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The Spanish *imperfecto* as a construal form for the conceptualization of state of affairs in journalistic texts

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Abstract

This study adopts a cognitive approach to the analysis of the use of the Spanish *imperfecto* as a construal form for the conceptualization of state of affairs in certain journalistic texts. In doing so, the main focus of the study is to investigate cognitive processes like modalization and subjectivization, which are related to the speaker's standpoint and to his subjective, not grammatically motivated, decision to use the imperfective instead of the perfective form. By the help of the corpus programmes *GlossaNet* and *CREA* (corpus of the *Real Academia Española*) we analyze the imperfective use of some Spanish verbs, which are semantically perfective in nature so that the normative use would require a perfective form. In other words, we investigate how the speaker/journalist construes a reality or situation to be expressed by means of the *imperfecto* and show that this use of the imperfect is typical for journalistic discourse.

Keywords: cognitive grammar, Spanish imperfect, imperfective aspect, quotative imperfect, modalization, subjectivization

1 Introduction

This paper aims to analyze the use of the Spanish *imperfecto* under a cognitive approach, in which it can be observed how the speaker – according to his standpoint – construes a reality or situation to be later described or expressed by means of the *imperfecto*. For cognitive grammar, the “language is neither self-contained nor describable without essential reference to cognitive processing [...]” (Langacker 1990: 1). The cognitive process is related to the speaker’s perspective for choosing some semantic expressions to construe a specific situation and to express it in a very special way. For example, the difference between a perfective form like *llegó* (‘came.PRET’¹) and an imperfective one like *llegaba* (‘came.IMPF’) does not only rely on their temporal and aspectual values: *llegó* (a concluded and completed action in the past) / *llegaba* (non-concluded and durative action in the past) but also on the speaker’s attitude and standpoint towards his utterance. Analyzing the secondary values (‘*valores secundarios*’) of the Spanish *imperfecto*, Gutiérrez Araus (1995: 179) explains that the “característica que une a todos [estos valores secundarios] es la relevancia de la actitud del hablante hacia lo que dice, sus reservas epistemológicas y su aprobación o desaprobación al interlocutor” (‘the common feature of all [the secondary values of the *imperfecto*] is the relevance of the speaker’s attitude towards his utterance, his epistemological precaution as well as his approval or disapproval towards his interlocutor’). On the other hand, Reyes (1996: 12) highlights the “quotative value of the imperfecto” by explaining that the speaker uses the *imperfecto* to refer to utterances said by others and to show lack of responsibility for the content of it as in *Mañana daba una conferencia María* (‘*María would held (IMPF) a conference tomorrow*’). Although several studies on the so called “secondary values of the Spanish *imperfecto*” (*valores secundarios del imperfecto*, cf. Gutiérrez Araus 1995, Reyes 1996, Díaz Salgado 2000 or García Fernández 2004)² have been carried out, only little attention was paid to these uses taking a cognitive viewpoint (cf. Böhm 2016: 478-489).

In this study we will focus on the cognitive processes of the speaker when using the Spanish *imperfecto* as Evans/ Green (2006: 5) say to study language from a cognitive perspective, which means “to study patterns of conceptualization”. Therefore, we will try to determine how the speaker or conceptualizer construes a specific situation (reality) and expresses it by choosing the *imperfecto* and furthermore what the semantic value of the situation (reality) is – conceptualized by means of the *imperfecto*. Díaz Salgado (2000) indicates for example that the *imperfecto* is used in the Spanish press as “a strategic communicative means to hide the whole truth of the reality and to show the journalist’s distance towards his information”.³

Our qualitative corpus will be taken from *GlossaNet* (<http://glossa.fltr.ucl.ac.be/>) from 10/02/12 to 10/04/12 and from *CREA* (corpus of the *Real Academia Española*), from journalistic texts. We will analyze some perfective verbs like *venir* (‘to come’), *resultar* (‘to result’), etc. and the durative verb *ser* (‘to be’) as well as the *verbum dicendi* *decir* (‘to say’) in 3rd person singular. Our aim is to answer the question why these verbs, which are semantically perfective in nature so that the normative use would require a perfective form, appear in the imperfective form as in:

- (a) Carlos Carnero, responsable de política internacional y eurodiputado, **recibía** ayer el agradecimiento de Xesús Redondo Abuín por defender en Bruselas los intereses Gallegos. (CREA, El País, Política, 14/10/1997)

¹ By *PRET* the Spanish preterite is meant, i.e. the *pretérito perfecto simple*.

² By *secondary values* of the Spanish *imperfecto* other values which are not prototypical and primary as its temporal and aspectual values are meant. For more information, cf. chapters 4 and 5 of this paper.

³ The words from Díaz Salgado are taken from this web page: <http://www.analitica.com/bitblilio/lcdiaz/drama.asp>.

*Carlos Carnero, responsible for international politics and member of the European parliament **accepted** (received.IMPF) yesterday the gratitude of Xesus Redondo Abuín for defending the Galician interests in Brussels.*

As a counter-example, see utterance (b) in which the same verb is used in the perfective form (*pretérito perfecto simple*) to express a completed and finished action in the past:

- (b) Barrionuevo **recibió** ayer el título de hijo predilecto de su pueblo, donde en 1983 substituyó a Manuel Salmerón en las placas que dan nombre a la avenida principal. (CREA, La Vanguardia, Política, 30/12/1995)
*Barrionuevo **was honored** (received.PRET) yesterday as the favorite son of his village, where he, in 1983, substituted Manuel Salmerón, after whom the main road was named.*

2 Basic notions of cognitive grammar

Cognitive grammar focuses on the intrinsic and indissoluble relation between form and meaning, which constitutes a symbolic unit: “a central notion of cognitive grammar [is] the idea that grammatical structure is inherently symbolic” (Langacker 1987: 56). According to Langacker (1987, 1991), this cognitive-symbolic grammar is structured on the basis of “mental images and schemes which – together with the metaphoric and metonymic mechanisms – build a set of cognitive idealized designs in which the linguistic signs capture some aspects or others according to the standpoint of the *conceptualizador*” (cf. Genta 2008: 31). The standpoint of the conceptualizer is related to the *perspectivization* of a specific situation. Langacker (1987, 1991) suggests the notion of *perspective* as one of the basis of cognitive grammar to explain linguistic structures. Wachtmeister (2005), referring to Langacker (1988: 6), states that “any concept [or predicate] is understood as a cognitive routine” (Wachtmeister 2005: 39). It means that the meaning of a linguistic expression is characterized relative to one or more cognitive structures called “cognitive domains” (cf. Langacker 1987: 147, Wachtmeister 2005: 40): “**Domains** are necessarily cognitive entities: mental experiences, representational spaces, concepts, or conceptual complexes” (Langacker 1987: 147).

