

## Chapter 14: The Imperfeito/Perfeito distinction and how to convey it in English

One might wonder whether Imperfeito has not been sufficiently discussed in this thesis to deserve another chapter. In fact, it was thoroughly studied in Chapter 10: It was observed from a monolingual point of view, and it was investigated contrastively when marked English devices were involved. However, it should not be forgotten that 623 out of the 1102 Imperfeitos translate into English simple past, nor that -- as is stated in every textbook --, Imperfeito is in paradigmatic opposition with Perfeito. It is, in fact, widely asserted that Imperfeito is an instance of the (crosslinguistically valid) imperfective / perfective opposition. English does not mark this opposition, and hence the fact that also 690 out of the 768 Perfeitos were rendered by the simple past.

This chapter is concerned both with the Imperfeito/Perfeito distinction in Portuguese and with its rendering in English. (Note as well that, until now, Perfeito, the second most frequent tense in the corpus, has hardly been mentioned at all -- it was mainly discussed in connection with *já* and translation into present perfect).

To study these matters, I will first look into statives in Sections 14.1 to 14.2, leaving the remaining cases for Sections 14.3 and 14.4. The reason for this separation is that in both languages statives behave differently: On the one hand, the Imperfeito/Perfeito distinction with statives has a different role in Portuguese; on the other hand, English statives are known to differ from other expressions in their behaviour with the progressive.

To look for statives in Perfeito or Imperfeito in a corpus of almost 2,000 potential candidates, however, (or alternatively, to look for English statives in the simple past), I had no choice but to restrict myself to the most frequent and typical statives, namely *ser* and *estar* in Portuguese, and *be* in English (remember, furthermore, that those were the only ones annotated separately in the annotation task).

### 14.1 Imperfeito and Perfeito with statives and their translation

In Table 14.1, I display the translation of the Portuguese verbs *ser* and *estar* as main verbs, of which there were 442 and 77 in the corpus, respectively.

Table 14.1

ser	442	Imperfeito	219	simple past	205
		Perfeito	36	simple past	33
estar	77	Imperfeito	41	simple past	37
		Perfeito	2	simple past	2

As can be observed, Imperfeito is by far preferred with these verbs. However, English

seems to neutralize this fourfold distinction by using *be* in the simple past.<sup>1</sup>

Now, there is a good reason to have two copulas in Portuguese (or, alternatively, the existence of two copulas neatly illustrates it), namely the deep ontological distinction made in Portuguese between temporary and permanent states (see Santos (1993) on the subject). *Estar* corresponds to temporary properties, while *ser* denotes permanent ones.

In the opposition Perfeito/Imperfeito with permanent states, Perfeito is clearly marked and can be described as having two distinct meanings:

(i) it may mean that the property is now over, i.e., the situation it describes is wholly in the (remote) past, as in: *Ele foi um homem bom* ('He was a good man, (but he is no longer a man, i.e., he must be dead)');

(ii) it may mean that there was an event of instantiating that property, as in *Ele foi simpático* ('he was nice', meaning "that was nice of him"), or, somewhat differently, that that property held of an event, as the English paraphrase shows.

This latter case is commonly cited in the literature on English in connection with the use of the progressive with states, cf. *He is being nice*.

The former case could probably be rendered explicitly in English by "used to". It is nevertheless interesting to note that a similar distinction is also often cited concerning the opposition simple past vs. present perfect, as illustrated by the pairs *He has been good* vs. *He was good*, or *He has loved her* vs. *He loved her*. In both example pairs, it has been claimed that, when 'he' was dead, only the simple past is felicitous. However, and this is important to stress, Imperfeito does not correspond to English present perfect at all: *Ele era bom* ('He was good') and *Ele gostava dela* ('He loved her') are simply assertions of a past property. Imperfeito can neither describe a period up to the present, nor an existential perfect, which would have to be rendered in Portuguese respectively by *Ele tem sido bom* ('He has been good up to now') and *Ele já foi bom* ('He has been good, once'), *Ele já gostou dela* ('He has loved her, once').

Both cases are thus clearly situations where the same conceptual distinction can be found in the two languages, but in different parts of the system. (Recall that a similar observation has been done in Chapter 12 above.)

Let me now investigate whether the distinctions expressed by Imperfeito/Perfeito with stative verbs go through into English. First, I look at the 36 sentences with *ser* in Perfeito to confirm the theoretical analysis just presented, and to look for overt correlations of it in the English text.

#### 14.1.1 Perfeito with *ser* and its translation

Thirteen occurrences of *ser* in Perfeito are in cleft constructions (maintained in English except for the interrogative ones) and do not therefore concern us here, given that the tense is

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<sup>1</sup> I should perhaps clarify that, in most cases, only a twofold distinction is at play in Portuguese. While one can say *ele foi/era/esteve/estava doente* ('He was sick'), predicative NPs require *ser*, cf. *ele era professor / ele foi professor* ('he was a teacher'), and human location require *estar*, cf. *Ele estava em Lisboa / ele esteve em Lisboa* ('he was in Lisbon').

grammatically constrained to agree with that of the main clause; cf. e.g.:

*mas foi o que eles ouviram*  
*but that's what they heard*  
'but that was what they heard'

Other seven cases indicate a (definite) temporal location; cf. e.g.:

*Não foi, portanto, nessa hora que o meu divino Mestre nasceu de novo [...] ?*  
*Wouldn't that be, therefore, the very hour when my divine Master was born again*  
*[...] ?*  
'Wasn't thus on that time that my divine Master was born anew [...] ?'

*Dizes que isso foi há quarenta anos*  
*You say this happened forty years ago.*  
'You say that was forty years ago'

This was an interesting observation which is rarely made explicit, namely that *ser* is used to indicate temporal location.

Then, four cases were found that actually corresponded to remote properties, in the sense of being definite and completed before the moment of speech, thus demonstrating my case (i) above:

*ele foi das poucas pessoas [...] que às vezes se esqueceu que eu era o Imperador*  
*he was one of the few people [...] who at times forgot I was the emperor*  
'he was one of the few persons [...] who sometimes forgot that I was the emperor'

*a minha condição de cidadão romano, que meu Mestre não foi*  
*my Roman citizenship, which my Master did not have*  
'my condition of Roman citizen, which my Master was not'

*quando foste o pretor de Antióquia*  
*when you were praetor of Antioch*

*que foi um dos heróis das Campanhas da Ocupação*  
*who was one of the heroes of the Campaigns of Occupation*

It is relevant, in this connection, to note that they could not have been phrased in Imperfeito without considerable change of meaning.

Then, nine cases corresponded to the attribution of properties to definite instances, events or actions, i.e., fell under the description given above for case (ii):

*Foi um erro monstruoso que é preciso corrigir*  
*It's all a monstrous mistake that must be set right*  
'It was a terrible mistake that it is necessary to correct'

*Foste então o instrumento do amor dos deuses*  
*Then you were the instrument of the gods' love*  
'You were thus the instrument of the love of the gods'

*não foi promessa minha*  
*it was no promise of mine*  
'it was not a promise of mine'

*Foi bonito?*  
*Was it pretty?*

*diga como foi!*  
*tell me how it went*  
*'tell how it was!'*

The first five were individuated through previous discourse. The next four were introduced by the clause itself (in all cases the subject):

*as horas da noite foram [...] uma distração contínua*  
*the night hours provided a continuous distraction*  
*'the night hours were a neverending fun'*

*O estremeção foi tal*  
*The shuddering was such*

*O desbastar do tronco [...] foi quase divertido*  
*the paring of the trunk [...] was almost fun*

*O transporte foi agradabilíssimo*  
*The carrying of the trunk was very pleasant.*  
*'The transportation was most pleasant'*

Interestingly, one case was found in which, in addition to the past event interpretation just illustrated (case (ii)), one could interpret it describing a remote property (case (i)) instead:

*o padre dá a absolvição, se fomos virtuosos e piedosos*  
*the priest gives absolution, if we were virtuous and pious.*

This sentence can be read as attributing a property to one's definite (and completed) instance of life, or "we" are already over (the life is considered as being over) and that is why "our" properties are expressed in *Perfeito*.

One can, in fact, subsume the two cases (i) and (ii) by saying that they both concern totally past things, some very temporary in nature (like the paring of a trunk), some very permanent (such as one's life). I.e., what *Perfeito* seems to contribute is "over". Then, depending on its argument, what is over can range from a naturally completed event to the subject himself of whom a property is predicted.

As far as events instantiating a property of an action of a human subject (like *Ele foi simpático*), there were no cases, except if one wants to interpret the remaining sentence in that reading:

*eu nunca fui popular com os meus amigos*  
*I was never popular with my friends*  
*'I have never been popular with my friends'*

One may note that this sentence may convey quantification over previous instances, or else describe a property holding for an extended now. In either case, it should be noted that *nunca* ('never') reverts markedness, and thus it would be *Imperfeito* which would be marked in this case.

### 14.1.2 Perfeito com *estar* and its translation

Now, as far as temporary states are concerned, the opposition Perfeito/Imperfeito has purely to do with discourse: Imperfeito presupposes a given time, Perfeito asserts it. In other words, Imperfeito is anaphoric, while Perfeito is definite.

