ABSTRACT

Teaching Verbal Aspect of Spanish and French Past Tenses

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Aspect is one of the most challenging syntactic elements for Anglophone students of Spanish and French to master. While aspect is expressed in English, morphological and semantic differences among English, Spanish, and French often hinder students' comprehension. The present study examines why English-speaking students have such difficulty using aspect in Spanish and French through a discussion of relevant literature and surveys distributed among instructors of Spanish and French and offers methods to communicate these concepts to students more effectively. Pedagogical methods proposed by other researchers will also be discussed, and several French and Spanish textbooks will be analyzed in terms of their presentation of the past tense.

Teaching Verbal Aspect of Spanish and French Past Tenses

by

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Each conjugated verb in Spanish and French possesses tense, aspect, and mood.

Tense relates to when the action, event, or state takes place—past, present, or future;

aspect[1] refers to the completion, or lack thereof, of the action, event, or state; and mood

indicates the speaker's attitude toward the action, event, or state. In other words, does he

or she consider it part of his or her reality, or is it untrue or something he or she hopes

will happen? While tense is not a difficult concept for English-speaking students of

Romance languages to grasp, they have more difficulty with aspect and mood due to

morphological differences between English and the second language (L2). While the

morphological differences that communicate aspect and mood are less pronounced in

English, they are very obvious in languages like Spanish and French, which have separate

conjugations that express perfective/imperfective aspect and indicative/subjunctive

moods. The subjunctive has limited uses in English, and imperfect aspect is often

communicated through the past progressive. These differences could explain why such

concepts are so challenging for English-speaking students of Spanish or French. The

semantic nuances expressed through aspect and mood are similar in English, Spanish, and

French, but students may not think of making semantic connections between English and

the L2, and might therefore view aspect and mood as more foreign concepts than they

really are.

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[1] Jones defines aspect as "the way in which the event is distributed over time" (139).

This study focuses on the teaching of Spanish and French past tense verbs[2], and more specifically, on their aspect, which is one of the most difficult concepts for non-native speakers to master. It is for this reason that I am investigating aspect, and my goal is to compile a set of explanations and exercises to give the non-native/Anglophone speaker of Spanish or French more confidence and autonomy when choosing between perfective and imperfective aspect in the L2.

Predicates

In order to frame our discussion on aspect in Spanish and French, we must first consider predicates and how the past tense is expressed in English—the latter will be discussed in the following section. In his 1957 paper on verbs, Vendler proposed four lexical categories of predicates, or verbs, which relate to their aspect: states, activities, accomplishments, and achievements. States refer to a circumstance that continues indefinitely. Activities require energy and are lasting events with arbitrary beginnings and endings, while accomplishments have concrete end points. Achievements also have concrete end points, but unlike accomplishments, do not last (Koike and Klee 100). Smith included semelfactives in the grouping of predicates. These predicates relate to instantaneous events that occur repeatedly, such as sneezing or knocking on a door. In contrast with accomplishments, semelfactives do not have "natural beginnings and endings" (Hardin). It is important to bear in mind that while the infinitives of these verbs belong to a certain category, the verbs may belong to a different category once they are conjugated and put into context. For example, "run" is an activity, but becomes an

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[2] While aspect encompasses perfect, progressive, and simple tenses, I will focus on the Spanish simple preterite and imperfect and the French compound past and simple imperfect.

accomplishment when included in the sentence, "I ran for three hours." Table 1.1 gives examples of verbs that correspond to each category (English translations of verbs in Koike and Klee 100).

Table 1.1

Vendler's Lexical Aspect Categories

Lexical Category	Examples of Verbs
verbs expressing states	desire, have, like, possess, want
verbs expressing activities	pull, push, run, swim, walk
verbs expressing accomplishments	build a house, write a novel, make a chair, paint a painting, walk a mile
verbs expressing achievements	find (something), lose (something), realize (something), recognize (someone), win a race

Source: Koike, Dale A. and Carol A. Klee. *Lingüística aplicada*. Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, 2013. 94-106. Print.

Vendler separates his categories by describing the qualities of each. For example, some verbs are continuous, while others are not (144). Activities, such as swimming and running, can be expressed in the present progressive, while states, such as knowing, cannot. I can say that I am walking, but I cannot say that I am having a brother (148, 153).[3] Vendler further makes this distinction by demonstrating that I cannot run in my sleep, yet I can still ascribe the quality of having a brother to myself even though I am asleep (156). Moreover, I can say that I am writing a letter during the process of writing a letter (an accomplishment), but I cannot say I am reaching the top of Mount Everest (an achievement). I can only say I have reached the top once I have arrived at that spot

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[3] I can say I am having a child if I am referencing pregnancy or giving birth.

(147).[4] For Vendler, the ability to use the continuous tense separates states, activities, achievements, and accomplishments.

States and activities can also be distinguished in terms of ability versus action. For example, being able to see implies seeing, but being able to run does not imply actually running (148). We can also differentiate states and activities in terms of the subject's intentions. We can perform activities intentionally, and "be accused of" performing them, but we cannot intentionally have a state or be accused of having it (148-149). A student can look at another's test intentionally and be accused of performing this action. Seeing the test, on the other hand, is not intentional, and the student could not be accused of it (148-149).

While Vendler's analysis of lexical aspect deals only with English verbs, it proves helpful in the study of past-tense aspect in an L2 because it explains not only the aspect of both English and L2 verbs but also how perfective and imperfective aspect are acquired in the L2, not only in English (Bardovi-Harlig and Reynolds 107), but also in Spanish and French. The latter topic will be explored further in the next chapter.

We can analyze the acquisition of perfect and progressive inflections through the classifications discussed by Anderson and Shirai. They expounded on the semantic characteristics of Vendler's categories through the use of the labels punctual, dynamic, and telic (Koike and Klee 100).[5] If an event is punctual, its beginning and end occur simultaneously; dynamic events have agents; and telic events have "natural beginnings

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[4] Vendler does not consider the use of "I am reaching the top" in the sense that I am approaching the summit.

[5] Hardin references Vendler, 1967, and uses the term "durative" rather than "puntual." Durative refers to an ongoing action, event, or state, while punctual refers to an action, event, or state whose beginning is equivalent to its end. A durative event can occur *for* a certain amount of time, but will not occur *in* a certain amount of time. That is, it is possible to walk for two days, but not in two days.

and ends" (Hardin and Koike and Klee 100).[6] Table 1.2 (chart from Koike and Klee 100; adapted from Andersen and Shirai, 1994) summarizes the semantic characteristics of each aspectual category.[7]

Table 1.2

Semantic Characteristics of Aspectual Categories

Characteristics	"States"	"Activities"	"Accomplishments"	"Achievements"
"Punctual"	"-"	"-"	"-"	"+"
"Telic"	"-"	"-"	"+"	"+"
"Dynamic"	"-"	"+"	"+"	"+"

Source: Koike, Dale A. and Carol A. Klee. *Lingüística aplicada*. Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, 2013. 94-106. Print.

Andersen (1989) and Andersen and Shirai (1996) explained that children acquiring their first language use perfective aspect with accomplishments and achievements, but not with activities and states. They use the progressive to talk about activities and sometimes states. "Imperfective inflections are acquired gradually, and once acquired, are limited to activities and states. In early stages of acquisition, when children are beginning to learn the aspectual system and the perfective inflections, they do not use inflection to describe states."[8] Anderson and Shirai found that the acquisition of perfective and imperfective aspect in students of Spanish reflects that of children (Koike and Klee 100-101).