To understand, for instance, the conceptualization or the meaning of the word *Monday* we will have to activate firstly the *cognitive domain of time* (Langacker 1987: 147) and then we will have to subdivide it in weeks and days. Therefore, it is only under this kind of cognitive domain (of time) in which the word *Monday* would make sense in its meaning. The cognitive domains constitute the background of the scene or situation by which a semantic unit acquires a meaning. In this cognitive process, the meaning of some linguistic expression is contained in the respective cognitive domain which evokes such expression. The participation of the conceptualizer (speaker) is also important for establishing the meaning of a specific situation or expression. The conceptualizer (speaker) describes or conceptualizes a scene or situation according to his *perspective*. For that purpose, he chooses a specific mechanism – an expression – which exists in a language to construe such a scene or situation (Genta 2008: 37). Adopting the notion of *perspective* (Langacker 1987, 1991), we would construe the following scene and situation:

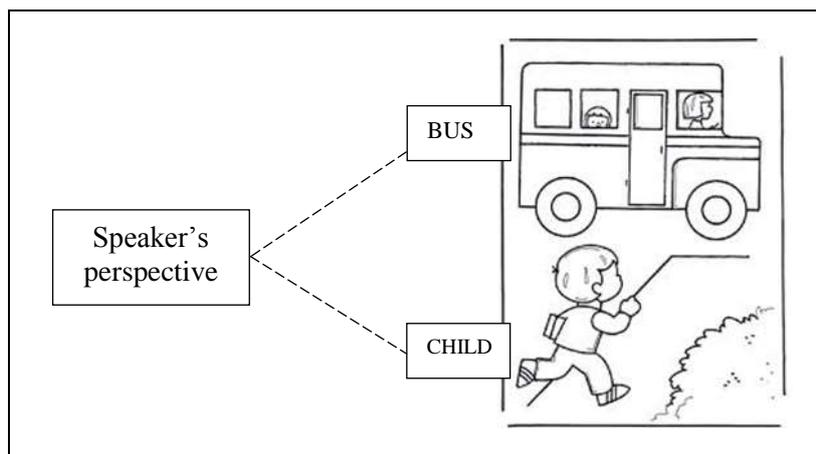


Figure 1. Conceptualization or meaning of a scene.

According to his cognitive domains, the *conceptualizer* or speaker can choose some of these expressions (utterances) to describe or construe Figure 1:

| Speaker's perspective | child | bus |
|---------------------------|---|---|
| expressions or utterances | (1a) El niño corre / está corriendo hacia el autobús <i>The child runs / is running to the bus</i> | (2a) El autobús está llegando al paradero <i>The bus is arriving at the bus stop</i> |
| | (1b) El niño corre / corría / está corriendo para alcanzar el autobús <i>The child runs / ran / is running to reach the bus</i> | (2b) El autobús se detiene / se detuvo para recoger al niño <i>The bus stops / stopped to pick up the child</i> |
| | (3) Mientras el niño corre / corría / está corriendo , el autobús viaja / viajaba ⁴ <i>While the child runs / ran / is running / the bus goes / went / is going</i> | |

As we can see, Figure 1 can be construed and conceptualized according to the perspective chosen by the conceptualizer – either the child or the bus. Wachtmeister says in this respect that “el lenguaje nunca representa lo que ocurre en el mundo sino la interpretación de un estado de cosas por parte de un conceptualizador” (‘the language never represents what is occurring in the world but it is the interpretation of a state of affairs by the speaker’; Wachtmeister 2005: 40). The conceptualizer’s interpretation is connected to two other important concepts within cognitive grammar – *profile* and *base*:

A predication always has a certain scope [...], and within that scope it selects a particular substructure for designation. To suggest the special prominence of the designated element, I refer to the scope of a predication and its designatum as **base** and **profile**, respectively. (Langacker 1987: 183)

The *base* consists of such aspects of the cognitive domains evoked by the utterance. The *profile* is the subregion within the base which the utterance explicitly designates (cf.

⁴ These are our own examples to show how the speaker construes a scene or situation according to his perspective.

Wachtmeister 2005: 41). If we take Wachtmeister's example for construing the word *pinion*, we would see that the *base* will be the entity *wheel* and the *profile* will be a specific part of the base designated by such word⁵. Wachtmeister, in line with Langacker (1987), continues explaining the difference between *profile* and *base* introducing two more concepts: *trajector* and *landmark*. By means of the Spanish prepositions *sobre* ('on') and *bajo* ('under'), which are also visually represented in Figures 2 and 3, he explains the definition of *trajector* (tr) and *landmark* (lm) as follows:

[...] la preposición *sobre* perfila una relación espacial entre dos entidades, una de las cuales está encima de la otra. Entre los participantes prominentes o salientes en una entidad relacional, una constituye la figura principal dentro de la relación perfilada, y se construye como la entidad que es localizada o, en general, descrita. Esta entidad más prominente en una relación se llama *trajector*, marcada en los diagramas como *tr*. Otro participante con un alto grado de prominencia es el llamado *marco de referencia* (también llamado *locus* o simplemente *marco*), marcada en los diagramas como *lm* (del inglés *landmark*).

([...] the preposition 'on' profiles a spatial relation between two entities, which one of them is above the other. Between the prominent or salient participants in a relational entity, one entity is the main figure within the profiled relation and it is constructed as the localized, or in general terms, the described entity. The most prominent entity is called 'trajector', marked in the respective figures as 'tr'. Another participant with a high degree of prominence is the so called 'reference frame' (also called 'locus' or simply 'frame'), marked in the figures as 'lm' (in English 'landmark'); Wachtmeister 2005: 41):

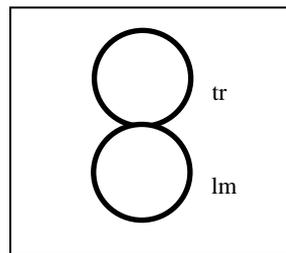


Figure 2. The relation of *on*.

According to Wachtmeister's explanation, the *trajector* (tr) is the most prominent part of the profiled relation, i.e. it is the localized entity. The *landmark* (lm) or *frame* is the other less prominent part serving as a reference frame to localize the *trajector*. When the conceptualizer (speaker) uses the preposition *on*, he builds or construes the scene in such a particular way. It is also possible that the conceptualizer construes this scene (Figure 3) using the preposition *under*:

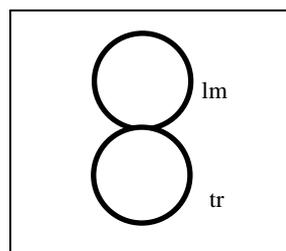


Figure 3. The relation of *under*.