This is obviously true of the two only examples, which introduce as new information the location or manner of location of a person. Imperfeito could not be used in either case:

*Esteve hoje cá o Padre Manuel*  
*Padre Manuel was here today*

*assim esteve um longo tempo*  
*thus he stood for a long time*  
*'thus he was for a long time'*

### 14.2 Imperfeito and Perfeito as translations of *be*

Let me now look at the translations of *be*. Before, I should note that *be* in English has different aspectual properties than its Portuguese counterparts. In particular, it has an inceptive use, illustrated by Moens's (1987:82) example and my translation:

*When Harry broke that vase Sue was in an extremely bad mood -> Quando o Harry partiu o tal jarro a Sue ficou de péssimo humor.*

I begin by presenting the distribution of *be* between Imperfeito and Perfeito translations:

Table 14.2

be	simple past	333	Imperfeito	264
			Perfeito	27
			Mais que perfeito	11
			Prep. phrase	6

The first relevant remark is that in English there are half as many occurrences of *be* in the past as in Portuguese, namely 333 out of 3744 English tensed clauses (8.9%) against 519 out of 3257 Portuguese tensed clauses (15.9%). This may be related to a richer lexical encoding of position in English, and, in addition, to the generally less important status of states in this language.

#### 14.2.1 Perfeito as translation of *be*

Let me first look at the Perfeito translations: The vast majority did not involve *ser* or *estar*. In fact, none involved *estar*, and of the six (6) containing *ser*, five (5) were cleft constructions. The remaining case contained a clear loss in translation:

*And he drank a little pulque and that was breakfast*  
*Bebeu um pouco de pulque. E foi o seu pequeno almoço.*  
*'He drank a little of pulque. And that was his breakfast (then).'*

In fact, the Portuguese sentence is about a particular instance of eating (saying that such

instance constituted Kino's breakfast), and thus failed to convey that this was generally Kino's breakfast, which I believe the English sentence does (as well).

Two cases were then translated by the verb *haver*, standard translation of *there be*.

The most interesting observation was, however, that most translations of *be* involving Perfeito conveyed either inchoativeness or perception.

I begin by presenting the inchoative translations:

*But Kino **was** in motion  
mas Kino **começou** a mexer-se  
'But Kino started to move'*

*And suddenly he **was** afraid of his talking  
E, de repente, **assustou-se** com os próprios pensamentos  
'And, suddenly, his own thoughts frightened him'*

*Now uncertainty **was** in Kino  
A dúvida **apoderou-se** de Kino.  
'The doubt took over Kino.'*

*The crowd **was** silent now, fearing to miss a word,  
Depois, **ficou** silenciosa, com medo de perder uma palavra,  
'Then, it became silent, afraid of missing a word,'*

*And she **was** silent, for his voice was command.  
Ela **calou-se**, porque a voz dele era uma ordem.  
'She shut up, because his voice was an order.'*

*Her goading struck into his brain; his lips snarled and his eyes **were** fierce again.  
Estas perguntas incisivas chegaram-lhe ao cérebro; os lábios entreabriram-se e os olhos de novo se **tornaram** duros:  
'These incisive questions came to his brain; the lips opened and the eyes again became hard:'*

In the following cases, not only inchoativity is conveyed, but also the action leading to the result state (expressed in English by *be*) is made explicit:

*Now the tension which had been growing in Juana boiled up to the surface and her lips **were** thin  
A angústia que tinha estado a formar-se no coração de Joana veio então à superfície e **pôs-lhe** os lábios brancos.  
'The anguish that had been forming in Juana's heart came then to the surface and put her lips white.'*

*Instantly Juana **was** on her feet and her hand lay on his arm.  
De um salto, Joana **pôs-se** de pé e pousou a mão no braço de Kino.  
'With a jump, Juana stood up and put down her hand on Kino's arm.'*

*... he watched the blue shadow of the mountain move out across the brushy desert below until it reached the Gulf, and the long twilight of the shadow **was** over the land.  
Kino **ficou** a ver a sombra azul da montanha deslocar-se, lá em baixo, pelo*

*matagal fora, até atingir o Golfo. Nessa altura o vasto crepúsculo de sombra cobriu a Terra.*

'Kino kept seeing the blue shadow of the mountain move, down there, through the woods, until reaching the Gulf. At that time the vast twilight of shadow covered the Earth.'

Alternatively, other translations make perception explicit:

*Kino held the great pearl in his hand, and it **was** warm and alive in his hand.*

*Kino apertou a pérola na mão e **sentiu**-a quente e viva.*

'Kino clasped the pearl in the hand and felt it warm and alive.'

*His eyes **were** soft and warm on her then,*

*Ele **contemplou** a mulher, terna e afectuosamente,*

'He contemplated his wife, tender and affectionately.'

The former examples involved physical perception, but this phenomenon was more common with intimate, or intellectual, perception:

*Kino **was** afraid as a man is afraid who says*

*Kino **sentiu** medo, como sente medo o homem que diz*

'Kino felt fear, as feels fear the man who says'

*Suddenly Kino **was** afraid.*

*Nessa altura, Kino **sentiu** um medo súbito.*

'Then, Kino felt a sudden fear'

*He looked then for weakness in her face, for fear or irresolution, and there **was** none.*

*Ele procurou então no rosto da mulher fraqueza, medo ou irresolução. Nada disso **achou**.*

'He searched then in his wife's face weakness, fear or irresolution. Nothing of that did he find.'

*He looked into its surface and it **was** gray and ulcerous.*

*Mirou-lhe a superfície e **achou**-a cinzenta e ulcerada.*

'He watched its surface and found it gray and ulcerous.'

It should be noted, however, that inchoativeness and perception are more intimately related than it may seem at first sight: Inchoativeness may stem from a perceptually situated perspective. In other words, those staves to which one must give an inchoative plus continuing interpretation may signal that the story is being told through someone's perspective. The Portuguese translator had then the choice of making the perspective explicit, or to fill in the missing bits of the story.

This gives support to Caenepeel's (1989) contention about staves in English, namely, that staves convey perspective, but it does not allow one to apply it to Portuguese as well, since the main staves in this language do not accept this perspective use as easily (if at all).

Only in two cases the translation by Perfeito did not add inchoativeness:

*The trackers **were** long in coming,*

*Os batedores **levaram** tempo a chegar.*

'The trackers took time to arrive.'

*For a moment his body was black in the cave entrance, crouched and silent, and then he was gone.*

*Por um instante, o corpo recortou-se-lhe, negro, na entrada da gruta, atento e silencioso. Depois -- saiu.*

'For a moment, his body was silhouetted, back, at the cave entrance, attentive and silent. Then -- he went out.'

This is very probably due to the explicit mention of duration (*long*, or short: *for a moment*). In that case, *Perfeito* is again the unmarked case. Were the first sentence to be interpreted as a subjective statement, then it would be more accurately rendered by *Imperfeito*.

Finally, the last instance of inchoative translation is, in my opinion, a mistranslation:

*The wind blew freshly into the estuary, a nervous, restless wind with the smell of storm on its breath, and there was change and uneasiness in the air.*

*Um vento frio, irrequieto, arrastando consigo o cheiro da tempestade, soprou no estuário. A instabilidade e a inquietação ficaram no ar.*

'A cold and restless wind dragging the smell of tempest, blew in the estuary. Instability and inquietude remained in the air.'

The translator interpreted the second clause as the result, while I read it as co-description, suggesting therefore as alternative translation for the two clauses an *Imperfeito* rendering: *O vento soprava frio no estuário, um vento nervoso e agitado com cheiro de tempestade, e havia mudança e inquietação no ar* ('The wind blew cold in the estuary, a nervous, restless wind with smell of tempest, and there was change and inquietude in the air').

This case of *be* translation is thus very interesting, because it displays a covert aspectual distinction in English, that of inchoative states, which requires a different machinery in Portuguese altogether, and is, in fact, signalled overtly by the translation of simple past *be* by *Perfeito*.

There is, incidentally, a Portuguese verb with similar aspectual properties, i.e., vague between the durative description of a state and its inception, namely *ficar*. However, it was only used twice in the translation, because, I believe, of its comparatively much lower frequency.

Summing up, the main distinction between *Imperfeito* and *Perfeito* with statives is completely irrelevant when coming from English, which does not express it. By contrast, what emerges clearly is the aspectual difference present in *be*, which gets translated by a combination of tense (*Perfeito*) and lexical items.

#### 14.2.2 *Perfeito* with *ser* in translated text

Note that my description above does not imply that there are no instances of *Perfeito* with statives in the translated text. It only asserts that they do not translate simple past *be*. I thus looked into cases of *ser* and *estar* in *Perfeito* in translated Portuguese which do not originate from simple past *be*, which were only six:

*"It is lucky that I know about the poison of the scorpion*

*-Foi uma felicidade eu conhecer o veneno do lacrau.*

'It was a luck I know the poison of the scorpion.'

The first one reduces a general statement of luck to a past event which is described as

lucky. The Portuguese translation is idiomatic, and is a case of "attribution of properties to definite instances" as described above.

The three following ones correspond simply to clefting introduced by the translator. This is an interesting feature, possibly uncovering different rethorical styles altogether, but which I will leave for further study. (In any case, it should be noted that Portuguese allows topicalization of adverbials, i.e., the order of the English sentences is not grammatically blocked in Portuguese.)