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[6] "[H]ay punto natural de inicio/terminación" (translation is mine).

[7] Semelfactives are considered [+dynamic], [-durative]/[+punctual], [-telic] (Hardin).

[8] Translation is mine.

Past Tenses in English

Marchand explained that, "English (and Germanic in general) has no distinction of imperfective and perfective—its simple tenses are ambiguous in this regard, and its complex tenses mark other distinctions (perfect and progressive)." In Romance and classical languages, "[t]he imperfect seems to be a marked imperfective form in contrast with the preterite, which is perfective (or possibly a neutral) form" (Binnick 296). Some English sentences written in the simple past do not have multiple interpretations and allow for the preterite-"sequenced actions" and imperfect-"non-sequenced actions" distinction "and [for] the narrative versus the frame of that narrative" distinction. For example, both sentences below are written in the simple past, but A refers to simultaneous events while B refers to sequential events:

A. "He enjoyed and admired the sonnets of Petrarch."
B. "He addressed and sealed the envelope" (Binnick 373).

Some consider the progressive an imperfective tense. Binnick states that, "Insofar as the simple tenses contrast with the progressive, they are perfective, though as regards to meaning…the English past and future are ambiguously perfective or imperfective" (372). Table 1.3 outlines the uses of the perfective and the imperfective in the English past tense (Binnick and Solé and Solé).

Binnick argues that "used to" does not indicate "past habituality" (33). In English, "used to" refers to something that is no longer true, while "would" does not, as in the examples, "Susan used to swim everyday" and "Susan would swim everyday" (35). However, the French sentence *Je lisais tous les jours* could be translated three ways: 'I read every day,' 'I used to read every day,' and 'I would read every day' (Binnick).

Table 1.3

Past-Tense Aspect in English

Perfective Aspect	Imperfective Aspect
1. simple past I *read* the book. Steve *entered* the room, *turned* on the lights, and *opened* the window.	1. simple past When I *was* little, I *read* "The Three Little Pigs" everyday. Mary *played* the piano while John *sang*. 2. "used to" + verb We *used to live* in Dallas. 3. "would" + verb You *would* often *visit* the Smiths. 4. past progressive The students *were talking* when the teacher entered the room.

Sources: Binnick, Robert I. *Time and the Verb: A Guide to Tense and Aspect*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991. Print. and Solé, Yolanda R., and Carlos A. Solé. *Modern Spanish Syntax: A Study in Contrast*. Wilmington, MA: D C Heath and Co., 1977. Print.

Solé and Solé illustrate why this is true in Spanish as well. They claim that English does not distinguish between and durative/imperfective, initiative, and terminative[9] aspect as "there is no one-to-one correspondence between the preterit and the imperfect tenses and any single English verbal form" (54). This is due to the variety of possible English translations, as well as to "restrictions in usage that characterize potential…equivalents" and to "aspectual differences that exist in Spanish" (55). The following example from Solé and Solé (55) illustrates the multiple possibilities for English translations:

"*Me informó que regresaba la semana siguiente*", "'He informed me he would return the following week.'"
"'He informed me he would be returning…'"
"'He informed me he was returning…'"

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[9] Initiative and terminative aspect are represented by the preterite in Spanish (Solé and Solé 54).

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As seen in the above example, the Spanish past tenses do not have clear-cut translations in English. The English speaker's choice of translation depends on the context of the sentence because not every sentence allows for all possible translations (Solé and Solé 54-55). Consider the following example from a popular newspaper column, "[W]henever there would be a problem with him, I would always feel completely out of my depth."[10] A Spanish speaker in a similar situation might state, "Cuando él tenía problemas, yo no sabía qué hacer," and a French speaker might describe the situation as follows: "Quand il avait des problèmes, je ne savais pas ce qu'il fallait faire." The Spanish and French sentences allow for three possible translations of the imperfect verbs: used to + verb, would + verb, and simple past. However, English allows for only the simple past in the subordinate clause: "Whenever there was a problem with him, I would always feel completely out of my depth" or "Whenever there was a problem with him, I always felt completely out of my depth."[11] Both sentences describe the habituality of the situation and imply that it continues into the present. If the speaker wanted to imply that his situation was no longer the case, he might state, "I always used to feel completely out of my depth whenever there was a problem with him." Again, this sentence allows for only the simple past in the subordinate clause.

As shown above, aspectual nuances are not always well-defined or understood in the English past-tense, and English-speakers may therefore have to rely on which option sounds better when making their selection. This phenomenon does little to improve English speakers' grasp of past-tense aspect in Spanish and French, particularly as some

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[10] Van Buren, Abigail. "Dear Abby" column. *Universal Press Syndicate*. November 29, 2015. http://www.uexpress.com/dearabby/2015/11/29/threatened-suicide-paralyzes-sibling-whos-expected

[11] Because "would" appears in the subordinate clause of the example sentence, it can be considered erroneous.

textbooks give non-contextualized expressions[12] such as "used to + verb," "would + verb," and "was + gerund" as English translations of the imperfect. That knowledge or consciousness of past-tense aspect in English may be lacking indicates that a review of this concept might be necessary before embarking on a study of past-tense aspect in Spanish or French in the L2 classroom.

Past Tenses in Spanish

In contrast to the English past tense, the simple past tense in Spanish is represented by the preterite, which indicates perfective, or completed, aspect, and the imperfect. Woolsey conceptualizes the preterite as a line with "a definite beginning, middle, and end," while the imperfect is "a straight line of indefinite beginning and end," or "an action in progress" (3). In terms of narration, "the imperfect sketches in the background and the setting while the preterite generally indicates the acts which occur within the framework thus described" (3). Sentences 1 and 3 in the example below would likely be used to describe what was going on at a specific point in time, while sentences 2 and 4 would probably refer to the main events in a narration.

> Ex.: I went shopping every day. – *Iba de compras todos los días.*
> I went shopping three times. – *Fui de compras tres veces.*
> I knew (all along) how to do it. – *Sabía hacerlo.*
> I knew (found out at that moment) how to do it. – *Supe hacerlo.*

Solé and Solé indicate that the preterite is an absolute, perfective, and punctual tense that describes the "retrospective past" and "reports, narrates *what took place*, and *what was [or] had been*." The preterite can also relate to anteriority, that is, what

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[12] By "non-contextualized," I mean expressions devoid of explanations of English aspect.

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happened in the past. The imperfect is a relative, imperfective tense that describes the

"retrospective present, future, and past" and

> describes what was (a) co-existent with another event; (b) what was going on at a
> given time; (c) what used to be: mental and emotional processes or states,
> physical and material conditions; (d) what used to happen: continuous or
> habitually repeated actions; (e) what still is: events, states, and conditions in
> indirect discourse; (f) what will be: mostly in indirect discourse with a limited
> class of verbs (72-73).
> In his analysis of the stories, "¡Diles que no me maten!" by Juan Rulfo and

"Bernadino" by Ana María Matute, Ozete discovered that *ser* and *estar* were mostly used

in the imperfect, but when they referred to an action rather than to a circumstance, they

were used in the preterite. The preterite was used with human subjects more than the

imperfect, while the latter was used more often with common nouns than with proper

nouns. "[T]he imperfect occurred about four times as often than the preterite in

subordinate clauses," while "the preterite occurred four times as often in the main clause,

and frequently under the guise of a reporting verb, e.g. *dijo*, *pregunté*, and *contestaron* to

set off direct quotes in stories" (687-689).