⁵ For the graphic illustration of these examples, cf. Wachtmeister (2005: 41-42) and Genta (2008: 37-38).

This means that the speaker or conceptualizer imposes a different profile over the base. In Figure 3, the *trajector* (tr) is now below and it is the entity being described or localized. The entity which is above, i.e. the *landmark* is the reference frame. Following Langacker (1987: 215), Wachtmeister points out that

esta operación de destacar un perfil sobre una base conceptual no se restringe a los sustantivos, y menos aún a sustantivos que representan entidades físicas. Las preposiciones, los adjetivos, los verbos y los adverbios son *relaciones* o *entidades relacionales* y lo que perfilan son las interconexiones entre dos o más entidades [...].
(this operation to emphasize one profile over a conceptual base is not restricted to the nouns, even less to nouns representing physical entities. Prepositions, adjectives, verbs and adverbs are relations or relational entities which profile compound connections between two or more entities [...]; Wachtmeister 2005: 41)

Therefore, the concepts of *trajector* and *landmark* can also be applied to the Spanish *imperfecto*. We will investigate in further chapters what the *imperfecto* conceptualizes and how it is construed by the conceptualizer.

3 The conceptualization of the Spanish *imperfecto*

Considering the basic notions of cognitive grammar, we will try to analyze the speaker's conceptualization of reality when using the Spanish *imperfecto* in utterances like:

- (4) **Resultaba** casi imposible perforar la barrera húngara y los lanzadores españoles **se veían forzados** a realizar tiros muy imprecisos (*El País* 05/03/2012).
It resulted (IMPF) almost impossible to go through the Hungarian barrier, and the Spanish throwers were (IMPF) forced to fire imprecise shots.

In example (4) the imperfective forms *resultaba* ('resulted.IMPF') and *(se) veían forzados* ('were.IMPF forced') do neither express simultaneity of the action in the past nor describe a durative and ongoing action – its prototypical temporal and aspectual values, but they refer to the journalist's attitude towards his utterance. Such uses of *resultaba* and *(se) veían (forzados)* are modalized and they express the quotative value of the Spanish *imperfecto* in which they implicitly point out that the journalist reproduces utterances from others. By speaking about the modal and quotative values of the *imperfecto*, we refer to its *non-prototypical* (not primary) uses, which are known as the secondary values of the *imperfecto*.

Within the cognitive approach, the primary values of the *imperfecto* correspond to its temporal and aspectual features:

a) Temporal feature: It expresses simultaneity of the action in the past, which is called *copretérito* ('copreterite') by Bello (1988: §628-629) because of its anaphoric or relative relation to another *preterite* in order to establish its temporal reference:

- (5) Cuando el presidente llegó al Congreso, los diputados **discutían** acaloradamente.
 (Gutiérrez Araus 1997: 41)
When the president arrived (PRET) at the congress, the members of parliament were discussing / discussed (IMPF) heatedly.

b) Aspectual feature: It expresses the duration of an action in which the beginning or the end of are unknown or not marked, providing a repetitive or habit reading:

- (6) Él **trabajaba** de fontanero. (Schwall 1991: 347)
He worked (IMP) as plumber.

As already mentioned, these primary values of the *imperfecto* are also known as ‘prototypical’. Langacker (1987: 377-386) also uses the term ‘protoypical values’ to establish a relationship with other more abstract and schematic values of linguistic categories: “A prototype is a typical instance of a category, and other elements are assimilated to the category on the basis of their perceived resemblance to the prototype; there are degrees of membership based on degrees of similarity” (Langacker 1987: 371). For Langacker the linguistic categories are complex and typically polysemic (cf. also Castañeda 2004): the meaning of the signs shall be conceived as conceptual networks in which two kinds of connections are established between some nodes and others. On the one hand, there are *elaborative* relationships by which a relation between hypernymy and hyponymy is made, i.e. a relation between a specific concept and other more general and abstract concepts, the characteristics of which are exhaustively contained in the specific concept as the relationship between the concept of *tree* and the other concepts like *cherry tree*, *olive tree*, *oak*, *chestnut tree*, etc. On the other hand, Langacker introduces another term: *extension of use* for categorizing other kinds of relationship within a network. By *extension of use* a specific concept is used to categorize another one which does not contain all relevant characteristics of the first. For example, many relevant characteristics to define the prototypical category of *tree* are not found in the concepts of *palm tree* (leaves, branches, form, etc.). However, there are still enough aspects or characteristics contained in the word *palm tree* and in other kinds of *tree*. From this relationship can arise another concept of *tree* as long as the repeated use of this category is motivated. This new concept of *tree* would then be more abstract than the previous one (*tree*) and it arises from the common characteristics shared in the concept of *tree* and of *palm tree*. This new more abstract concept is called *schematic use* by Langacker and keeps a relationship of *elaboration* with the concepts of *tree* and *palm tree* (cf. Castañeda 2004: 67).

The concept of prototypical and schematic (by extension of use) use, which was introduced by Langacker to cognitively explain the meanings of lexical units, can also be applied to grammatical and phonological categories (cf. Castañeda 2004: 67). Thereby, following the cognitive model on the conceptualization of a scene or reality (cf. Langacker 1985 and chapter 2 of this paper) and taking into consideration both the concepts of *base* and *profile* as well as the concepts of *trajector* (tr) and *landmark* (lm), we can visually conceptualize, firstly, the prototypical (temporal-aspectual) values of the Spanish *imperfecto* (cf. examples 7-8)⁶ in Figure 4 and then its secondary values (non-prototypical) or extension of its use in Figure 5 (example 9):

- (7) Estuvo a punto de ahogarse por el peso de los tenis y la ropa mientras **nadaba** hacia la orilla del río Miami [...] (*El Nuevo Herald*, 24/07/2000)
He was (PRET) about to stifle because of the weight of his tennis shoes and clothes while he was swimming (IMPF) to the shore of the Miami River [...]
- (8) Aquí lo que apareció fue una torre de cuatro metros de altura en la que había agua y coches, gente que **corría** y **gritaba**, y en lo alto de toda la torre, una grúa municipal. (*El País*, 18/11/1997)
Here appeared (PRET) a four-meter-high tower, in which there was (IMPF) water and cars and people running (IMPF) and shouting (IMPF) and at the top of the tower there was a municipal crane.

⁶ These examples were taken from the Corpus of the *Real Academia Española*, CREA.

