such contexts, which still maintains a positive definition of the IPF. This is the case, for example, in habitual chains of completed events that happened in the past where each event in the chain is completed before the next event starts (e.g. *Mary woke up, went to the bathroom, brushed her teeth and prepared breakfast*), and similarly this happens in such chains of events in the historical present. The use of the IPF in these cases is commonly explained by the habituality of such chains of events, or by the incompatibility of present tense semantics and PF semantics, but event completion of each subevent in these chains is not captured by the IPF either.

Event completion is also not a necessary condition for PF to arise. In unique chains of events Russian has to use PF to signal reference time movement, even for the last event in such

a chain that might not be completed but could go on after that, as in (3).

(3)   Ona **vstala**   i   {**zapela** / *__*pela__ / *__*zapevala__} pesnju.
        she   got-up.PF and ZA-sang.PF sang.IPF ZA-sang.IPF song.ACC
        'She got up and sang / started singing a song.'

If event completion (non-completion) is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for PF (IPF) to arise it should also not be the sole reason for a PF (IPF) form to be used; rather we also need to take into account the overall discourse structure and discourse functions that IPF and PF play, by taking the information structural cues seriously and going one step further than just staying at the sentential level. For example, in (4) (after Forsyth 1970) we have a discourse in which a completed letter-writing event is introduced in the first sentence by a PF form *napisal* 'wrote.PF' and then referred back to by the IPF *pisal* 'wrote.IPF' in the second sentence.

(4)   V ėtoj porternoj ja [...] **napisal** pervoe ljubovnoe pis'mo. **Pisal**   [karandašom]$_F$.
        in this tavern   I   wrote.PF first   love   letter   wrote.IPF pencil.INSTR
        'In this tavern I wrote my first love letter. I wrote it with pencil.'

The information structural cues (destressed IPF verb form, focus on *karandašom* 'with pencil') instruct the hearer to look for an eventive antecedent in the discourse, which is found in the PF event description in the first sentence. I propose the following DRT account of the relevant parts of this discourse (ignoring indexicals and the locative modifier in the first sentence):

(5) $[e_1, e_2, t_1, t_2, n, x, y, z | \textbf{write}(e_1), \text{AGENT}(e_1, \textbf{I}), \text{THEME}(e_1, x), \textbf{first love letter}(x), \tau(e_1) \subseteq t_1, t_1 < n,$
       $\textbf{write}(e_2), \text{AGENT}(e_2, \textbf{I}), \text{THEME}(e_2, y), y = x, \textbf{pencil}(z), \text{INSTRUMENT}(e_2, z), e_2 = e_1, t_2 \subseteq \tau(e_2), t_2 < n]$

In words, there is a writing event e_1, introduced by the PF, with 'I' as the agent and 'first love letter' as the theme; its run time, $\tau(e_1)$, is part of the reference time t_1 (PF semantics), which is before n(ow) (past tense semantics). The second sentence of the discourse, with the presuppositional IPF that we are interested in, introduces a second writing event e_2, which, due to its presuppositional nature, is anaphorically linked to e_1, i.e. $e_2 = e_1$, just like its implicit theme y is linked to x, the theme of e_1, as standardly assumed in DRT. The new information about this event is introduced by the modifier 'with pencil'. Notice that a standard partitive semantics for the IPF specifies that there is a second reference time, t_2, which is part of the run time of the event, $\tau(e_2)$; past tense, again, indicates that this reference time is before n(ow).

     The information that the actual writing event described by the IPF was completed and that its full run time falls within a reference time (for which an assertion is made) is not lost under this analysis. Rather, it is already provided by the first sentence, which introduces e_1 with a PF semantics; since e_2 equals e_1 the actual event of writing remains completed. However, in the second sentence we zoom in on a narrower reference time for which an assertion is made, t_2, and this reference time is part of the run time of e_2, and thereby also part of the run time of e_1. By transitivity, t_2 is then also part of the bigger reference time t_1.

     By taking into account the broader discourse structure, we show that a standard IPF semantics can also account for cases where IPF forms describe actually completed events, thereby refuting an analysis of such forms as 'fake' IPFs with a PF semantics. The proposed account captures the general intuition that the use of the IPF is conditioned by a particular discourse structure, in which the event described is already part of the common ground, and the IPF sentence elaborates on this event, zooming in on a narrower reference time. The proposal also has repercussion for definitions of the PF and encourages us to take a closer look also at the role of PF beyond the sentential level.

References: FORSYTH (1970). *A Grammar of Aspect.* CUP. ● GEURTS & VAN DER SANDT (1997). Presuppositions and background. *11th Amsterdam Colloquium Proceedings.* ● GRØNN (2004). *The Semantics and Pragmatics of Russian Factual Imperfectives.* PhD Oslo. ● GRØNN (2015). On (in)definite tense and aspect in Russian. *FDSL 10 Proceedings.* ● PADUČEVA (1996). *Semantičeskie issledovanija.* Jazyki russkoj kul'tury.