In their discussion on the aspectual contrasts between the English and Spanish

past tenses, Solé and Solé remark that the Spanish imperfect translates to the English

preterite in situations "describing the co-existence of a state or condition with another

event or in relation to a definite past" (68). This is due to the fact that the English

preterite is not punctual. The Spanish preterite could not appear in such a sentence as it is

punctual. Other English tenses that correspond to the Spanish imperfect include the

preterite progressive, "used to" + infinitive, "would" + infinitive, the past perfect, the past

perfect progressive, the conditional, and the conditional progressive (69-71).

Past Tenses in French

In contrast to Spanish speakers, French speakers usually express perfective aspect using the *passé composé*, or compound past. The compound past is a combination of an auxiliary verb, either *être* or *avoir*, and the past participle. French does have a simple past tense, the *passé simple*, but it is usually relegated to writing and is the most common tense in French literature (Binamé and Sockton 12). Both the simple past and the compound past refer to the beginning, the completion, the duration, or the totality of an action, event, or state. Imperfect aspect is conveyed through the *imparfait*, which, like the Spanish imperfect, is used for ongoing, repeated, or habitual actions, events, or states. The French simple past and compound past, like the Spanish preterite, tell what happened, while the imperfect in both languages is used to describe situations. Examples of uses of the French imperfect include habitual actions, actions interrupted by another action, descriptions or states, direct and indirect speech, and simultaneous actions joined by *comme* (Binamé and Sockton 13-14). The French simple past, compound past, and imperfect can all be translated to the English simple past. (Binamé and Sockton 12-13).

Contrasts between English and French past tenses are seen in the morphology utilized to express aspect. For example, the French compound past conveys perfective aspect, while the French imperfect conveys imperfective, iterative, or habitual aspect. The English simple past conveys both perfective and "imperfective/habitual" aspect, while the past-progressive is used to communicate progressive aspect (Ayoun 4). French uses the phrase *être en train de* + infinitive to talk about a progressive action.

While there are differences between English and French past tenses, both French and English use "lexical means," verbal morphology, and syntax "to express past

temporality." For example, French uses "tense, periphrastic tenses[13], and time adverbials;" English past tense is conveyed through "tense, modals, *have*, and time-adverbials" (Ayoun 4).

In his analysis of *Le Rouge et le Noir*, Hopper found that the *passé historique* (*passé composé*) is used in "chronologically sequenced" sentences with non-overlapping events. The imperfect is "'nonsequential'" and can refer to overlapping events (Thogmartin 345). It is possible to say *Je lisais quand tu es entré dans ma chambre*, 'I was reading when you entered my room,' but it is not possible to say **J'ai lu quand tu es entré dans ma chambre,* 'I read when you entered my room.' It should also be noted that because the imperfect is a "nonsequential" form, an imperfect French verb can be translated as a past-perfect verb in English. Thogmartin cites a passage from Simenon (cited in Cox 230) to illustrate this phenomenon: *Je me suis demandé pourquoi Maurice cessait de parler au beau milieu d'une phrase*, 'I wondered why Maurice had stopped talking mid-sentence.' As Thogmartin notes, it would not be possible to use ?*a cessé de parler,* 'stopped talking,' the compound past, in written French, but *avait cessé de parler* ('had stopped talking'), the past perfect, would be possible (345).

One must use the compound past in order to form a basic narrative in French, which "would be a single sentence in the 'passé composé' relating to a single event: for example, Agnès in *L'école des femmes*: *Le petit chat est mort.*[,] or a newspaper headline (where English would use the present)" (Thogmartin 346). According to Thogmartin, a sentence in the imperfect, such as *Le petit chat mourait…*, 'The cat was dying…,' could not function on its own, but "might be the opening line of a novel called *La Mort du petit*

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[13] A periphrastic tense consists of an auxiliary and a past participle (Ayoun 4).

chat recounting events that were going on while the kitten lay dying, but is not in itself a complete narration of an event" (346). The same would be true in Spanish.

As has been shown, the uses of perfective and imperfective aspect of Spanish and French past-tense verbs are similar. Further discussion of aspect of past-tense verbs in both languages will follow in Chapter Two, the literature review. The third chapter will contain a discussion of textbook explanations, which will be analyzed in the fourth chapter, as well as the results of a survey distributed among Spanish and French instructors. The results of the survey will be analyzed in Chapter Four. Chapter Four will also include a discussion on possible classroom activities relating to aspect.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

The previous chapter discussed the uses of perfective and imperfective aspects in

English, Spanish, and French. This chapter deals with the acquisition of these

conjugations in Spanish and in French, the primary difficulties students have with them,

and proposed methods of teaching past-tense aspectual differences.

Acquisition of the Preterite and the Imperfect in Spanish

Andersen found that perfect morphology is acquired first, followed by imperfect

morphology. Ramsey (1990), Salaberry (1999), and Camps (2002, 2005) found that

students of Spanish acquire the preterite and the imperfect in a similar order. The perfect

is acquired as follows: achievement → accomplishment → activity → state. The

acquisition of the imperfect is more gradual. Speakers acquire the imperfect in this order:

state → activity → accomplishment → achievement (Koike and Klee 101). As Andersen

and Shirai note, an adult native speaker of Spanish would be able to apply both perfective

aspect and imperfective aspect to all four of Vendler's lexical categories (Koike and Klee

101). That is, both the preterite and the imperfect can be used with verbs of all lexical

aspects: states, activities, accomplishments, and achievements.

Primary Difficulties Experienced by Students of Spanish

"Both language-learners and linguists are likely to experience initial difficulty

with the preterite and the imperfect, because the fact is that most past-tense situations can

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be described with either label" (Lunn 50, quoted in Frantzen 145). Writers choose a past-tense aspect based on how they want to express information: the preterite is used for viewing events in focus and as a whole and for drawing the hearer's attention to the information; the imperfect is used to view events out of focus, because the speaker is either too close to or too removed from the situation to see it clearly. Speakers also have the choice between conventional and unconventional uses of aspect. A speaker making conventional choices uses the preterite for information that is in focus and the imperfect for information that is out of focus. For example, the sentence *Comía cuando llegaste.*, 'I was eating when you arrived.,' is a conventional use of aspect because the speaker uses the preterite to focus on the hearer's action, arriving, and defocuses the action that was occurring in the background when the hearer arrived, in this case, eating. Unconventional choices involve using the preterite for out-of-focus information and the imperfect for in-focus information. For example, a speaker who focuses more on himself rather than his surroundings might make the following observations: *Comía mamá, leía papá y cosía Inés. Yo dormí.*, "Mom ate, Dad read, and Ines sewed. I slept.' (49-61). Although Lunn's paper examines the literary uses of the preterite and the imperfect, her analysis could be used to explain the difficulties encountered by students of Spanish when studying aspect. The choice is based on the speaker's perspective, rather than on "categories of verbs or of time spans" (Lunn 51). The difficulty for students, then, is understanding the speaker's perspective, particularly if it is unconventional. As Lunn notes, students and linguists have different tasks when approaching aspect: the student must understand conventional uses, but the linguist must understand and explain unconventional uses (50). If the

student is able to understand and interpret unconventional uses as well as conventional uses using the in focus/out of focus criterion, she may have less difficulty.