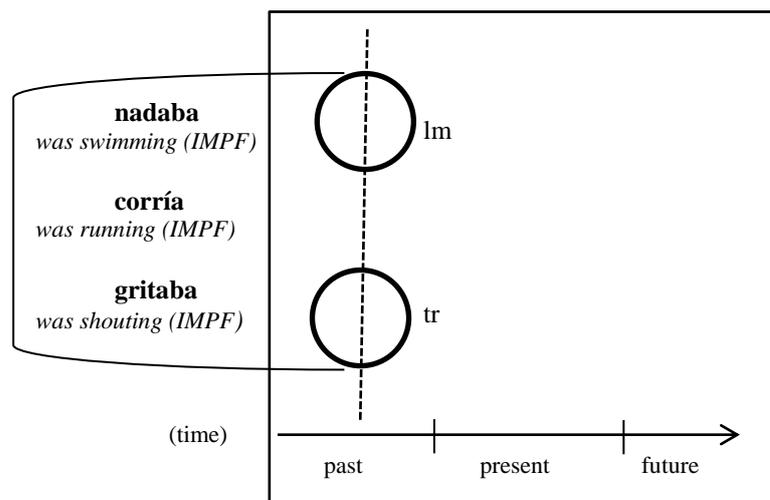


Figure 4. Conceptualization of the *prototypical values* of the Spanish *imperfecto*.⁷

The dotted line (Figure 4) indicates that the action is continuous and durative without marking the beginning or endpoint of it. It may be possible that the action could have begun before the *trayector* (tr) and have developed until an unknown endpoint, thus going beyond the limits of the *landmark* (lm). In contrast to the visual representation of the prepositions *sobre* ('on') and *bajo* ('under') in Figures 2-3 before, the conceptualizer visualizes or focuses the line segment of the dotted lines between the *trayector* and *landmark*. Due to this ongoing, durative or indeterminate characteristic of the Spanish *imperfecto*, it can also express habituality, repetition, progressivity and continuity of the action.

In the following example (9), *anunciaba* ('was announced.IMPF') expresses the non-prototypical, *secondary* (modal and quotative) values⁸ of the *imperfecto*:

- (9) Hoy se **anunciaba** oficialmente en su web, que el disco, aún sin título está en marcha y que estará a la venta el próximo año (*El País*, 13/03/2012).
It was (IMPF) officially announced on his website today that the work on the record, still without a title, is in progress and it will be in the shops next years.

Anunciaba ('was announced.IMPF') in example (9) shows the speaker's standpoint towards his information: his distance to the content of the utterance and his lack of commitment to it. In Figure 5 there is a visual conceptualization of the non-prototypical (modal-quotative) use of the *imperfecto*. We will note that the *imperfecto* is used as perfective form instead of the *pretérito perfecto simple* *anunció* ('announced.PRET'):

⁷ For other *prototypical values* of the Spanish *imperfecto* like progressivity, continuity and habituality, cf. Bertinetto (1986).

⁸ Cf. also Reyes (1990). On the modal uses of the Italian imperfect cf. also Bazzanella (1990).

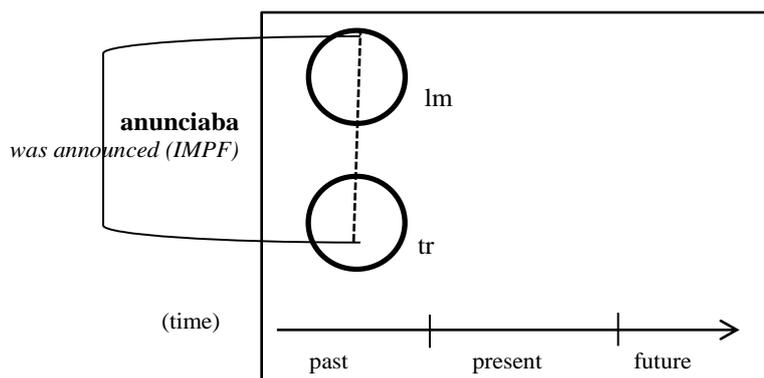


Figure 5. Conceptualization of the *non-prototypical value* of the Spanish *imperfecto* as a perfective form.

The dotted lines going from the *trajector* (tr) to the *landmark* (lm) show us that the action was finished and concluded. The endpoints of the realization of the action *anunciar* (‘to announce’) are marked.

4 The metonymic relationship between the imperfective aspectual feature of the *imperfecto* and its non-prototypical values

The starting point for studying and analyzing the non-prototypical (modal and quotative) values of the Spanish *imperfecto* relies on its *imperfective aspectual* feature. Comrie (1976: 3) defines aspect as “different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation”. Aspect is a non-deictic grammatical category which views the action in its internal development, in contrast to tense which is a deictic grammatical category that locates a situation in the external temporal line.⁹ The *pretérito perfecto simple* (preterite) *canté* (‘sang’) and the *imperfecto* (imperfect) *cantaba* (‘sang.IMPF’) constitute the aspectual opposition in Spanish, i.e. the *perfective / imperfective* aspect respectively. Taking into consideration the cognitive approach, Castañeda refers to the *pretérito perfecto simple* and the *imperfecto* as follows:

[...] constituyen dos percepciones alternativas de un mismo proceso. En ambos casos presuponemos un modelo cognitivo sobre la forma en que los distintos tipos de procesos se generan, se desarrollan y concluyen. [...] mientras que el indefinido representa una visión distante o panorámica que abarca el principio, el desarrollo y el término del proceso, el imperfecto representa una visión fragmentaria [...] que no incluye la representación del término o la conclusión del proceso.

([they] are two alternative perceptions of the same process. In both cases, we suppose a cognitive model about the form in which different types of processes are created, developed and concluded. [...] while the preterite [pretérito perfecto simple] represents a distant or panoramic vision containing the beginning, development and the end of the process, the imperfect represents a fragmentary vision [...] which does not include the representation of the end or conclusion of the process; Castañeda 2004: 65)

⁹ According to the speaker’s standpoint, the localization of situations can be understood as previous, simultaneous or posterior to the speaker’s speech moment or to another specific point of time reference which can also be previous, simultaneous or posterior to another situation (cf. Rojo/ Veiga 1999: 2871-2892).