*and brought it to his sleeping mat, and under his sleeping mat he dug another little hole in the dirt floor and buried his pearl and covered it up again.*

*Levou-a para a esteira onde dormia e **foi** debaixo dela que abriu um novo buraco onde enfiou a pérola e que logo tapou*

'he took it to the mat where he slept and it was under it that he opened a new hole where he stuck the pearl and which he at once covered'

*Then from the corner of the house came a sound*

***Foi** nessa altura que, no canto da casa, se começou a ouvir um ruído*

'It was at that moment that, in the corner of the house, people began to hear a sound'

*and so it had come to Kino.*

*e **foi** assim que lhe veio parar às mãos.*

'and it was thus that it had come to his hands.'

The remaining case, most interestingly, features the attribution of an instance to a permanent subject, illustrating precisely the situation of case (ii) which was missing in Portuguese source text (cf. Section 14.1.1 above):

*and the Father made that very clear. The loss of the pearl was a punishment visited on those who tried to leave their station. And the Father made it clear that each man and woman is like a soldier*

*O padre **foi** bem claro a esse respeito: o desaparecimento das pérolas era um castigo para aqueles que tentavam abandonar o seu posto. O Padre **foi** bem claro: um homem, ou uma mulher, é como um soldado*

'The priest was crystal clear about it: the disappearance of the pearls was a punishment for those who tried to quit their post. The priest was crystal clear: a man, or a woman, is like a soldier'

The priest is not said to be *claro* ('intelligible', 'crystal clear') in general, but only in that occasion.

### 14.3 Imperfeito and Perfeito of non-statives translated

If one considers, now, the picture that emerges without copulas, one finds a rather different distribution of the match between simple past and the two past tenses in Portuguese: simple past only translates 381 out of the 842 remaining Imperfeitos (45.2%), while it is used for 655 out of the 730 Perfeitos (89.7%), showing thus that simple past is much closer in use to Perfeito than to Imperfeito.

To investigate the issue in more detail, two different paths can be followed: (i) the study of the marked translation of the two elements of the pair, i.e., to analyse the translation of

Imperfeito into the progressive, gerund, modals, etc., and the translation of Perfeito into present perfect, modals, etc.; and (ii) the study of those cases (which constitute the vast majority) where both Imperfeito and Perfeito are rendered by English simple past.

### 14.3.1 The marked translations of Imperfeito and Perfeito

The marked translations of Imperfeito have already been discussed in detail in Section 10.3.2. The analysis of those of Perfeito, on the other hand, was scattered among Section 12.4 (present perfect), Section 11.3.1 (*could*) and Section 13.2.4 (past perfect). Translation into passive was also discussed in passing in Chapter 13.

For the sake of completeness, I will briefly analyse the few remaining cases.

#### 14.3.1.1 Perfeito to Presente

There were six cases of Perfeito translated by simple present, two of them simply reflecting a different grammatical rule as far as clefting is concerned; cf.:

*Mas foi o que eles ouviram.*  
*But that's what they heard.*  
'But that was what they heard.'

*foi a Encarnação quem o viveu a ele.*  
*it is the Incarnation that has lived him.*  
'it was the Incarnation who lived him.'

Another case illustrates clearly the higher relevance of the result than of the action itself:

*Ceguei por isso mesmo.*  
*That's why I'm here.*  
'I arrived exactly for that reason.'

One case involves historical present, which is consistently used in the English translation, but not in the Portuguese original. This example illustrates well, incidentally, the difficulties of translating the style of a narrative:

*Meti a chave à porta, entrei sentindo o calafrio do costume e, quando ia no primeiro lanço de escada, ouço um estardalhaço em casa dos vizinhos, a porta deles a abrir-se, e a mulher veio direita a mim*  
*I put the key in the door, felt the usual shudder as I entered, and, as I start up the first flight of stairs, I hear a racket at the next door neighbors', their door opens and the woman comes directly to me*  
'I put the key in the door, entered feeling the usual shudder and, when I was in the first stairflight, I hear a confusion at the neighbour's house, their door opening, and the woman came in my direction'

The next case is of a past delimited assertion rendered in English as a present rule, to which the use of *sempre* ('always'), together with a relative clause in Presente, had certainly a large impact in the choice:

*Sempre insisti nisso em tudo quanto escrevo.*  
*I always insist on this in everything I write.*  
'I have always insisted on that in everything I write.'

In fact, the preposed position of *sempre* seems to indicate a property holding in an extended now interval, and thus the Presente tense in the relative clause. Another tense agreeing with the meaning of the main clause would have been the PPC, but it would then depict the activity of writing as temporary and/or recent, contrary to the essential property of "my" writing that was to be conveyed. This complex combination of meanings might be expressible in English as *Whenever I write, I have insisted on that*, but I am afraid that this is a far less natural English sentence than the one suggested by the translator.

Finally, the last case may also be due to the combination of Perfeito and Presente in the same sentence; cf. the already mentioned example:

*Foi um erro monstruoso que é preciso corrigir.*  
*It's all a monstrous mistake that must be set right.*  
'It was a terrible mistake that it is necessary to correct.'

It features, in my opinion, a poor translation, because the English sentence fails to refer explicitly to the previously mentioned event (the attempt to burn Rome), and thus the whole utterance can be interpreted, rather, as identifying as a mistake the assertion that it was the Christians who were involved.

#### 14.3.1.2 Perfeito to gerund

There were three cases of Perfeito translated into gerund, all concerning a sequence of several actions:

*Marco Semprônio passou devagar por entre os coxins dispersos, **alçou** cuidadosamente as pernas por sobre um escravo estendido e nu, que já devia estar morto, e reclinou-se, alargando o manto, ao lado do imperador.*  
*Marcus Sempronius made his way slowly among the scattered cushions, **stepping** carefully over the legs of an outstretched and naked slave--who must have already been dead--and lay down, spreading out his mantle, next to the emperor.*  
'Marcus Sempronius went by slowly among the dispersed benches, lifted carefully the legs over a naked slave lying, who must already be dead, and reclined, loosening the mantle, beside the emperor.'

*Apurando a vista, examinou-o minuciosamente, e **deteve** os olhos no pequeno golpe no pescoço,*  
*Concentrating his gaze, he examined him minutely, **detaining** his eyes on the small cut on his neck,*  
'Straining his eyes, he examined him minutely, and stopped the eyes on the small cut in the neck,'

*Pelo seu pé, dizia-lhe o demônio, que logo **acrescentou** que o acompanharia, para ajudá-lo a regressar mais depressa, acabada a execução.*  
*On foot, the demon told him, soon **adding** that he would accompany him to help him return more quickly once the execution was over.*  
'Walking, was the demon telling him, who at once added that he would accompany him, in order to help him return more quickly, finished the execution'

The English translation describes the action in question as making part of the one previously mentioned, while Portuguese indicates clearly that it follows it. The only difference

between the first two examples and the third is that in this latter there is an explicit contrast between Imperfeito of *dizer* ('tell') and Perfeito of *acrescentar* ('add'), thus supporting some tense change in the English translation, contrary to the sequence of Perfeitos in the other cases.

#### 14.3.1.3 Perfeito to conditional

Finally, two cases were translated by the English conditional, both of which were negated. These examples are very interesting, because they illustrate some of the very few cases where Portuguese is more direct than English:

*Não foi, portanto, nessa hora que o meu divino Mestre nasceu de novo, pela segunda vez, na plena integridade do seu Ser?*

*Wouldn't that be, therefore, the very hour when my divine Master was born again, for the second time, in the full integrity of his Being?*

'Wasn't it thus then that my divine Master was born again, for the second time, in the full integrity of his Being?'

The first case asks explicitly for a confirmation -- and the English text asks it in a more polite, less affirmative, way. Possibly, a question tag translation would be more faithful: *It was thus then that [...], wasn't it?*

The second example involves apparently the same cognitive action, *imagine*, which seems, however, to have different aspectual properties, as well as appropriateness conditions, in the two languages (or at least in negative contexts):

*Não imaginei, porém, que fosse preciso vir da Síria conspirar em Roma, Saulo...*

*I wouldn't have imagined, however, that it was necessary to come from Syria to conspire in Rome, Saul....*

'I did not imagine, however, that it was necessary to come from Syria to conspire in Rome, Saul...'

In fact, the Portuguese Perfeito can describe both an extended now and every possible past occasion where he could have wondered about it. By contrast, the English rendering refers to a hypothetical imagination activity, actually conditional relative to an unexpressed "if you hadn't told me", which is, moreover, placed in the past by the perfect form.

These are, obviously, cases that can only be identified by looking at real instances of translation; no competence rules could *a priori* be adduced.

#### 14.3.2 Translation of Imperfeito and Perfeito into English simple past

Before I begin analysing the cases where Imperfeito and Perfeito were translated by English simple past, I should present in general traits the paradigmatic relations between Perfeito and Imperfeito for non-statives, as well as single out some possible cases where they do not compete.<sup>2</sup>

##### 14.3.2.1 Brief description of the Imperfeito/Perfeito opposition

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<sup>2</sup> Competition of aspects, a concept dear to Slavic aspectologists, denotes those cases where the two aspects can be chosen without a significant difference of meaning conveyed. This is easier said than objectively pinpointed, though, because a significant difference in meaning depends on one's semantic theory in the first place.