For some researchers (Frantzen, Westfall and Foerster), the difficulties with the preterite and the imperfect can be attributed to typical explanations found in textbooks, which can be inadequate and misleading. For example, textbooks give incomplete rules with multiple exceptions, leaving the student confused when he comes across a counter-example. Students who learn that the imperfect is used to describe someone's emotional state may become confused when they read a sentence such as *Ayer, estuve triste*, 'Yesterday, I was/became/stopped being sad,' because they are lead to believe that only *Ayer, estaba triste*, 'Yesterday, I was sad,' is possible. Another exception Frantzen points out in her paper is the use of time expressions, such as three days ago, to signal the use of either the preterite or the imperfect. Although time expressions can be reliable indicators of whether to use the preterite or the imperfect, the speaker must analyze the entire situation in order to choose the appropriate aspect. The imperfect aspect is necessary in the sentence *Jorge hablaba español hacía tres años*, 'Jorge had been speaking Spanish for three years,' due to the syntax required by time expressions used with *hacer*, 'to make.' Students who learn to associate specific time references with the preterite will probably have difficulty using such phrases with the imperfect. The phrase *todos los días*, 'every day,' on the other hand, is often paired with the imperfect because it represents a habitual occurrence. However, the preterite is required in a sentence such as *Entre 2008 y 2010, Jorge se montó en bicicleta todos los días*, 'Jorge rode a bicycle every day between 2008 and 2010' because the event of Jorge's riding a bicycle every day is confined to the years 2008 through 2010.

Preterite morphology, which Massey describes as "complex and rule-burdened" (550), can also be difficult for students as it is one of the most irregular in Spanish. Futhermore, English has only one past tense, while Spanish has two (Martínez vii). As shown in Solé and Solé's examples (55) in the previous chapter, a Spanish sentence can have several possible English translations.

Teaching the Spanish Preterite and Imperfect

Several researchers have proposed what they view as more effective methods for teaching the preterite and the imperfect. Frantzen, for example, argues against traditional textbook explanations, which she views as "half-truths." She suggests a broader set of six rules of thumb which more fully encompass the uses of the preterite and the imperfect. According to Frantzen, the imperfect should be used to refer to:

1. "actions and states in progress at some focused point in the past"
2. "habitual past actions"
3. "repetitious past actions"
4. "anticipated/planned actions" (147).

The preterite is used in the following circumstances:

1. when discussing "the completion of past actions or states"
2. when referring to "the beginning of past actions or states" (147).

These rules of thumb better explain the uses of the preterite and the imperfect than do typical rules found in textbooks. Frantzen views the following rules found in textbooks as problematic (146):

1. "The imperfect describes emotional or mental activity."
2. "The imperfect is used to express repeated or habitual past actions."
3. "'Would + infinitive' signals the use of the imperfect."
4. "Certain words and expressions are frequently associated with the preterite, others with the imperfect."
5. "Some verbs take on a special meaning in the preterite tense."

6. "When two actions occur simultaneously in the past, the imperfect is used."

Those familiar with the uses of the preterite and the imperfect will likely think of counterexamples to the problematic rules as they are reading the list. As Frantzen notes, these rules are "'half-truths'" and can confuse and mislead students (145-146). For example, both the preterite and the imperfect can be used to refer to a mental or emotional state. The speaker's choice of aspect depends on whether he views the action as completed or in progress/ongoing (147).

Ex.: *Pensé que sería buena idea informarte de los planes.*, 'I thought (it occurred to me) that it would be a good idea to inform you of the plans.'
Pensaba que sería buena idea informarte de los planes..., 'I was thinking/I thought that it would be a good idea to inform you of the plans…'

In the first example, the speaker implies that the idea of informing the listener of her plans occurred to her instantaneously—the idea began and was completed at the same time. The second example indicates that the speaker was thinking about informing the listener of her plans. The use of the imperfect signals that some other circumstance either caused the speaker to change her mind about informing the listener of her plans or interrupted her thought process. More information would be needed here, such as, *Pensaba que sería buena idea informarte de los planes, pero Manuel me dijo que arruinaría la sopresa si te los dijera*, 'I was thinking it would be a good idea to inform you of the plans, but Manuel told me I would ruin the surprise if I told you about them' or *Pensaba que sería buena idea informarte de los planes cuando Silvia llamó*, 'I was thinking it would be a good idea to inform you of the plans when Sylvia called' (Frantzen 147).

Another circumstance in which the both preterite and the imperfect can be used is for repeated actions. Frantzen disagrees with the use of the term "repeated" in this situation because it is "ambiguous," meaning it could be applied to either aspect (148). A speaker could say: *Apareció el fantasma dos veces*, 'The ghost appeared two times' or *Aparecía el fantasma cuando María apagaba las luces*, 'The ghost appeared whenever/each time María turned the lights off.' For this reason, she suggests calling repeated ongoing actions "repetitive or repetitious actions" to avoid confusion (148, 154). Furthermore, both the preterite and the imperfect can be used to discuss "two or more simultaneous actions" depending on whether or not the action is completed (148). Frantzen offers the following examples: *Juan salió en el momento en que Ana entró* and *María leía mientras su hijo dormía* (154, first example from Quilter 96). The preterite must be applied in the first example because both actions were completed instantaneously (154). However, the actions do not have to be instantaneous for the preterite to be used. The preterite can be used with simultaneous durative actions, provided that the speaker focuses on their completion rather than their duration (154). Ramsey provides the following example from Galdós' *La de Bringas* to illustrate this point: *Mientras estuvieron solos, Bringas y su mujer apenas hablaron* (326, quoted in Frantzen 155), 'Bringas and his wife hardly talked while they were alone.' If Galdos had written, *Mientras estaban solos, Bringas y su mujer apenas hablaban*, 'Bringas and his wife hardly talked while they were alone,' the sentence would have served as a description of the circumstances that existed when another event happened, while *Mientras estaban solos, Bringas y su mujer apenas hablaron*, 'Bringas and his wife hardly talked while they were alone,' would have brought the hearer's attention to the Bringas' actions during

the unspecified time they were alone. The time they were alone would serve as background information in this situation.

Frantzen also sees the association of either the preterite or the imperfect with certain words or phrases as problematic.

> Apparently [textbook] authors consider lists [of expressions associated with the preterite or the imperfect] helpful for lower-level learners, as they build their understanding of aspectual differences, but once they have reached some level of competence, they are no longer needed. However, the danger is that although a few of the phrases are reliable for signaling aspectual choice, most are not (150).