Adopting Langacker's model (1987: 209 and 251) on the difference between the progressive and not-progressive forms in English, Castañeda illustrates the aspectual opposition between the *pretérito perfecto simple cantó* and the *imperfecto cantaba* as follows:

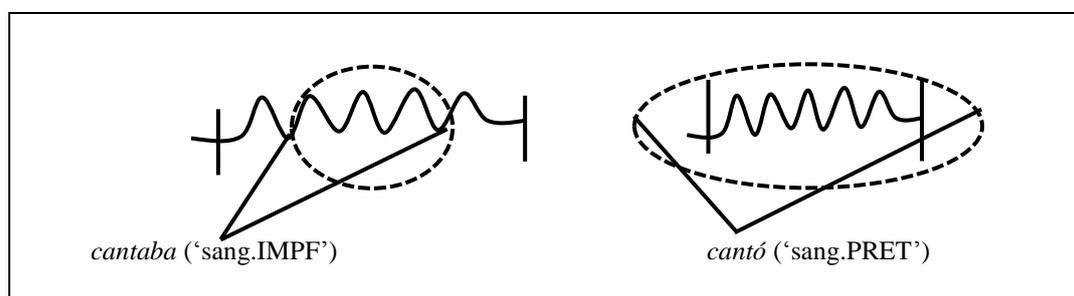


Figure 6. Perspectives on *cantaba* and *canto*. (Castañeda 2004: 66)

Ruiz Campillo (1998: 200) speaks about the *interior and exterior vision* of an event to distinguish the aspectual characteristics of the *imperfecto* (interior vision) and *pretérito perfecto simple* (exterior vision). This concept of *vision* is related to the differentiation between *perfectivity* and *imperfectivity*¹⁰ made by Comrie (1976):

Perfectivity indicates the view of a situation as a single whole, without distinction of the various separate phases that make up that situation; while the *imperfectivity* pays essential attention to the internal structure of the situation. (Comrie 1976: 16)

Due to the imperfectivity of the Spanish *imperfecto* – an action viewed in its course or duration, where no limits of the beginning or the end are determined – an action seems to be non-concluded / non-finished thus changing the meaning of the true reality and building a bridge to modality (cf. also Dessì Schmid 2010, Böhm 2016: 308-311, 321 or Haßler 2016: 345-347). In example (10) we cannot be sure if the action of ‘going’ took place or not because this action was interrupted by the telephone ringing. That is why the *imperfecto* is also called *imperfecto de conato* (‘imperfect of attempt’) or *imperfecto de acción inminente frustrada* (‘imperfect of imminent frustrated action’):

- (10) Yo **salía**, cuando sonó el teléfono. (Gutiérrez Araus 1995)
I was going (IMPF) out when the telephone rang (PRET)

It seems that the lack of time limits regarding the beginning and the end of the action, what Dessì Schmid (2010: 42) also calls *semantic indeterminacy*¹¹, represents the starting point to establish the metonymic relation between the imperfective aspectuality and modality¹². If we read an example like

- (11) **Salían** de viaje el martes próximo. (Reyes 1994: 603)
They went (IMPF) on a trip the next Tuesday
They are about to go on a trip next Tuesday,

¹⁰ For more details on imperfectivity cf. also Böhm (2016).

¹¹ “*Semantic indeterminacy* means that there are no cognitive spatiotemporal limitations on the state of affairs expressed in the imperfect, or at least that these limitations are not focused. This absence of any kind of limitation on the one hand makes the process seem non-concluded [...]” (Dessì Schmid 2010: 42).

¹² Dessì Schmid (2010: 39) argues in favor of the imperfective aspectual feature of the *imperfecto* as a motivating factor of its modal uses: “I take that link to be metonymical, but I will focus [...] on its aspectual (and particularly imperfective), [...]”.

we would understand utterance (11) as being ‘not normal’ because the *imperfecto salían* (3rd Person Plural) does not express any temporal or aspectual value. On the contrary it refers to its *modal* use indicating that the utterance made by the speaker is based on “testimony or utterances from others, for which expressions like ‘I was told / they said that’ [...]” marking the evidence of the information source, can be added (cf. Reyes 1994: 603). In such a case the *imperfecto* would refer to its *quotative* value.

5 The *imperfecto* in terms of modalization and subjectivity

According to Castañeda (2004: 55), Langacker’s elaborated epistemic model (Langacker 1991: 243-249) shows the representation of the reality and its evolution through history according to the conceptualizer’s epistemic spaces or world. In Figure 7, Castañeda visually illustrates the conceptualizer’s epistemic spaces with regard to his reality:

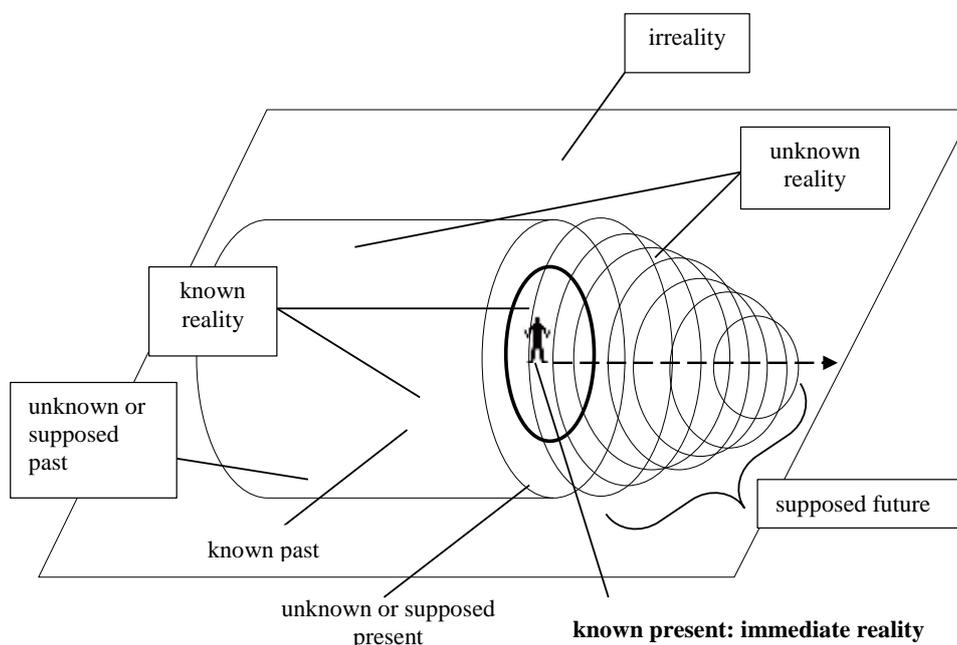


Figure 7. Epistemic spaces in the world represented by the conceptualizer according to Langacker (1991).¹³ (cf. Castañeda 2004: 56)

In this respect Langacker says:

[...] certain situations (or “states of affairs”) are accepted by a particular conceptualizer (C) as being real, whereas others are not. Collectively, the situations accorded that status constitutes C’s conceptions of known reality [...]. Reality is neither simple nor static, but an ever-evolving entity whose evolution continuously augments the complexity of the structure already defined by its previous history: the cylinder depicting it should be imagined as “growing” along the axis indicated by the arrow. The leading edge of this expanding structure (i. e. the face of the cylinder) is termed immediate reality. It is from this vantage point – from reality at the latest stage of its evolution – that C views and he