It is easier, I believe, to pin down the meaning of *Perfeito* and define *Imperfeito* as contrasting with it in several respects, as Cunha & Cintra (1987) proceeded, or Comrie (1976) did for imperfective aspect.

*Perfeito* is the unmarked tense with events, and presents them as past, i.e., it locates the speaker after the event in its entirety. Whether it is concluded (regarding its inherent meaning) is something which Portuguese does not care about, even though that is the relevant feature as far as Russian is concerned (cf. Leiria (1991:177ff)). In fact, when actions having an inherent end are concerned, languages differ in the way they distinguish (or not) completion versus simple end. While Russian perfective aspect can only be used for completed actions, in Portuguese, *Perfeito* signals that the action did finish, irrespective of (natural) completion (cf. *O João leu 50 páginas do relatório* ('John read 50 pages of the report'), as noted by Leiria (1991:177)).

To convey that something was terminated but not (necessarily) completed, the *Perfeito Progressivo* would be used: *O João esteve a ler o relatório* ('John has been reading the report'). *Perfeito* and *Perfeito progressivo* stand in a privative opposition: *Perfeito progressivo* is more marked than *Perfeito*, and only in contrast with it does *Perfeito* mean completion. Cf. the two possible answers to the question *O João leu o relatório?* ('Did John read the report?') --*Esteve a ler, mas não sei se o acabou* ('He has been reading it, but I don't know whether he finished it') versus --*Leu, pelo menos a primeira parte* ('He did, at least the first part of it'). The first answer interprets *leu* as completion, while the second reads it as simply past occurrence.

But back to the opposition *Perfeito/Imperfeito*, there are at least three ways in which (the above definition of) *Perfeito* can be contradicted, namely:

(i) in the pastness related to the speaker's location: *Imperfeito* describes the speaker as co-temporal, simultaneous with the time of the event, which cannot therefore be said to be completed at the time in question;

(ii) in not describing an event: *Imperfeito* describes a property (or a state). This holds not only of habitual *Imperfeitos*, but of other uses of *Imperfeito* like -- *Dali vias o teu irmão?* -- *Via* "'Could you see your brother from there?" "Yes".

(iii) in not asserting a fact: *Imperfeito* describes the reflection of an event on a human being, describing thoughts, possibilities, desires, and perception (all of which can be "mistaken", i.e., do not need to reflect the real world).

Another way to pin down the *Perfeito/Imperfeito* opposition is to analyse minimal pairs regarding tense, i.e., cases where the only difference is in the tense choice:

- In *ele dava muitos livros aos filhos* versus *ele deu muitos livros aos filhos* ('he gave many books to his children'), one has a property contrasting with a fact. The first places the speaker at the same time, and thus conveys habituality (or a property of his), the second expresses simply a past fact.

- In *ele sabia que ela não tinha pago* ('he knew she had not paid') vs. *ele soube que ela não tinha pago* ('he learned that she had not paid'), one has a description of a property (a mental state) in the first sentence and of an event in the second. This applies for the acquisition class in

general.

- In *em 1 de Dezembro de 1640 os conspiradores entravam no palácio* vs. *em 1 de Dezembro de 1640 os conspiradores entraram no palácio* ('In December 1st, 1640, the conspirators entered the palace'), since a unique, definite time is conveyed through the temporal adverbial, Imperfeito only adds vividness, by "forcing", so to say, the reader to place him/herself at the time of the event. Undoubtedly, this use of Imperfeito is much more marked than its Perfeito counterpart.

A similar situation happens with durative adverbials, which, since a period's length can only be measured when the period is over, are generally expressed with Perfeito.<sup>3</sup> This is not a grammatical rule, though. It is a semantically motivated cooccurrence. In fact, one has perfectly grammatical sentences with duration adverbials and Imperfeito, cf. *Ele parava durante uns tempos e depois continuava*. ('He would stop for a while and then continue') or *Finalmente decidiu-se. Durante dois dias, não dava aulas. Depois se veria*. ('Finally he made up his mind. For two days he would not teach. Then one would see'). The first Imperfeito is due to habituality, or, at least, to an indefinite sequence in time; the second to the expression of intentions (perspective, that is).

Finally, another minimal pair which is interesting to analyse includes *já*, because its meaning interacts with what is conveyed by the two tenses, restricting the number of possible interpretations. *Já*, I recall, relates a contextually dependent time with a time coming from its argument.

In *ele já comeu ovas de bacalhau* ('he has eaten "ovas de bacalhau"') vs. *ele já comia ovas de bacalhau* ('he was already eating "ovas de bacalhau"'), the difference can be cast in the following terms: "there was an event before now" vs. "there was a property (or habitual activity) whose inception occurred before then".

In cases where an habitual interpretation is hard to get, the perspective versus fact is clear, cf. *Ele disse que já chegou* ('He said he has arrived') vs. *Ele disse que já chegava* ('He said he was coming soon').

So, my task in the following sections is to evaluate the relevance of these oppositions for the translation into English.

#### 14.3.2.2 Imperfeito translated into the English simple past

Because I could not analyse every single translation pair, I randomly chose 60 instances of Imperfeito to simple past translation and divided them (not necessarily exclusively) between eight categories as follows:

- (i) habituais with adverbial frequency specification

*Tê-lo-ia envolvido numa das conspirações que descobria todos os dias?*  
*Had he involved him in one of the many conspiracies he **uncovered** daily?*

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<sup>3</sup> This is one of the core facts of aspectology, namely that perfective aspect co-occurs with durative adverbials, cf. e.g. Comrie (1976).

(ii) habituais in temporal clauses

*A ascensão da estreita escada escura, e tão a pino, com os degraus muito altos e cambaios, era, **sempre que voltava** a casa, uma tortura.*

*The ascent up the dark, narrow, and steep staircase with its high and crooked steps was a torture whenever he **returned** to the house.*

'The climbing of the narrow dark staircase, and so steep, with very high and worned-out steps, was, always when he returned home, a torture.'

(iii) habituais without overt marks (at most plural arguments)

*tudo ali **acontecia**.*

*it all **went** on there.*

'everything happened there.'

*quando afirmava que [...] os frades eram intermediários entre o reino de Deus e o do mundo, porque **chamavam** sobre si os pecados do mundo*

*as he was stating that [...] the friars were intermediaries between the Kingdom of God and that of the world, because they **took** on themselves the sins of the world*

(iv) negative habituais

*E este pensar [...] não lhe **facilitava** a vida interior*

*And this thinking [...] **did** nothing to calm his inner life*

'And these thoughts [...] did not make easy his inner life'

(v) statives

*erguera a mão para o cendal que o **cingia***

*had raised her hand to the sendal that **girded** him*

***Apetecia**-lhe gritar por socorro*

*She **yearned** to cry for help*

'She felt like crying for help'

*nem se atrevera a emergir das raízes, pelos canais de seiva que **sabiam** a queimado.*

*he hadn't even dared emerge from the roots through the sap canals that **tasted** charred.*

(vi) expression of event simultaneity

*Suspirou. O imperador **dormia**, respirando tranquilo,*

*He sighed. The emperor **slept**, breathing easily,*

(vii) interior perspective

*Até **calhava** bem, era significativo.*

*At least it **fitted** well, that was something.*

'It even was appropriate, it was meaningful.'

*Gostavam pela certa, **cantava** bem.*

*Certainly they liked her, she **was** a good singer.*

'For sure they would like, she sang well.'

(viii) others (discussed below).

The outcome of the process is displayed in Table 14.3, where the total number of instances drawn from each text is displayed between parentheses.

Table 14.3

	PE10 (10)	PE11 (6)	PE12 (10)	PE3 (9)	PE6 (9)	PE8 (6)	PE9 (10)	Total (60)
i	1						1	2
ii			1				1	2
iii	1	1	3	2		3		10
iv		1					2	3
v	1	5	6	3	7	2	4	26
vi	3	1		7	1	2	3	17
vii	1		2	3	3	1		10
viii	3			3	1	1	1	9

The picture that emerges is as follows:

- 17 out of 60 were habitual Imperfeitos (28%),
- 22 out of 60 denoted stative situations (37%),
- 17 out of 60 cases (28%) were considered as predominantly indicating simultaneity or temporal inclusion,
  - 10 out of 60 cases (17%) involved perspective (including strict indirect speech),
  - and 9 cases where something else seemed to be (as well) involved in the meaning of Imperfeito.

This is not to be taken as the distribution of Imperfeitos in Portuguese source text, but it shows, in my opinion, that the factors at stake were relevant enough.

Regarding the "others" category, two salient contexts involved comparative clauses, and/or gradual processes; cf.:

*E a voz **uivava** tanto, que deve ser verdade.*

*And the voice **howled** so much that it must be true.*

*embora seguro do caminho, senão da noite e da solidão que se **confundiam** cada vez mais e a perder de vista.*

*sure of his way although less so of the night that **mingled** with the solitude, fast becoming one.*

'although he was certain of the way, if not also of the night and solitude which increasingly mixed and as far as the eye could reach.'

*O frio, a água, a treva, **penetravam**-no.*

*The cold, the water, the darkness, **penetrated** him.*

*Mas, das profundezas da árvore, **subia** um delicioso perfume.*

*But from the depths of the tree there **arose** a delicious perfume.*

My conclusion is that, in the case of this kind of events, it is Imperfeito that is unmarked. Contrastively, these cases are among those I pointed out initially as bringing more loss: they fail to describe an action in progress.