Frantzen provides the following explanation from a first-year textbook to illustrate this point:

> "Certain words or phrases are often associated with the preterite since they indicate a limited time period. These phrases tell when the action started and/or stopped."
> 1. "a specific time: a + la(s) + hour"
> 2. "a general time: por la mañana"
> 3. "a date: el martes/el 25 de junio de 1817/en 1965; el mes pasado; tarde/temprano/pronto/después/luego/ayer/anteayer/anoche"
> 4. "a certain amount of time: por dos años/por una hora/por cinco meses" (150)

Frantzen offers the following examples to illustrate the unreliability of such lists:

> 1. "A las ocho me acosté./A las ocho ya leía para el lunes."
> 2. "Hice mi tarea por la mañana./Ayer, por la mañana, caminaba por la calle cuando vi el accidente./De niña, hacía mi tarea por la mañana."
> 3. "Susana nació en 1965./En 1965, aunque solo tenia 16 años, David ya asistía a la universidad."
> 4. "Carlos estudió por una hora y luego se acostó./De niño, Daniel leía por una hora antes de acostarse (150)."

As can be seen, it is possible to use either the imperfect or the preterite with most of the expressions in the list. "Although it is true that a few of the listed expressions (e.g. *por dos años*), would not likely be used with the imperfect, by the time all the unreliable expressions are eliminated from the list, what remains is scarcely a list" (Frantzen 150).

Frantzen argues that although lists of terms associated with the imperfect ("*siempre, cada día, todos los lunes, generalmente*, etc." (151)) are "statistically" more reliable than lists of terms used with the preterite, students should not rely on them as indicators of the imperfect because they can be used with the preterite if the context refers to "the completion of [an] even[t]" (151). Therefore, it can be argued that teaching a list of usage rules rather than a list of terms often associated with the preterite and the imperfect is more helpful to students (150).

Frantzen also views the statement that "some verbs take on a special meaning in the preterite tense" is "misleading" because it is not always true. It is more helpful, she argues, to point out to students that while these verbs are often interpreted differently in the preterite, they are not irregular or different from "'normal'" verbs (151) and can at times "best be translated into English as the 'normal' infinitive" (152). For example, the verb *tener*, 'to have,' can be translated as 'to receive' in the preterite (King and Suñer 88), but this translation is not a given. It is unlikely that the sentence *María tuvo un hijo el año pasado*, 'Mary had (gave birth to) a son last year,' would be translated as 'Mary received a son last year.'

Finally, the explanation that the imperfect translates to "would + infinitive" is unreliable because it can lead to students' using the imperfect in situations in which the conditional would be appropriate if the instructor does not mention the conditional to the students (149) and it is not taught until later in the semester. However, translations to "was/were + infinitive" and "used to + infinitive" are more reliable than "would + infinitive." "Was/were + infinitive" corresponds to the English past progressive, and can therefore be used quite reliably to "signa[l] the imperfect." "Used to + infinitive" can be

used with the imperfect provided that the action, event, or state is viewed as "habitual or customary" (148-149).

Westfall and Foerster agree with Frantzen that textbook explanations are problematic, but they argue that Frantzen's rules of thumb do not take into consideration the semantic aspects, or "temporal properties," of the preterite and the imperfect, nor does she discuss the discursive properties of the preterite and the imperfect. As Westfall and Foerster note, "Past research indicates that an approach based on temporal and discourse uses of these forms is needed" (551). For example, García and van Putte find that the primary difficulty of non-native speakers is that they have trouble determining the uses of the preterite and the imperfect in "any save the most obvious narrative lines" (27, quoted in Westfall and Foerster 551). In other words, native speakers examine a discourse's big picture, while non-natives zoom in on the "immediate context" (551). Therefore, students must learn the temporal properties of the preterite and the imperfect as well as their uses. Westfall and Foerster propose a four-step method for teaching the preterite and the imperfect, as well as visual metaphors.

Westfall and Foerster recommend that the teacher begin by explaining the uses of the preterite with examples. The students can then begin analyzing passages written entirely in the preterite in terms of the way each verb is used—does it represent a completed action, the beginning of an action, etc. The teacher need not have finished explaining the uses of the preterite. Westfall and Foerster define the preterite as an aspect that indicates (552):

1. "A sequence of events."
   a. *Llegué a la escuela, vi a mi amigo José y fuimos a la clase de español*, 'I arrived at school, I saw my friend Joseph, and we went to Spanish class'
2. "Quantitatively-bound repetitive actions."
   a. *La banda cantó "La Bamba" tres veces*, 'The band sang "La Bamba" three times'
3. "The beginning of a state."
   a. *Desde aquel momento, Nicolás creyó en Papá Noel*, 'From that moment, Nicholas believed in Santa Claus'
4. Events with "fixed endpoints."
   a. *Pasamos un año en Francia*, 'We spent a year in France'

While their suggestion to couple a list of the uses of the preterite with examples is valid, the authors use potentially confusing terminology. For example, the phrase "quantitatively-bound repetitive actions" will likely require further explanation, such as "an action that was completed a certain number of times." "Completed" is a key word in this explanation, as the imperfect can also be used with repetitive actions, and even those that are "quantitatively-bound," as in the following example: *El cura recitaba El Padrenuestro dos veces cada mañana*, 'Every morning, the priest recited/would recite the Lord's Prayer two times.' While context is needed in order for this example to be valid—in this case, it is "cada mañana"—it is still a possible use of the imperfect.

Furthermore, the explanation that a sequence of events calls for the preterite must be qualified using the term "completed," as a sequence of events can also be described using the imperfect. As in the previous example, context is needed: *De niña, la Sra. López levantaba a las ocho, se cepillaba los dientes y comía una manzana*, 'As a child, Mrs. López got up at eight, brushed her teeth, and ate an apple.' If the teacher were to use similar examples to explain to her class that both the preterite and the imperfect are valid choices, she would need to supplement her explanation with Westfall and Foerster's assertion that the preterite is used for the main events in a narration, while the imperfect

is used for background information. The example relating to the priest might be used to set the stage in a story about the priest, while the example dealing with Mrs. López' morning routine as a child could be found in a story about an event from her childhood.

After the class discusses the preterite, it can move on to the imperfect. The authors define the imperfect as a conjugation that "describe[s] or characterizes an open interval in time" (552). The students receive another paragraph, this time written in the imperfect, to which the instructor assigns a time period, such as "when I was little." He draws a box on the board and writes the time period in the box, as shown in the following example. Each imperfect verb in the paragraph should be written in the box, as shown in Figure 2.1 (552).

<div style="text-align:center; border:1px solid black; display:inline-block; padding:10px;">

cuando era pequeño

iba al parque todos los días
almorzaba en McDonald's
bebía mucha limonada

</div>
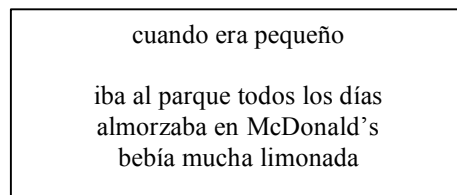
Fig. 2.1 Example Imperfect Exercise from Ruth Westfall and Sharon Foerster. "Beyond Aspect: New Strategies for Teaching the Preterite and the Imperfect." *Hispania* 79.3 (1996): 550-560. Web.

Once the activity has been completed, the teacher should then explain that the events listed in the box "describe" the time period, "when I was little." Students should then be asked questions relating to a past time period, which they will answer in the imperfect.

After the uses of each aspect have been discussed, the teacher should present her students with English examples involving perfective and imperfective aspect.

Ex.: I painted the house.
        #I was painting the house.

The first example indicates that the speaker finished painting the house, while the second is incomplete because it requires more information, such as an event that interrupted the speaker or changed his action. The teacher should then give the same examples in Spanish to illustrate this point.