¹³ Castañeda’s illustration of *epistemic spaces* has been translated into English. Cf. Castañeda (2004: 56) for the Spanish version.

has direct perceptual access only to portions of this region. Irreality comprises everything other than (known) reality. It is important to bear in mind that a situation does not belong to reality or irreality on the basis of how the world has actually evolved, but depends instead on whether the conceptualizer knows and accepts it as being part of that evolutionary sequence. (Langacker 1991: 242-243)

Therefore, we could state that the uses of the *imperfecto* in examples (12) and (13) express the epistemic spaces of the conceptualizer regarding an unknown or supposed reality:

- (12)[...] Sánchez, el director general ejecutivo del Madrid, y el presidente del club, Florentino Pérez, se trasladaron a Milán en la primavera de 2010 para contratar al hombre que les hablaba con voz metálica y tono profético de su conocimiento profundo. **Decía** que sabía cómo desactivar al equipo más perfecto que había existido en las últimas dos décadas. (*El País* 13/03/2012)
[...] Sánchez, the Executive General Director of Madrid and the Club's President, Florentino Pérez, went (PRET) to Milan in spring 2010 to hire the man who spoke (IMPF) to them with a metallic voice and prophetic tone about his deep knowledge. He **said** (IMPF) that he knew (IMPF) how to deactivate the most perfect team which has existed for the last two decades.

In example (12), the use of *decía* ('said.IMPF') indicates that the conceptualizer was not part of the (known immediate) reality. His epistemic world regarding the fact of "knowing how to deactivate the most perfect team" is only a 'supposition' or 'belief' based on what he heard or what he inferred from some evidence (e.g. what others said) about the fact. The same seems to occur in example (13):

- (13)El Ministerio Público **defendía** que Guesalaga realizó un viaje a Venezuela en 2008 en el marco de la colaboración entre ETA y las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC). El objetivo **era** colaborar con la organización colombiana en la encriptación de sus archivos, **aseguraba** el fiscal. (*El Mundo* 02/03/2012)
The Public Ministry defended (IMPF) that Guesalaga **had travelled** (PRET) to Venezuela in 2008 for collaborating between ETA and the Columbian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC). The goal **was** (IMPF) to collaborate with the Columbian organization in encrypting their files, so **maintained** (IMPF) the fiscal.

The *imperfecto* forms *defendía* ('defended.IMPF') and *era* ('was.IMPF') refer to the speaker's (journalist's) standpoint towards his utterance. The journalist is just reproducing utterances from others. Note that at the end of the utterance (13) the author of such information is mentioned: "so maintained the fiscal". By doing so, the journalist shows distance or epistemic precaution from his information and does not take any responsibility for the content of it. In other words, he refers to an utterance said by the fiscal. The journalist seems to reproduce his information based on non-direct evidence, i.e. the access to the reality of this situation seems to be unknown or non-immediate. Thus, it is hardly surprising that the verbs of saying like *asegurar* ('to maintain, to point out'), *decir* ('to say') and *explicar* ('to explain') are likely to appear in the imperfective form (cf. example 14) to show distance from utterances already said by others in the past:

- (14)Asunción López Peláez, de 70 años, **aseguraba** que ni conocía la agresión ni estaba de acuerdo con ella. "Pero es que ellos han empezado algo muy gordo. A mí no me gustan los gais, pero no los ataco", **decía**. Iruza Casteli, de 19 años, **explicaba** que ni aprueba ni condena el intento de quemar la galería. "Los que atacan con fuego reciben fuego", **decía** en referencia a las imágenes de la exposición, que definió como "blasfemas". (*El País* 20/03/2012)

Asunción López Peláez, 70 years old, **maintained** (IMPF) that he neither experienced (IMPF) aggression nor accepted (IMPF) it. “But they have begun with something very bad. I do not like gays but I do not attack them”, he **said** (IMPF). Irauza Casteli, 19 years old, **explained** (IMPF) that she neither approves nor condemns the attempt to burn the gallery. “The ones who attack with fire will receive fire”, she **said** (IMPF) referring to the exhibition’s paintings, which she defined as “blasphemous”.

In terms of modalization and subjectivity it is the intention or attitude of the conceptualizer (journalist) which leads to the use of the *imperfecto* instead of the *pretérito perfecto simple*. Compare the following sentences (14a-c) as counter-examples for (14):

- (14a) Jordana **aseguró** también que la entrega de pagarés a los proveedores a los que se pague a más de 45 días “no conseguirá reducir ningún riesgo [...]” (CREA, La Vanguardia, Industry, 04/05/1994)
*Jordana also **maintained** (PRET) that the promissory notes given to the providers who are paid for more than 45 days “will not reduce any risk [...]”.*
- (14b) El ex gerente de la PSV **dijo**: “Es absolutamente mentira que la cooperativa estuviera en quiebra, ya que tenía patrimonio suficiente”, y **agregó** que también es falso que la UGT “esté quebrada por la actividad de PSV, pues ya lo estaba antes de iniciarse dicha actividad”. (CREA, La Vanguardia, Business, 30/07/1995)
*The ex PSV manager **said** (PRET): “It is absolutely not true that the cooperative is bankrupt, since it had enough assets” and he **added** (PRET) that it is also false that the UGT “is bankrupt because of the PSV’s work, as it was already bankrupt when it began this work”.*
- (14c) En el ámbito geográfico **explicó** que “Galicia se ha convertido en el Finisterre europeo y ello pesa en las decisiones económicas, que se inclinan por un eje centroeuropeo-Mediterráneo”. (CREA, La Voz de Galicia, Economy, 23/11/1991)
*With respect to the geographic area [he] **explained** (PRET) that “Galicia has become the European ‘Finisterre’ and it has a great value in the economic decisions which incline towards a middle European-Mediterranean axis”.*

In examples (14a-c) we can see that the use of the *preterite* suits well when referring to situations or utterances expressed in the past. The use of the *imperfecto*, however, leads to slight changes or hiding the whole truth of the situation / reality being described, especially when perfective and punctual verbs¹⁴ like *morir* (‘to die’), *resultar* (‘to be, to get’) and *disparar* (‘to fire’) are used in the imperfective form:

- (15) En otro atentado con coche bomba, en la ciudad de Musayib, a unos 30 kilómetros de Hilla, **moría** un agente de policía y otras dos personas **resultaban** heridas. (CREA, El Mundo, Internacional, 01/03/2005)
*In another attack with a car bomb, in the city of Musayib some 30 km from Hilla, a police officer **died** (IMPF) and two more people **got** (IMPF) wounded.*
- (16) Un soldado croata **disparaba** ayer con antiaéreos contra posiciones terrestres serbias situadas a 200 metros [...]. (CREA, La Vanguardia, Ciencia Militar, 02/05/1995)
*Yesterday, a Croatian soldier **fired** (IMPF) anti-aircrafts against Serbian strongholds situated 200 meters [...].*

¹⁴ According to lexical-semantic meaning of the verbs, i.e. *Aktionsart*, verbs like ‘to die’, ‘to get’, ‘to fire’, etc. are punctual and perfective in their intrinsic meaning because they reach their completion or get to an internal limit of conclusion in contrast to other verbs like ‘to sleep’, ‘to read’, etc. which are durative without internal limits of conclusion.