Another context not taken into account in the classification was the specification of manner:

*Ia de olhos baixos, temendo encontrar alguém conhecido*  
*He walked with his eyes down, afraid of meeting anyone he knew*  
'He went with eyes in the ground, fearing to meet anyone known'

*E riam como uns perdidos que eram.*  
*And they roared like the condemned that they were.*  
'And they shrieked with laughter.'

In the above examples, the emphasis seems to lie in the property of the action rather than on the action itself. Here, English simple past is non-committal, and thus translation is reasonably contents preserving.

As to the habituais, the English sentences are mostly vague regarding habituality. It was nevertheless interesting to note that something in the nominal domain was added to two out of the three negated habituais, which adds to my claim on the contrastive complexity of negation:

*Agora, era certo e garantido que aquela alma ficaria lá pelo cemitério, sem descanso, trazendo uma mudança nova ao desconsolado ambiente em que não acontecia nada.*

*Now it was assured and guaranteed that that soul would haunt the cemetery restlessly, bringing a new change to the disconsolate environment in which nothing ever happened.*

'Now, it was hundred per cent sure that that soul would remain there in the cemetery, restless, bringing a new change to the insipid environment where nothing happened.'

*E este pensar [...] não lhe facilitava a vida interior*  
*And this thinking [...] did nothing to calm his inner life*  
'And these thoughts [...] did not make easy his inner life'

Finally, there was one case where the Imperfeito/Perfeito distinction was clearly lost (incidentally involving the remaining negated habitual):

*O clarão recomeçou a encher a cela, mas não aumentou mais, nem ressoava*<sup>4</sup>  
*The glare again began to fill the cell, but it neither increased nor resounded*

'The brightness began to fill the cell again, but it stopped increasing, and was not resounding'

Portuguese describes here the end of an (albeit gradual) event, thus located precisely in time, together with a property of the noise. The English rendering fails to transmit this subtle distinction.

#### 14.3.2.3 Perfeito translated into English simple past

I produced again a sampling of 60 Perfeito to simple past translations. This time, there was no set of previous classifications which seemed to be relevant, so I content myself here with reporting a few interesting observations.

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<sup>4</sup> Note that the verb *aumentar* ('increase') is in Perfeito while *ressoar* ('resound') is in Imperfeito.

There was only one clear stative in the sample, whose translation, in my opinion, failed to convey the added meaning of Perfeito:

*Acreditas que eu **amei** esse escravo?*  
*Do you believe that I **loved** that slave?*  
'I have loved that slave, can you believe it?'

In fact, neither does it make explicit the pastness of the property (i.e., the slave is dead), nor does it express what, in my opinion, is conveyed by the particular question at stake, and which is clear in my own English rendering, namely that "I" loved that slave is a fact (no matter the hearer believe it or not).

Then, there were three Portuguese acquisitions, whose eventive interpretations is clearly enforced by Perfeito, but which is left to context in the English rendering:

*Os outros ouviram todos a sua pergunta, e **compreenderam** a inquietação dele.*  
*All the others heard his question and **understood** his worry.*  
'The others heard all his question, and realized why he was worried.'

*Na confiança que de repente **sentiu**, gritou:*  
*With the confidence that he suddenly **felt**, the genie cried:*

*O homem **olhou-o** com o mesmo olhar de polícia, e depois, com espanto, fixou as flores.*  
*The man **looked** at him with the look of a policeman and then, surprised, stared at the flowers.*

I do not want to claim that there is loss in these particular translations, but that there could be loss if the eventive, delimited reading were not clear from the context.

Likewise, there were two cases where the Portuguese text depicts a completed situation whose completion is only (at most) hinted by the English text:

*Marco Semprônio **veio** até junto do vulto agachado. Sob o manto, sem desagasalhar-se, tirou da bolsa moedas que tilintaram no lajedo.*  
*Marcus Sempronius **approached** the crouching figure. Beneath his mantle, without loosening it, he took coins from his pocket that tinkled on the flagstone.*  
'Marcus Sempronius came near the crouching figure.'

*Não foi, porém, disso que ele **tremeu**.*  
*It wasn't for that, however, that he **trembled**.*

In the first case, the English sentence does not indicate that first Marcus Sempronius came, and then he took the coins. In the second example, one complete shudder is conveyed, while, in English, "he" could go on trembling for all we know.

A similar situation arises in the next example: While in Portuguese one "run" only is clearly conveyed, i.e., a semelfactive event is grammatically expressed, in English nothing prevents a repeated running:

*Tornou a fixar [...] o interlocutor, e uma perturbação o **percorreu**.*  
*Once again he fixed his gaze [...], and a troubling thought **ran** through him.*

The opposite lack of specification, that concerning the initial starting point, is visible in:

*nela dois velhos imemoriais, emaciados, de repas gordurosas, fitaram-me.*  
*from it two long-forgotten and emaciated old men, with thin greasy hair, stared at me.*

'on it two hystorical old men, emaciated, with greasy hair, set their eyes on me.'

In the Portuguese text, the stare begins at that moment, while in the English translation it could have been going on for some time.

There was one case where an event of changing state is expressed by an inceptive *be*. In this particular instance, there did not seem to be any danger of misunderstanding it for a stative situation:

*Eu, que levei anos a [...], fiquei estarrecido.*  
*I, who had spent years [...], I was appalled.*  
'I, who have spent years [...], got appalled.'

As far as the only two cases involving negation (broadly speaking) were concerned, neither featured any perceivable loss:

*em vão procurou uma agradável recordação que [...] se salvasse do naufra'gio.*  
*in vain he searched for a pleasant memory that [...] would save him from his despair.*  
'in vain he looked for a pleasant memory which [...] would resist the wreck.'

*Não levantou, porém, a cabeça para olhar em volta, para perscrutar o horizonte.*  
*He did not raise his head to look around or search the horizon.*  
He did not raise, however, the head to look around, to scrutinize the horizon.'

This is probably due to the fact that *Perfeito* is unmarked with negation. Furthermore, there is not much point on insisting on the initial or terminal points of non-existing events.

Looking now at quantified sentences, there was one case involving proposed *sempre* ('always'), which, interestingly, was translated into a stative predicate:

*que escrever bem tu sempre escreveste desde muito pequeno*  
*for you always knew how to write well*  
'since to write well you've always written since you were small'

There was also one case involving *nunca*. This time, the vagueness between quantification over occasions and a property holding in an extended now interval that the Portuguese text features is lost in the English translation, which had to choose the first:

*Eu nunca falei de outra.*  
*I never spoke of any other.*  
'I've never talked about another.'

Most cases of *Perfeito* (50 out of 60) corresponded to definite actions (or lack thereof) in the narrative sequence. However, some interesting cases where this was not the case appeared, as in:

*sentindo os olhos da velhinha fitos nele, horrorizados com a monstruosidade dos castigos reservados a quem se entrega aos pecados da carne, sem se manter puro como veio ao mundo.*  
*feeling the old woman's eyes fixed on his, horrified at the monstrosity of the punishments reserved for those who surrender to the sins of the flesh, who*

*abandon the purity with which they came into the world.*

'sensing the eyes of the old woman staring at him, horrified at the monstrosity of the punishments reserved to who indulges in the sins of the flesh, without keeping virtuous as he came to the world.'

While the Portuguese sentence expresses a generalization in the singular, English translates it into the plural, probably because present is not so strongly a rule-flavoured tense as Presente.

Summing up, simple past is employed in English to transmit the meaning of Perfeito, but it does not convey explicitly initial or final boundaries. In the cases where this is more relevant, some loss may result. There does not seem to be many alternatives in English to convey those, though, one exception being completive particles like *down* in:

*o velho veio como uma seta, sentou-se ao meu lado, e perguntou-me flautadamente:*

*the old man approached me like an arrow, sat down, and asked me sprightly:*

'the old man came like an arrow, sat beside me, and asked me in a voice as a flute.'

#### 14.3.2.4 The translation of *já* + Imperfeito

As mentioned above, contexts with *já* seem also relevant to an encompassing treatment of the distinction Perfeito/Imperfeito in Portuguese. I thus looked for the cases of co-occurrence of *já* with Imperfeito in the corpus.

Two different cases could at once be perceived. One with events, indicating that a given event was in process, where the main gist of *já* seemed to be to indicate temporal closeness, i.e., to signal that the event had soon happened; cf. e.g.