> Ex.: *Pinté la casa.*
> *Pintaba la casa cuando me caí de la escalera/cuando Julio llegó a mi casa.*

As in the English examples, the first Spanish example indicates that the speaker finished painting the house. The second, which was given as an incomplete English sentence is now complete as it includes the events that interrupted the speaker's painting—in this case, "I fell off the ladder" and "Julius arrived at my house." However, "I was painting the house" could be seen as complete in English if it is a response to a question such as, "What were you doing?" The teacher must explain to her students that any differences between the Spanish and English sentences are morphological,[1] as the two groups of sentences communicate the same information (Westfall and Foerster 553).

Thomas also contrasts English and Spanish aspect in his intermediate textbook.[2] He states that English speakers use adverbial expressions, context, and structure (past progressive versus simple past) to convey aspect. For example, I was riding my bicycle when John arrived and I rode my bicycle when John arrived. Spanish speakers, on the

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[1] Morphological differences are seen in the use of the simple past in the English sentence where the preterite would be used in Spanish, and in the use of the past progressive in the English example where the imperfect would be used in Spanish.

[2] Thomas' text could also be included in my discussion on textbooks in Chapters Three and Four. Its comparison of English aspect with Spanish aspect is excellent and and allows students to view aspect as a less foreign concept. Because my goal in writing this thesis is to help students become more comfortable with aspectual distinctions, and one way to do that is to help them understand English aspect, Thomas' book serves as an example to other texts and is an appropriate inclusion in the present chapter. Moreover, the text includes a unique explanation, helpful to both students and teachers, of the past tense in narration, which will be discussed later.

other hand, use the preterite and the imperfect. Thomas gives four sets of sentences

similar to the one given above to illustrate that some sentences emphasize the progression

or middle of an action rather than its beginning, completion, or end, as in the first

sentence. Others emphasize the action's beginning, end, or completion, as in the second

example. Spanish speakers use the imperfect to refer to an action's progression and the

preterite when discussing an action's beginning, end, or completion. Thomas further links

aspectual representations in English and in Spanish by stating that aspectual choice

"depends largely on the intended meaning" and that "[t]here are often language cues that

can help English speakers understand when to use the preterite or the imperfect" (115).

Thomas summarizes the differences between the preterite and the imperfect as

follows (116):

Uses of the imperfect:

1. "middle of action"
2. "action in progress"
3. "repeated action"
4. "sequence of habits or repeated actions"

Uses of the preterite:

1. "beginning or end of action"
2. "completed action"
3. "single, completed occurrences"
4. "sequence of completed actions"

Like Westfall and Foerster, Thomas emphasizes semantics, explaining that the

imperfect usually conveys background information when used in sentences discussing

"location, time, dates, ages, and weather" unless the speaker is referring to "the beginning

or end of the condition, a specific time frame" (116). Emotional, mental, or physical

conditions are used with the imperfect because they are "ongoing states," but the preterite

indicates "a change in condition" or the "specific time frame when it occurred (117). Time and dates are expressed using the imperfect unless the speaker is talking about when an event took place, as in the example, *El congreso fue el sábado*., 'The conference took place on Saturday' or when it ended, as in *El congreso fue a las dos*, 'The conference ended at two.' (116). In narration, the imperfect represents the *interrupted* action, and the preterite refers to the *interrupting* action (117).

Thomas includes a unique explanation in his text. He informs the student that a sentence that expresses only an action in progress is viewed as incomplete. The hearer is left wondering what happens next, so the speaker must finish the sentence with a verb in the preterite in order to "complet[e] the thought" expressed by the verb in the imperfect (118).

The above discussions indicate a necessity of adapting textbook explanations to better reflect the uses of the preterite and the imperfect and to be more easily understood by the student. Westfall and Foerster's and Thomas' works also demonstrate the importance of English in understanding aspect in Spanish. As Frantzen and Westfall and Foerster argue, poor textbook explanations contribute to students' difficulties with aspect, a difficult subject in itself as several have pointed out. These problems are not limited to the Spanish language or to Spanish textbooks, as will be discussed in the next section.

Acquisition of the Compound Past and the Imperfect in French

As Ayoun (2004) notes, multiple studies relating to the acquisition of the French past tense among English speakers, both children and adult college students, have been conducted. These studies agreed with the Aspect Hypothesis proposed by Andersen and Shirai (Ayoun 35) that states that perfective aspect is acquired before imperfective aspect,

and that students first use perfective aspect with accomplishments and achievements, and later with activities and verbs of state. Imperfective aspect is acquired as follows: verbs of state → activities → accomplishments → achievements. Progressive aspect is first used with achievements and later with accomplishments and achievements and is "not incorrectly overextended to statives" (Bardovi-Harlig 2000, 227, quoted in Shirai 53).

Primary Difficulties Experienced by Students of French

Past-tense aspectual distinction is also one of the most difficult concepts in French for English speakers because it does not have a "neat equivalent" in English (Dansereau 33). Dansereau finds that inadequate explanations found in introductory textbooks can contribute to the problem as they are often "vague, incomplete, contradictory, and generally poor" (33). For example, books often give general explanations for tense and the compound past up front, and then later elaborate on them through the use of "sub-explanations, precisions and exceptions" (33). Dansereau argues that this practice misleads and confuses students, and that students would be better off with all-encompassing definitions. An example of a poor "general definition" is the following: "[T]he *passé composé* is used to 'indicate that an event occurred in the past'" (33-34). The problem with this definition is that it can be used to refer to any past tense in French, including subjunctive and conditional tenses (34). Textbook explanations are also "ambiguous and confusing" because they often have exceptions and portray the compound past/imperfect distinction as a semantic question rather than an aspectual one. That is, this distinction is not an issue of action verbs=compound past and verbs of state=imperfect, but rather an issue of the speaker's choosing an aspect according to how he or she "wishes to portray the event" (Dansereau 34). Because the distinction between

the compound past and the imperfect is aspectual rather than semantic, both the compound past and the imperfect can be used with any verb (Dansereau 34).[15] Ayoun believes that explanations revolving around aspectual distinctions are not included in textbooks because aspectual "distinctions [between perfective and imperfective aspect] are complex and subtle" (33). Phonological similarities between the imperfect and other tenses, such as the conditional, whose final vowel sound is also [ɛ], and verb forms that end in [e], including the infinitives and past participles of *–er* verbs and the *vous*, 'you, formal singular/plural,' form of regular verbs, complicate matters (Harley 1986, quoted in Ayoun 33), as do the verbs' complex morphologies (Terrell 1986, quoted in Ayoun 33).

Tomme finds the French imperfect to be one of the most difficult verb forms in French, not because of its conjugations, but because of its uses in comparison with English, which students are likely to use in order to understand the French imperfect (1100). For example, which form of the English past tense should be used to translate, *Quand je vivais au Canada, je mangeais de la poutine*., 'When I lived in Canada, I ate/would eat/used to eat poutine.'? Students who learn that the imperfect refers to an incomplete event and the compound past to a complete event may find that explanation problematic because the speaker no longer lives in Canada nor eats poutine. Like other researchers, Tomme states that textbook explanations can be part of the problem because "[m]ost beginning and intermediate grammar books divide the uses of [the imperfect] into loose categories which often overlap and give little attention to the exceptions to the rules—especially those with regard to English." The instructor must mitigate student errors through the use of "a more economical and clear-cut approach" (1100).