If the journalist uses the *imperfecto* (examples 15-16) to dissociate himself from his utterances or for not taking responsibility for the veracity of the content of his information reproduced or for indicating that information was obtained from others, we can observe that it is the conceptualizer's subjective decision of choosing the *imperfecto* to describe a reality or situation from his standpoint. In examples (15-16) one could state the following questions: "Did these situations really occur or not?", "Can we say that somebody was dying or getting wounded (cf. example 15) when this situation really occurred in the past?", or "Can we even say that a soldier was firing or was he about to fire yesterday?". We think that there are pragmatic reasons for which the conceptualizer (journalist) – depending on the context – uses the *imperfecto* instead of other perfective forms. For example, Díaz Salgado (2000) refers to the *imperfecto periodístico* ('journalistic imperfect') when Spanish journalists use the *imperfecto* to hide the true reality and to cause pragmatic effects like 'suspect', 'speculation' or 'doubt' in the reader. That is the case when the *imperfecto* is used in financial and stock exchange reports, especially in connection with numbers and sales figures (example 17):

- (17) Al acabar el pasado mes de agosto, la deuda de la Administración central **ascendía** a 44,8 billones de pesetas. La mayor parte de la misma está emitida a corto plazo, en [...] (CREA, *El País*, Economy, 30/09/1997)
At the end of the last month August, the debt of the Central Administration rose (IMPF) to 44, 8 billion pesetas. The biggest part of them was issued in short-dated, in [...]

In example (18) we will see that the *pretérito perfecto simple* does not cause the same pragmatic effect as the *imperfecto* in (17) because "the increase of the debt to 44.8 billion pesetas" is understood as a real and true fact:

- (18) Al acabar el pasado mes de agosto, la deuda de la Administración central **ascendió** a 44,8 billones de pesetas. La mayor parte de la misma está emitida a corto plazo, en [...] *At the end of the last month August, the debt of the Central Administration rose (PRET) to 44, 8 billion pesetas. The biggest part of them was issued in short-dated, in [...]*

For that reason, we will try to apply Langacker's elaborated epistemic model and represent visually the cognitive processes of the conceptualizer by using the *imperfecto* (Figure 8) in some contexts (where a perfective form is to be expected, cf. examples 4, 9 and 13-17) and how the recipient (reader) conceptualizes a specific situation described by the *imperfecto* (Figure 9).

- 1) In Figure 8 we visually represent the cognitive processes of the conceptualizer towards his utterance which is produced on the basis of his epistemic knowledge of the state of affairs. For this purpose, we will take representative examples (15-17) in which the modal and quotative function of the *imperfecto* is implicitly marked:

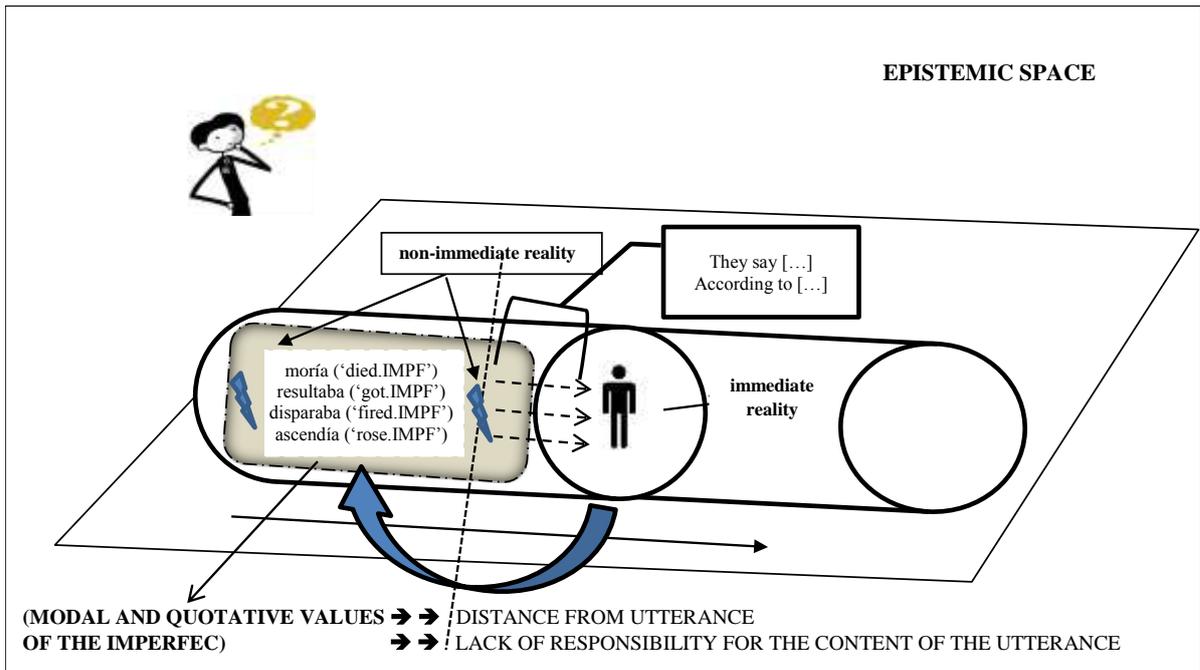


Figure 8. Conceptualization of the reality (situation) to be produced by the conceptualizer (journalist).