*A brutalidade sufocante e dilacerante penetrava-a já*  
*The suffocating and lacerating brutality was already penetrating her*

*Já as palavras tumultuavam nele*  
*Already the words rioted within him*

From a contrastive point of view, it is interesting that every translation of *já* signalling an event in progress involves the word *already*, and that four out of six used the progressive (simply or (once) in a related construction); cf. e.g.:

*retraía-se num palpitar ansioso, de que as mãos já se levantavam num gesto de repulsa*

*drew back in an anxious throbbing, from which her hands were already rising in a gesture of aversion.*

'she retreated in an anxious palpitation, in which the hands already rose in a repulse gesture'

*Fr. Athelstan já lá dormia*  
*Friar Athelstan already lay sleeping there*  
'Fr. Athelstan was already sleeping there'

Of the remaining two, one is very interesting because it indicates that the verb *ir* in Imperfeito with a location simply expresses an (intermediary) position implied by a given movement, as was correspondingly rendered in English:

*Não sei como, **ia já** a meio caminho da rua,  
I don't know how, but I **was** already halfway in the street  
'I don't know why, I was already halfway in the street'*

The other clear pattern of Imperfeito with *já* applies to states, hooking them temporally to the narrative time, i.e., establishing a temporal relation; cf.:

***Já era** tarde.  
It **was** already late.*

*na bolsa dos pais que tinham e eu **já** não  
or in the pocketbooks of parents they still had and I no longer **did***

*Não **pensavam já** em matá-lo  
They no longer **thought** of killing him*

To translate the Portuguese statives, there was much more variation in English: In some cases a similar pattern occurred, as the preceding examples show, but equally as frequently different means of expression were chosen. In the next sentence, the corresponding inceptive event was used instead:

*Mais tarde, essas demonstrações ostensivas **eram** desnecessárias **já**  
Later, those ostentatious demonstrations **became** unnecessary  
'Later, these ostensive demonstrations were already unnecessary'*

Also, *now* was used instead of *already*:

*atirou-se sobre o cadáver -- porque **era** um cadáver **já** --,  
threw herself on the corpse -- for it **was** now a corpse --  
'she threw herself over the corpse -- because it was already a corpse --'*

And, in this last example, a pluperfect was employed, resulting, in my opinion, in a poor translation:

*passou a ser, mais do que **já era**, a minha vida  
began to be, more than it already **had been**, my life.  
'became, more than it was already, my life'*

From a contrastive point of view, a further case emerged, that of *já* applied to acquisitions. In such a context, *já* seems to measure the distance between the inception event and the current stative situation, additionally implying that the state corresponds to a gradual, or at least foreseeable, situation.

For example, when you approach something you eventually see it and will see it better and better, as in the next example, already discussed in Chapter 11 because it concerns a perception event:

***Já via** o quarteirão por detrás do qual repousava o Castanheira.  
Now he **saw** the section behind which Castanheira lay.  
'He could already see the quarter behind which Castanheira rested.'*

The translator used an English acquisition for translating the Portuguese acquisition. But because the simple past contrasts with *could* for this kind of verbs (verbs of perception), I believe its choice overemphasizes the event connotation (as if it were *Suddenly, he saw it*), and thus

misses both the visual ability and the durativity conveyed in the Portuguese original.

Similarly, when you repeat something many times you eventually learn it by heart:

*e os gestos do amor tão poucos que os **sabia** já de cor.*  
*and the gestures of love so few that he **had** long **known** them by heart*  
*'and the gestures of love so few that he already knew them by heart.'*

This case uses a pluperfect, thus succeeding in conveying both a previous occasion and a result state. *Long*, however, is nowhere conveyed by the Portuguese original (as noted in Section 7.1.1.2, the Portuguese sentence does not indicate the distance between the learning and the current time).

The following example involves syntactic restructuring:

*e até parecia que nem já se **lembravam** de que haviam pensado nisso*  
*nor did they even seem to remember that they had thought of doing so*  
*'and it even seemed as if they no longer remembered they had thought about it'*

Finally, in the next example, a free translation, the translator chose to invoke an action with a result:

*-- Quere-as? -- e as flores já se **alteavam** nas mãos do outro.*  
*"Do you want them?"--and he **placed** the flowers in the other man's hands.*  
*"Do you want them?" and the flowers already rose in the other's hands.'*

In any case, it is but fair to say that acquisitions with *já* posed the most problems for translation.

For completeness's sake, I present the remaining example, which corresponds clearly to what I called the conditional use of Imperfeito in Chapter 10:

*Mas com dia não **chegava** já.*  
*But there was no way he could arrive by daylight.*  
*'But by daylight he no longer would arrive.'*

In fact, one could paraphrase this example by *There was no longer ta chance that he might arrive by daylight.*

Summing up, this investigation was not particularly illuminating as far as translation of Imperfeito to simple past was concerned, although it threw some light into the meaning of *já*. The only clear translation regularity was that statives with *já* were often translated by simple past with *already* or *now*. But since statives without *já* were also most of the times translated by simple past, it seems that the co-occurrence of *já* is a factor that weakens such general rule, instead.

#### 14.4 Imperfeito and Perfeito as translations of simple past

Let me now investigate which factors influence the translation of simple past into either Portuguese tense, and whether the Imperfeito/Perfeito opposition is a covert distinction in English.

##### 14.4.1 Distribution on a test sample

The first method I followed was again to make a random selection of 50 cases of each

translation and look for regularities and/or interesting contrastive phenomena.

According to the analysis of the Imperfeito/Perfeito distinction presented above, one would expect to find mainly cases of addition by translation (or alternatively, of loss of a meaningful vagueness in the English source). This was actually confirmed by several examples.

In the next translation pairs, the difference between Perfeito and Imperfeito is of clear consequence for the sequencing of two different actions. While in English the exact temporal relationship between the two events is left vague (or to the readers' discretion), it must be decided by the translator in order to render the sentences in Portuguese. I believe that the following cases may be interpreted differently, however irrelevant such details may be in general:

*"I am sorry, my friend," he said, and his shoulders **rose** a little to indicate that the misfortune was no fault of his.*

-- *Lamento muito, meu amigo -- disse ele. E **erguia** um pouco os ombros para mostrar bem que não tinha culpa nenhuma daquela contrariedade.*

'I am very sorry, my friend" said he. And he raised (Imperf., at the same time) a little the shoulders to show well that he had no fault whatsoever in that annoyance.'

*The hot sun beat on the earth so that Kino and Juana moved into the lacy shade of the brush, and small gray birds **scampered** on the ground in the shade.*

*O sol ardente causticava tanto a terra que Kino e Joana tiveram de procurar a sombra rendilhada dos arbustos, donde pássaros **fugiam** apressados.*

'The burning sun cauterized so much the earth that Kino and Juana had to look for the lacy shadow of the bushes, from where birds escaped (Imperf., at the same time) hastily.'

*"We must go west," he said, and his eyes **searched** the stone shoulder behind the cleft.*

-- *Temos de ir para oeste -- disse ele, enquanto **fixava** a proeminência da rocha do outro lado da garganta.*

'"We must go west", said he, while he stared (Imperf.) at the rock shoulder on the other side of the gorge.'

One regularity that emerged was that Imperfeito was chosen for the majority of extended unbounded actions that were mentioned in the English text (10 instances out of 14), and which were thus considered by the translator as background description or perspectivated; cf. e.g.:

*He looked down in wonder at his split knuckles and at the blood that **flowed** down between his fingers.*

*e ficou a olhar pasmado para os dedos feridos e para o sangue que deles **escorria**.*

'and he started looking, astonished, at the wounded fingers and the blood that dropped from them.'

*And the sun beat down on the streets of the city and even tiny stones **threw** shadows on the ground.*

*O sol causticava as ruas da cidade e até as pedras mais pequenas **desenhavam** sombras no chão.*

'The sun cauterized the streets of the town and even the smallest stones drew shadows on the ground.'

This was not necessarily always a good choice, though. In my opinion the next examples feature clear translation mistakes:

*The third man **scrabbled** away like a crab, slipped into the pool, and then he began to climb frantically*

*O terceiro homem **arrastava-se** como um caranguejo, escorregara até à lagoa e começou a trepar freneticamente*

'The third man was dragging himself like a crab, he had slipped to the lagoon and he started to climb up frantically'

*The procession **crowded** close the better to see and hear.*

*A procissão **comprimia-se** para ver e ouvir melhor.*

'The procession was condensing to see and listen better.'

The two next examples, on the other hand, clearly demonstrate that, in any case, the choice is not lexically driven:

*Juana carried Coyotito on her back, covered and held in by her head shawl, and the baby **slept***

*Joana levava Coyotito às costas, enfiado no xale. O pequeno **dormia***

'Juana took Coyotito upon the back, slipped into the shawl. The baby was sleeping'

*In the heat of the day Kino relaxed and covered his eyes with his hat and wrapped his blanket about his face to keep the flies off, and he **slept**.*

*No pino do calor, Kino esmoreceu. Puxou o chapéu para os olhos, cobriu a cara com a manta por causa das moscas e **adormeceu**.*

'In the heat of the day, Kino slackened. He pulled the hat over the eyes, covered the face with the blanket because of the flies and felt asleep.'

Let me now present some examples where, though the action is extended and unbounded, the translator chose Perfeito:

*Greedy fingers went through his clothes, frantic fingers **searched** him*

*Dedos ávidos percorriam-lhe o fato, dedos frenéticos **rebuscaram-no**.*

'Greedy fingers ran through his clothes, frantic fingers ransacked him.'

*and the canoe **creased** the water and hissed with speed.*

*e o barco **cortou** o mar, tão veloz que assobiava.*

'and the boat cut the sea, so quick that it hissed'

*Kino and Juana **walked** through the city as though it were not there.*

*Kino e Juana **atravessaram** a cidade como se ela não existisse.*

'Kino and Juana crossed the city as if it did not exist.'

In these cases, I would say there was really free choice, i.e., I cannot think of more reasons that could be adduced to defend one of the choices than the other.

As regards the nine clear stative, two of them were rendered by Perfeito. While the first case could be interpreted as inceptive, I disagree with the translator's choice in the second one; cf.:

*And the morning of this day the canoes **lay** lined up on the beach;*

*Na manhã daquele dia os barcos **ficaram** na areia.*

'On the morning of that day the boats remained ashore.'