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[15] Some verbs, such as "fall," are by nature perfective, and when used in the imperfect, imply a prolonged action (PC).

Another difficulty with using the compound past in French is the distinction between verbs used with *être* and verbs used with *avoir*. Some teachers use mnemonics such as "DR. and MRS. VANDERSTAMP" or "VANDERTRAMP," each capital letter of which corresponds to a verb used with *être*. Jarausch and Tufts provide the following list of verbs used with *être*: *aller*, *arriver*, *descendre*, *devenir*, *entrer*, *monter*, *mourir*, *naître*, *partir*, *passer*, *rentrer*, *rester*, *retourner*, *revenir*, *sortir*, *tomber*, *venir*.[3] The verbs *descendre*, *monter*, *passer*, *rentrer*, *retourner*, and *sortir* can be used with *avoir* if they have a direct object. If the direct object is a pronoun, the participle must agree in gender and number with the object. Furthermore, all verbs with reflexive pronouns are used with *être*, and any participle used with *être* must agree in gender and number with the subject (165).

> Ex.: *Ma mère est retournée à six heures du soir.,* 'My mother returned at 6:00 pm.'
> *Ma mère a retourné les livres de Paul.*, 'My mother returned Paul's books.'
> *Ma mère les a retournés.*, 'My mother returned them (Paul's books).'
> *Ma mère a retourné la robe de Martine.*, 'My mother returned Martine's dress.'
> *Ma mère l'a retournée.*, 'My mother returned it (Martine's dress).'
> *Ma mère s'est maquillée.*, 'My mother applied makeup (to herself).'

Fayol and Pacton, in their work on past-participle agreement among Francophone students, state that agreement is "plus tardivement enseigné et réputé plus difficile à acquérir et mettre en œuvre," which is due to incorrect generalization and to the use of homophones (69-70). For example, a student may attempt agreement with a past participle used with *avoir* when no such agreement is necessary, as in the example **Richard et Michèle ont mangés des légumes.*, 'Richard and Michelle ate vegetables.,'

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[3] 'to go,' 'to arrive,' 'to descend,' 'to become,' 'to enter,' 'to climb,' 'to die,' 'to be born,' 'to leave,' 'to pass,' 'to go back in,' 'to stay,' 'to return,' 'to return, to come back,' 'to go out,' 'to fall,' 'to come' www.wordreference.com

which should be written as *Richard et Michèle ont mangé des légumes*., because the verb *avoir* is transitive and is not preceded by a direct object pronoun. Homophone errors may be seen in the use of the infinitive instead of the past participle, such as in the example, **Richard et Michèle ont manger des légumes* (63-64, 69-70).

<p align="center">*Teaching the French Compound Past and Imperfect*</p>

Like Frantzen, Dansereau critiques conventional textbook explanations of the past tense and proposes alternatives. She finds five problematic elements in traditional textbook explanations. First, the definition of "finished vs. unfinished" is confusing because almost all past actions "will have been completed" "'at the time of speaking'" and/or would have been completed in the past, meaning that completion at the moment of speech cannot be used to distinguish aspect. This definition can be improved by stating that the compound past refers to "'actions completed *at the point of reference* in the past'" (34); however, the reference point changes, and students must "keep track of this reference time point" (34).

Definitions relating to the imperfect can be confusing as well when terms such as "continuing," "continuous," "durative," or "punctual" are used (34). These terms "giv[e] the impression that the length of time involved in some way affects the choice of tense" (34). An event can occur over a short or long period of time and still be used in the imperfect. The definition of the imperfect as an aspect that refers to an action or an event without referencing its beginning or end is also inadequate because actions or events stated in the imperfect "had to begin and end at some time and the beginning and the ending are often implicit in the context," such as in the following example Dansereau provides: "'*Marc s'est jeté de l'avion. Pendant qu'il tombait, il avait peur, mais lorsque*

<p align="center">31</p>

ses pieds ont touché la terre, sa peur s'est evaporée,'" 'Marc jumped out of the airplane. While he was falling, he was afraid, but once his feet touched the ground, his fear evaporated' (35). Dansereau argues that this example is contradictory because Marc's fall "began when [he] jumped and ended when he landed" (35). It is also confusing to use terms such as "action" and "state" because any verb can be used to refer to an action or a state depending on the context, and such terms lead the student to believe that verbs can belong to only one category. "Description" is a term that should not be used either because students look at sentences such as *Marie a mangé la soupe*, 'Mary ate the soup,' and consider them descriptions. Using the term "'precise moment,'" even when stating that the imperfect "describe[s] 'a past mental or physical state *without reference to an exact moment of time*'" can be problematic as well because a specific time is mentioned in sentences such as *Je lisais pour trois heures chaque nuit quand j'étais petite*, 'I read for three hours every night when I was little' (35).

The statement that the compound past is used for events that were "repeated a determinate number of times" and that the imperfect is used for events that were "repeated an indeterminate number of times" is also erroneous, as seen in Dansereau's three examples (35):

1. "'*Il tombait quand il a vu l'hélicoptère*,'" 'He was falling when he saw the helicopter.'
2. "'*Il est souvent venu me voir*,'" 'He came to see me often.'
3. "'*Cet été-là, il ne mangeait que deux fois par jour*,'" 'He only ate twice a day that summer.'

Although the first example is written in the imperfect, the subject fell only once; example two is written in the compound past even though we do not know how many times the subject visited me; and even though example three is written in the imperfect, we know

exactly how many times the subject ate (35). It is instead better to talk about actions such as the one in the third example using the term "'habitual'" rather than "'repeated'" because actions written in either the compound past or the imperfect can be repeated (36).

Dansereau also critiques the use of English translations in textbook explanations of aspectual distinctions because students become "dependent" on them, using translations rather than aspectual distinctions to differentiate between the compound past and the imperfect (36). Another problem is the translations themselves.

> [T]he *imparfait* is often translated as "used to"/"would." But how many students know the difference between the habitual 'would' and the conditional 'would' in English? The *imparfait* also sometimes translates as 'was/were doing,' but this definition excludes modal and auxiliary verbs which are rarely translated into English as progressives. For example, the verbs in both "*Elle avait un enfant*" and "*Elle a eu un enfant*" come out as "she had" in English. In addition, the "habitual" usage of the *imparfait* can often translate as a simple past in English: the verbs in both: "*le dimanche, j'allais à l'église*" and "*Dimanche, je suis allé à l'église*" can both be translated as "I went" (Dansereau 36).

