

A PERSPECTIVE-BASED ACCOUNT OF THE IMPERFECTIVE PARADOX

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Kazanina and Phillips (Cognition (2007) 105:65-102) distinguish two accounts of the progressive and imperfective: the ‘perspective-based’ approach and the ‘event-based’ approach. The event-based approach maintains that imperfective and perfective refer to different classes of events. The perspective-based approach maintains that imperfective and perfective encode different perspectives towards otherwise ontologically and metaphysically equivalent events. The event-based approach is preferable over the perspective-based approach because it accounts for the imperfective paradox, that is, for the fact that imperfective and progressive morphology make it possible to use a telic predicate like ‘drive to Bordeaux’, which is defined by its endpoint, reaching Bordeaux, to describe an event that is only a partial event of driving to Bordeaux. The perspective-based approach, on the other hand, is supported by experimental findings on the acquisition of the meaning of the imperfective. In this article, we propose an alternative approach to the progressive/imperfective that can account both for the imperfective paradox and the experimental findings. The proposal is based on two main ideas: (i) as in the perspective-based approach, the role of the progressive and imperfective is to present events from an internal perspective, whereas the role of the perfective is to present events from an external perspective; (ii) progressive and imperfective sentences involve quantification over inertia worlds, as in the modal variant of the event-based approach; however, the modal import of progressive sentences is not brought about by the progressive operator, but is a property of telic predicates themselves.

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