*Each of the three **knew** the pearl was valueless.*

*Qualquer dos três **achou** que a pérola não valia nada.*

'Any of the three considered that the pearl was worth nothing.'

In three cases, a possibly semelfactive action was rendered as a rule or a series of actions:

*He was the elder, and Kino **looked** to him for wisdom.*

*Ele era o irmão mais velho e Kino **esperava** os seus conselhos.*

'He was the eldest brother and Kino waited for his advice.'

*To one he **said**, "I think they have gone south along the coast to escape the evil that was on them." And to another,*

*A um **dizia**: "Talvez eles tenham ido para o sul para fugir à pouca sorte que os perseguia." E a outros:*

'To one he would say: "Maybe they have gone south to run away from the bad luck that hunted them." And to others:'

*A foolish madness came over him so that he **spoke** foolish words.*

*Apoderou-se dele uma loucura tal que **dizia** os maiores disparates.*

'Such a madness took over him that he would say the worst nonsense.'

In addition, and as already discussed in Section 10.2.5 above, there was a fair number of cases (eight) whose translation into Imperfeito highlighted (or added) an habitual, property-like connotation, not so obvious in the original. Examples are:

*And the night mice crept about on the ground and the little night hawks **hunted** them silently.*

*Os ratos da noite corriam colados à terra e os pequenos falcões nocturnos **caçavam-nos** sem ruído.*

'The night mice ran near the ground and the small night hawks hunted them without noise.'

*Kino's lips were thin and his jaws tight, and the people say that he **carried** fear with him*

*Kino tinha os lábios cerrados e as maxilas apertadas. E as pessoas diziam que ele **arrastava** o terror consigo*

'Kino had the lips closed and the jaws tight. And people said that he dragged terror with him'

Finally, it is probably not accidental that two out of the three (previously presented) examples featuring habituality addition involve assertion verbs, a very common kind in the corpus examined (and probably in narrative in general): eleven instances in the present sample. Incidentally, it was also pointed out by Matveyeva (1985) as a typical situation where different translators (from English into Russian) would take different decisions.

Two further cases involving the translation of these verbs in Imperfeito seem worth mentioning. In the next example, the use of Imperfeito explains the action, while Perfeito would merely describe it:

*Juan Tomás **cautioned** his brother.*

*João Tomás **prevenia-o**:*

'Juan Tomás warned (Imperf.) him:'

*And one man **said** that he would give it as a present to the Holy Father in Rome.*

*Another said that [...]*

*Um **dizia** que a daria de presente ao Papa, em Roma; outro, que [...]*

'One said that he would give it as a present to the Pope, in Rome; another that [...]

In the second case, by contrast, and even though the Portuguese rendering could also be interpreted as habitual, the sentence can be read as describing one single action performed by an unspecific neighbour, to which *Perfeito* would add too much definiteness, contradicting the irrelevance of who said it and when.

If my analysis is right, this indicates yet another distinction that is made in English through the choice between *one* or *a(n)*, and which in Portuguese is again due to tense. (Once again, I suspect that the two distinctions will not be co-extensive, like all other cases discussed in the present dissertation.)

#### 14.4.2 The translation of simple past and frequency adverbials

Another path I followed was to look for frequency adverbials in the English (original) text. According to Smith (1978:70), in English "an adverbial of frequency signals the habitual sentence". Since habituality necessarily corresponds to translation into *Imperfeito*, this seems to be a case where translation could be reasonably predicted. *Vlach*, on the other hand, contends that "frequency adverbials very often occur in non habitual sentences" (*Vlach*, 1993:240), and presents examples like *John is selling ten cars a week* as evidence for his claim.

It is thus interesting to observe contrastive data on this respect.

First of all, let me note that, in the sample of 50 clauses discussed above, there were three cases with a frequency adverbial, all translated by *Imperfeito*:

*And every year Kino **refinished** his canoe*

*Por isso todos os anos Kino **barrava** o seu barco*

'Therefore every year Kino smeared his boat'

*Juana **walked** in darkness for a moment and in light the next.*

*E Joana **caminhava**, ora às escuras, ora iluminada.*

'And Juana walked, now in the dark, now in light.'

*he moved in zigzags, and sometimes he **cut** back to the south and left a sign and then went toward the mountains*

*Avançava em ziguezague, **voltava** muitas vezes para o sul, deixando indícios de passagem, e, depois, encaminhava-se para as montanhas*

'He advanced in zigzags, he turned often to the south, leaving clues of passage, and, then directed to the mountains'

In addition, the following case, not adverbially specified in English, got an idiomatic translation with a frequency adverbial in Portuguese:

*Here, one would pause and look at the earth, while the other **joined** him.*

*De vez em quando um parava a inspeccionar o chão e o outro **aproximava-se**.*

'Once in a while one stopped to inspect the ground and the other approached him.'

I will not be concerned with such cases in the present section, though, since they either reflect other forms to convey frequency and/or repeated action in English, or correspond to addition by the translation. Here, I want to investigate the cases where frequency is already present in the English text.

Frequency was expressed fairly rarely, though (the random sample was far from representative in this respect: it contained a proportion of frequency-specified clauses considerably higher than average). *Frequently, usually, at times* and *rarely* did not appear at all in the corpus, and *often* and *sometimes* occurred only 2 and 6 times, respectively. Furthermore, only two instances involved simple past (one of which was already displayed above):

*Sometimes it rose to an aching chord that caught the throat, saying  
às vezes **atingia** um tom de sofrimento que apertava a garganta e que dizia:  
'sometimes it attained a suffering tone which tightened the throat and said:'*

Words in *-ever*, although a little more frequent (eight in total), co-occurred only three times with the simple past, and, even then, were not translated by either *Perfeito* or *Imperfeito*, but by *Imperfeito do conjuntivo*; cf. e.g.:

*wherever enough earth **collected** for root-hold, colonies of plants grew  
onde quer que a terra **fosse** bastante para as raízes se cravarem, brotavam ilhas  
de plantas:  
'wherever the earth were enough for roots to rivet, sprouted islands of plants'*

The remaining cases of adverbial frequency specification involved two cases of *now and then*, and one instance of *every time* and *in the times when* each:

*It was fed by shadepreserved snow in the summer, and now and then it **died**  
completely  
que era alimentado pela neve que as sombras ali conservavam mesmo no Verão.  
De vez em quando **morria** por completo  
'which was fed by the snow that the shadows kept there even in the summer. Once  
in a while it died completely'*

*And now and then a great jackrabbit, disturbed in his shade, **bumped** away and  
**hid** behind the nearest rock.  
E de vez em quando uma grande lebre, sentindo violada a sua sombra, **saltava e  
escondia-se** por detrás da rocha mais próxima.  
'And once in a while a large jackrabbit, feeling its shadow violated, jumped and  
hid behind the closest rock.'*

*for every time it **fell** over an escarpment the thirsty air drank it  
porque, cada vez que ele **caía** sobre uma escarpa, o ar sedento absorvia-o  
'because, each time it fell over an escarpment, the thirsty air absorbed it'*

*In the times when the quick rains **fell**, it might become a freshet  
Na época das grandes chuvas, tornava-se numa corrente  
'At the time of the great rains, it became a stream'*

Finally, and even though in isolation such expressions are vague, I looked for adverbials denoting parts of the day, of the week or of the year. The only two found were indeed habitual (or, at least, were interpreted thus by the translator):

*And the birds which spent the day in the brushland **came** at night to the little pools* *E os pássaros, que passavam os dias nos matos, **vinham** de noite às lagoas*  
'And the birds, who spent the days in the woods, came at night to the pools'

*It was **fed** by shadepreserved snow in the summer,*  
*que **era alimentado** pela neve que as sombras ali conservavam mesmo no Verão.*  
'which was fed by the snow that the shadows kept there even in the summer.'

Except for one case where a simple noun phrase was used, all other cases were translated by Imperfeito. This seems enough evidence to conclude that frequency adverbials do call for translation into this Portuguese tense, be it because they describe habituality (6 cases), or, simply, an indefinitely bounded situation (4 cases). It appears that neither language formally distinguishes between the two kinds of situations.

As to *always* in connection with the simple past, it always corresponded to habitual situations. Accordingly, sentences with *always* were mainly translated by Imperfeito (Presente, in one case):

*And as always when he **came** near to one of this race, Kino felt weak and afraid and angry at the same time.*  
*e, como sempre que se **aproximava** de um daquela raça, Kino sentia fraqueza, pavor e fome ao mesmo tempo.*  
'and, as whenever he approached one of that race, Kino felt weakness, terror and hunger at the same time.'

*But nearly always it **gushed** out, cold and clean and lovely.*  
*Mas, quase sempre, **jorrava** fresco, transparente e delicioso.*  
'But, almost always, it outpurred cold, transparent and delicious.'

*but nearly always it **was** a lean little spring.*  
*Mas, a maior parte do ano, **era** um estreito regato.*  
'But, for most of the year, it was a narrow brook.'

*Now he came to the canoe and touched the bow tenderly as he always **did**.*  
*Quando chegou ao barco, acariciou-lhe a proa ternamente, como sempre **fazia**.*  
'When he arrived to the boat, he caressed the bow tenderly, as he always did.'