2) In Figure 9 we can see how the reader conceptualizes the information described by the *imperfecto*. It is possible that the reader thinks that the information is 'not really true' (doubt) or he considers it to be a speculation. For this purpose, see also examples 15-17:

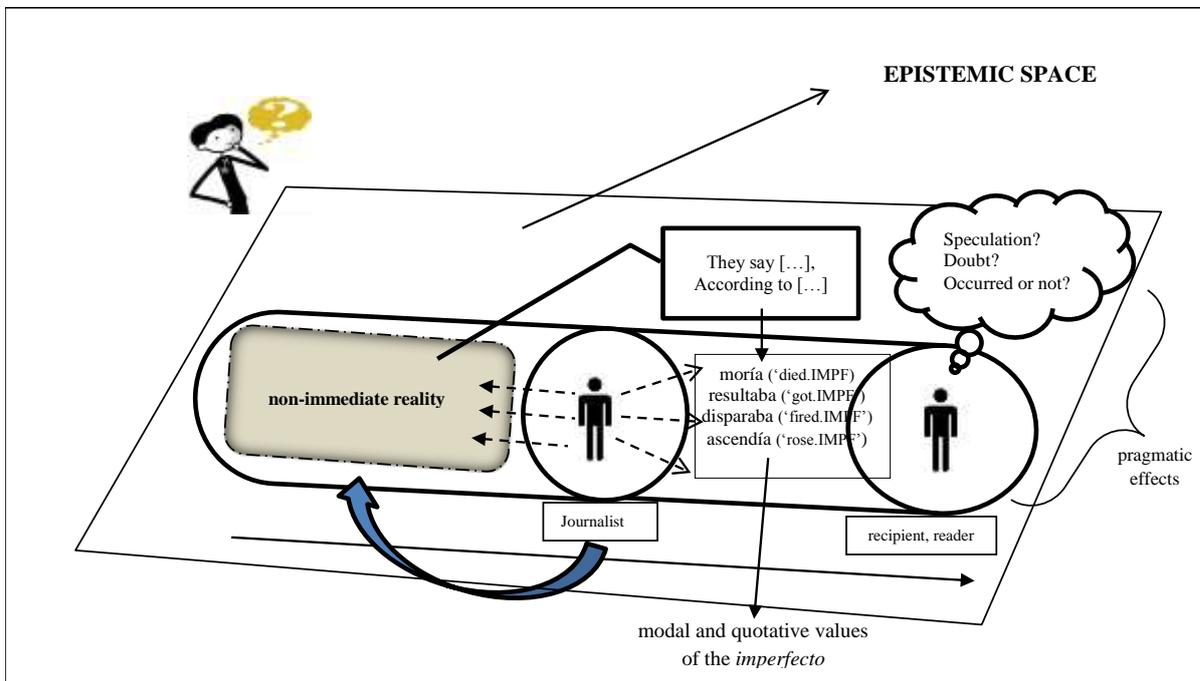


Figure 9. Conceptualization of the reality (information) received by the conceptualizer-recipient.

On the other hand, it is also interesting to show some examples in which the *imperfecto* is used in connection with cognitive verbs such as *creo que* ('I believe that [...]') as in example 19), *pensando que* ('Thinking that [...]') in example 20), *consideraba que* ('I considered.IMPF

that [...]’ in example 21) as well as with evidential expressions like *según las fuentes consultadas* (‘according to the consulted sources’ in example 22) or *según los datos* (‘according to the information [...]’ in example 23):

- (19) “En un país con cinco millones de parados quienes tienen un empleo fijo y seguro y tienen una horquilla legal de entre 18 y 21 horas lectivas (semanales), el subir a 20 horas creo que era algo no solo recomendable, **era** un imperativo moral en estos momentos en que tantas familias españolas lo están pasando tan mal”, ha aseverado la presidenta. (*El País* 22/03/2012)
“In a country with five million unemployed people who have a regular and secure job and a legal margin between 18 and 21 teaching (weekly) hours, I believe that the increase to 20 hours was (IMPF) not only recommendable, [but it] was (IMPF) a moral need in these moments where many Spanish families go through bad times”, the President said.
- (20) Tenía preparado el tique por si acaso venía [José]. [Camps] Se acercó a la caja. Yo, pensando que venía a pedirme el tique o a decirme cómo iba a pagar, pero se acercó y simplemente me dio la mano y se fue”. (*El País* 21/03/2012)
He got (IMPF) the ticket ready in case [José] was coming (IMPF). [Camps] came closer the counter. I was thinking (gerund) he would come (IMPF) to ask me for the ticket or to tell me how he would pay (IMPF), but he came closer and simply shook my hand and left”.
- (21) ‘Es de total confianza’ La Guardia Civil consideraba que el acusado **era** el responsable informático de la banda [...] (*El Mundo* 02/03/2012)
‘He is trustworthy’. The Civil Guard estimated (IMPF) that the accused was (IMPF) the responsible computer expert for the gang [...]
- (22) Según las fuentes consultadas en el congreso, el resultado **era** tan apretado que ha habido que repetir el recuento en varias ocasiones. (*El Mundo* 02/03/2012)
According to the consulted sources at the congress, the result was (IMPF) so close that the votes had to be counted again and again on several occasions.
- (23) El número de españoles que viajaban en el ‘Costa Concordia’, que encalló el viernes por la noche frente a las costas de la isla de Giglio (centro de Italia), **era** de 177, según datos de la compañía naviera, cifra que la embajada de España no acaba de confirmar. (*El Mundo* 18/02/2012)
The number of Spanish passengers traveling on the “Costa Concordia” which run aground on Friday night off the coast of Giglio island (Middle Italy), was (IMPF) 177, according to the information of the shipping company, a number which has not yet been confirmed by the Spanish embassy.

In cognitive terms we can also say that the *imperfecto* is used to show the conceptualizer’s epistemic world regarding his belief, thought or supposition about a certain, non-immediate situation (reality).

6 Conclusion

The imperfective aspectuality of the *imperfecto*, i.e. its semantic indeterminacy, opens the possibility to understand the action as non-concluded thus obtaining a modalized meaning. As we have seen before, the conceptualizer (journalist) seems to use the *imperfecto* whenever he wants to indicate that the information was obtained from others (quotative function of the *imperfecto*) either showing distance from his utterances or not assuming any responsibility for

it. Therefore, the subjective decision of the conceptualizer to use the *imperfecto* instead of other perfective forms is due to his attitude or standpoint towards his epistemic knowledge of the reality or situation to be produced. In most cases, the conceptualizer implicitly marks that his access to or knowledge of the reality described was non-immediate, as he obtained it from other sources (cf. examples 22-23). Moreover, when using the *imperfecto*, the conceptualizer intends to create some pragmatic effects in the reader such as doubt or speculation so that the reader cannot be ‘strongly affected’ because of such news. Finally, by means of the *imperfecto* he can also implicitly manifest his way of thinking regarding a state of affairs such as in examples 19-21, in which the *imperfecto* appears with cognitive verbs like *creer* (‘believe’), *pensar* (‘think’) and *considerar* (‘estimate’).

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