*and on the fear came rage, as it always **did**.*  
*Mas, como sempre **acontece**, o medo trouxe a raiva.*  
'But, as always happens, fear brought rage.'

*And he didn't know whether or not it **was** always a little blue.*  
*Não sabia se **era** normal, ou não, aquele azul.*  
'He did not know whether it was normal, or not, that blue.'

*He was trapped as his people **were** always **trapped***  
*Estava peado, como todos os da sua raça sempre tinham estado*

This latter example has been discussed in several other places above; it suffices here to say that it involves a passive form, contrasting thus with the other examples. The preceding one, incidentally, translates a temporal regularity into a normalcy assertion.

With the adverb *never*, things are not so clear cut, neither in monolingual interpretation nor in translation. One of the four instances is clearly habitual:

*The doctor never came to the duster of brush houses.*  
*o médico não **vinha** nunca àquele lugarejo de cabanas.*  
'The doctor never came to that hamlet of huts.'

Another expressed negation in an extended (but definite) period. Interestingly, it was rendered by a non-finite clause in Portuguese:

*All night they walked and never **changed** their pace.*  
*Caminharam toda a noite sem **abrandar** o passo.*  
'They walked all night without slackening speed.'

The two remaining ones, however, concerned an extended now, or, at least, an indefinite period (bounded by the narrative limits). For example, it is understood from the context that the doctor's eyes did not leave Kino's while he was there; not for ever.

*The doctor shrugged, and his wet eyes never **left** Kino's eyes.*  
*O médico encolheu os ombros, e os seus húmidos olhos nunca mais se **afastaram** de Kino.*  
'The doctor shrugged, and his humid eyes no more moved away from Kino.'

*And he **was** never **heard** of again and the pearls were lost.*  
*Mas nunca mais **ouviram** falar nele e as pérolas desapareceram.*  
'But they no longer heard about him and the pearls disappeared.'

In both cases, not only was Perfeito employed, which is the unmarked tense with *nunca*, but the expression *nunca mais* (literally, 'never more') was used, clearly indicating that no quantification over events, but over time, is meant.

#### 14.4.3 Imperfeito with *já* as translation of simple past

Finally, and even though there was no case of Perfeito with *já* as translation of simple past, as noted in Section 12.4.4, there were many cases of Imperfeito with *já*, and are thus worth while to look at closely.

In fact, there were 41 cases of Imperfeito with *já* as translation of simple past, 8 of which corresponded to *já não* ('no longer'). Surprisingly, only one case featured the standard (back)translation, namely:

*When they moved on it **was** no longer panic flight.*  
*Quando recomeçaram a andar, já não **era** uma fuga desesperada.*  
'When they restarted walking, it was no longer a desperate flight.'

No case of *already* + simple past was found. Rather, the most frequent overt pattern in English was a stative sentence containing *now*, in 7 cases; cf. e.g.:

*Now he **was** not confused, for there **was** only one thing to do,*  
*Agora já não **estava** perturbado. Já só **havia** uma coisa a fazer.*  
'Now he was no longer disturbed. There was already only one thing to do.'

*Her pain **was** gone now, her slowness.*  
*Já não **tinha** dores, já não andava com dificuldade.*

'She had no longer pains, she no longer walked with difficulty.'

*They **were** not near the Gulf now,*

***Já estavam** longe do Golfo.*

'They were already far from the Gulf.'

*It **was** not large and overwhelming now, but secret and poisonous,*

***Já não era** intensa e dominante, mas reservada e venenosa.*

'It was no longer intense and dominating, but reserved and poisonous.'

Another common case involved temporal clauses (in either language), which frequently suffered quite drastic reformulation; cf. e.g.:

*Before panting little boys could strangle out the words, their mothers **knew** it.*

*Ainda os garotos não tinham aberto a boca, já as mães **sabiam** tudo.*

'Still the boys had not opened the mouth, already the mothers knew everything.'

*Thus, in La Paz, it **was** known in the early morning through the whole town that Kino was going to sell his pearl that day.*

*Assim, mal a manhã romperá, já em toda a cidade de La Paz se **sabia** que Kino iria vender a pérola naquele dia.*

'So, hardly had the morning broke, already in the whole city of La Paz people knew that Kino would be going to sell the pearl on that day.'

*Kino **was** in mid-leap when the gun crashed*

*Quando o tiro estalou, já Kino **ia** no ar,*

'When the bullet shot, already Kino went in the air,'

*and when the bow **floated**, Juana climbed in,*

*e a proa já **flutuava** quando Joana saltou para dentro dele.*

'and the prow was already floating when Juana jumped into it.'

Seven cases occurred in connection with *when*-clauses. This is easily explainable if one notes that *já*, being a relational concept, requires two different times to join, and those are precisely available when two different events (or times) are mentioned.

Three cases involved the expression *be gone*, rendered in Portuguese by what corresponds to *was no longer there*, cf. e.g.:

*and when it settled the pearl **was gone***

*E quando esta se dissipou, a pérola já ali não **estava**.*

'And when this one dissipated, the pearl was no longer there.'

But, in most of the cases the Portuguese text simply added an implication of predictability which was not explicit in the source text, and, furthermore, might not be obvious for English readers. Consider, for example:

*and they discussed the great theme of the morning. They **did** not know, it seemed a fine pearl to them,*

*discutindo o grande acontecimento da manhã. Já não **sabiam** que pensar.*

*Parecia-lhes que a pérola era de fina qualidade,*

'discussing the great event of the morning. They no longer knew what to think. It seemed to them that the pearl was of high quality,'

(it was predictable that people got confused)

*He **had** only a little vision under the fallen limb.  
Já pouco **via** por debaixo do ramo caído.  
'He already saw little from under the fallen branch.'*

(it was predictable that he would lose vision)

*Juana's eyes **were** open too.  
os olhos de Joana também **já estavam** abertos.  
'the eyes of Juana were also already open.'*

(it is predictable that people open the eyes when they wake up in the morning)

*But Juana **had** the baby in her arms now.  
mas Joana **já tinha** o filho nos braços.  
'but Juana had already the son in her arms'*

(it is predictable that upon hearing her baby cry a mother picks him)

*since early Mass was over and business **was** slow  
como a missa da manhã estava acabada e aquilo **já pouco rendia**  
'as morning mass was finished and that payed little already'*

(it is predictable that after some time it stops being worthwhile)

But indeed not every case is so obviously predictable, and I actually disagree with the use of *já* in the next translation:

*When the trackers **came** near, Kino could see only their legs and only the legs of the horse from under the fallen branch.  
Quando os batedores **já vinham** perto, Kino, debaixo do ramo quebrado, **já** só lhes via as pernas e as pernas do cavalo.  
'When the trackers were already near, Kino, under the fallen branch, saw already only their legs and the legs of the horse.'*

Finally, predictability may stem directly from position in a (gradual) movement, as in the next examples:

*To determine to go and to say it **was** to be halfway there.  
Resolver ir e declará-lo **era já** metade do caminho.  
'To decide and declare it was already half of the way.'*

*but they **were** a good distance from the town and perhaps their tracks might not be noticed.  
Mas **já estavam** tão longe da cidade que talvez ninguém os visse.  
'But they were already so far from the town that maybe nobody would see them.'*

In other cases, a different explanation seems to be involved. Note, in fact, that the following example involves crucially a Portuguese acquisition:

*And she nodded and smiled a little at him, for she **knew** these things.  
Ela concordou com um sorriso, porque **já sabia** tudo aquilo.  
'She agreed with a smile, for she already knew all that.'*

The word *já* is idiomatic in the Portuguese translation. If *já* were not there, a marked case, the most natural implication would be that she knew that on that particular moment (a temporary

knowledge, that is), while *já* conveys that she learned it before and she knew it permanently ever since.

One could, it is true, suggest that Portuguese sees knowledge as monotonically increasing, and thus *já* indicates a relation between the now of the narrative (when she would learn them had not she known them) and a previous occasion of learning. However, a better explanation is, in my view, that *já* simply relates the two potential times of an acquisition (as a state and as an inceptive event); not invoking predictability or graduality here.

## 14.5 Wrapping up

Summing up, the Imperfeito/Perfeito distinction does not seem to be especially pertinent in English. It is definitely not pertinent with statives. Furthermore, the expression of limits or internal situations is hardly ever a concern of the English writer. Graduality also does not seem to be marked in general (except possibly by the progressive, something which was not investigated here; see Santos (1995a) for data on that matter). Finally, habitual properties as opposed to semelfactive actions were only (if at all) distinguished through adverbial means.

This may explain the considerable distributional difference of these two tenses in original versus translated text, displayed in Table 14.4 below.

Table 14.4

	Original Portuguese	Translated Portuguese
Imperfeito/Perfeito ratio	1102 / 768	945 / 1162
I/P ratio with <i>ser</i> and <i>estar</i>	260 / 38	195 / 14
I/P ratio translating <i>be</i>		264 / 27 (6)

Finally, it is interesting to note that, when randomly sampling cases involving the simple past, to my surprise I found globally more loss when translating from it than into it.

In other words, this seems to indicate that it is more damaging to add interpretation than to produce an expression that is vague (but not contradictory) regarding some information.

This global impression should be taken with care, however, because it may simply stem from my greater competence in evaluating text in Portuguese as compared to English.