Dansereau then provides an alternative method of teaching the compound past/imperfect distinction. She explains the aspectual distinctions to her university French students through the distinction between imperfective and perfective aspect, which is taught in graduate linguistics courses (33). As a past event can be viewed from multiple angles and is not always represented the same way in English as it is in French, Dansereau cautions against using English to teach the French past tense (36). Rather than using English as a point of reference in explanations of the French compound past and imperfect, Dansereau suggests relying on an explanation such as Pulgram's (1984): "The *imparfait* is used to relate *what the conditions were/what was going on* (*Quelles étaient les conditions ?*), and the *passé composé* to relate *what happened/what happened next* (*Qu'est-ce qui s'est passé ?*)" (37). This explanation has no exceptions and does not use

33

confusing terminology (Dansereau 37). Students will be able to grasp this concept more easily through examples, particularly the imperfect explanation, as it has two parts. The first relates to habitual actions and events, such as *J'ai lisais tous les jours quand j'étais petite*, 'I read everyday when I was little,' and the second relates to the background information that was occurring when another action happened, as in the sentence *Il faisait froid quand il est sorti du théâtre*, 'It was cold when he left the theater.' As Dansereau explains, "a verb in the *imparfait* in the second context is almost never complete: it leaves one hanging, waiting to hear what happened (*passé composé*)" (37). Students should also understand "that…all *physical* description in the past—as opposed to description of something that *happened*—is in the imperfect" (37). If students have any questions relating to the choice between the compound past and the imperfect, they should be referred back to Pulgram's two definitions. The instructor should avoid falling back on traditional explanations and should present only "clear-cut" examples at first (37-38).

Abrate offers another method for teaching French aspectual distinctions, which can also be used in Spanish courses. She states that both articles and textbooks attempt to explain aspect, but neither is adequate. Articles are too "specific" and "abstract" for classroom use, and textbook explanations "that may be applicable some of the time but invariably confuse and frustrate the student faced with an exception" (546) and that make aspectual distinctions out to be a very difficult concept (547). A common explanation of the imperfect, is that it is used to talk about conditions, descriptions, and "(permanent) states" (547). However, both *Madeleine était triste* and *Madeleine a été triste*, 'Madeleine was sad,' are possible (547). Other exceptions are seen in the following rules (547):

Uses of the compound past:

1. "completed action/one-time action"
2. "limited time frame"
3. "summation of a series of actions"
4. "change of a mental state"
5. "'ago'"

Uses of the imperfect:

1. "description/(permanent) state/condition"
2. "interrupted action"
3. "repeated/habitual action"
4. "simultaneous action"
5. "duration/continuation"
6. "unfinished/progressive action"
7. "time/temporal expression"
8. "indirect discourse"
9. "'used to/would'"

Abrate gives two examples to illustrate the problems found in the first list. "*Il a lu le livre*" and "*Il lisait le livre*," 'He read the book,' can both refer to a completed action. Context rather than the use of the imperfect is the deciding factor in determining whether or not the second example refers to a completed action. If the imperfect does refer to an action's completion, that completion is "comparatively unimportant," but is emphasized through the use of the compound past in the first example (547). Abrate's second example, "*Les marchands français ont souvent voyagé en Italie au XVIe siècle*," 'French merchants often traveled to Italy during the sixteenth century,' would have the same meaning but different "nuances" if written as *Les marchands français souvent voyageaient en Italie au XVIe siècle*, meaning that it is difficult to determine what a "limited time frame" is (547). Some of the items on the lists are "redundant," such as "change in mental state," which Abrate considers a completion. Moreover, the term "ago" could apply to either the compound past or the imperfect depending on the context,

even though this word is listed under the compound past column. The sentences *Marie et Paul sont allés au supermarché il y a une semaine.* and *Marie et Paul allaient au supermarché il y a une semaine.*, 'Mary and Paul went to the supermarket a week ago,' are both possible. "Used to/would" seem to indicate an activity that no longer occurs, which would place them under the compound past column (Abrate 548).

Abrate calls for a "concise" explanation of French past tense aspect that reflects native speakers' "way [of] viewing reality in terms of the past tenses" (546) instead of giving students lists of redundant rules that have many exceptions. She suggests the terms momentary and non-momentary verbs, which focus on "meaning and implication" (548). For Abrate, momentary verbs "are normally seen to be definable to a limited 'moment' in time and include most action verbs—*parler*, *aller*, *voyager*, *manger*, *respirer*, *retourner*, *prendre*, *voir*—but also included (this is where an action/non-action classification falls) are verbs such as *durer* and *oublier*, which include momentary limits implicit in their meanings" (548-549).[16] These verbs are typically used with the compound past (549). Abrate writes that determining a non-momentary verb's "moment" is more challenging because the speaker must consider the verb's meaning as well as "individual perceptions" of the verb (549). She offers the verb *attendre*, 'to wait for,' to illustrate her point. For her, it is difficult to limit waiting to a time frame, but others will note that waiting eventually ends. Thus, verbs of this type can be considered either momentary or non-momentary, as can other verbs such as *entendre*, 'to hear,' that have more than one meaning (549). Examples of non-momentary verbs include those that refer to "thought, feeling, and weather—*penser*, *aimer*, *pleuvoir*, *croire*, *regretter*, *être*, *avoir*" (549), 'to

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[16] 'to speak,' 'to go,' 'to travel,' 'to eat,' 'to breathe,' 'to return,' 'to take,' 'to last,' 'to forget'

think,' 'to love,' 'to rain,' 'to believe,' 'to regret,' 'to be,' 'to have.' Non-momentary verbs are usually conjugated in the imperfect because they refer to "continuity and repetition" (549). Abrate states that "understood" counter indications are most often found among non-momentary verbs (549). The speaker's meaning affects the choice between momentariness and non-momentariness, and context can help determine that meaning (549).

The uses of the compound past and the imperfect with momentary and non-momentary verbs, respectively, "hol[d] true if there is no contrary indication" (549), such as the use of a momentary verb in the imperfect or a non-momentary verb in the compound past. When momentary verbs are used in the imperfect, as in the example "*Je lui parlais*," 'I was talking/talked to him,' "[c]ontinuity or repetition is emphasized;" when non-momentary verbs are conjugated into the compound past, "[t]ermination or momentariness is emphasized" (548). The speaker refers to the termination of an event in the sentence, "*Il a plu*," 'It rained,' and to either termination or momentariness in the sentence, "*J'ai connu son frère*," 'I met his brother' (549). Verbs accompanied by phrases such as *toujours*, 'always,' can be written either in the imperfect or the compound past, depending on the overall meaning of the sentence (549). For example, both *Nous aimions toujours ce restaurant* and *Nous avons toujours aimé ce restaurant*, 'We always liked that restaurant,' are correct. The speaker's emphasis on either continuity/repetition or termination/momentariness affects aspectual choice, complicating the perfective/imperfective distinction. However, expressions of time and age, unless the speaker is talking about a birthday, as in *Vous avez eu dix-sept ans*, 'You turned seventeen,' are used in the imperfect (549). That is, one says, *Il était six heures*, 'It was

six o'clock' and *J'avais six ans quand j'ai lu Le Petit prince*, 'I was six when I read *The Little Prince*' instead of **Il a été six heures* and **J'ai été six ans quand j'ai lu Le Petit prince*. Abrate states that "[t]here are few right and wrong uses of the passé composé and the imperfect, although there is a right and a wrong way to express a particular nuance" (552).

The terms momentary and non-momentary verbs help students use the compound past and the imperfect, as does "awareness of contrary indications that are often contextual" (Abrate 552). Students must examine a sentence's "overall meaning" and the message they are trying to convey rather than adhering to a list of rules when deciding between the compound past and the imperfect, and must ask themselves, "What is implied?" when analyzing a sentence (552-553). One way to accomplish this task is through comparing a sentence written in the imperfect with one written in the compound past and listing the information each sentence implies. The instructor can also give students a list of implications and ask them which implications are true and which are not based on the two prompt sentences written in the past tense. Such an exercise helps students understand the kinds of information they can communicate through aspectual choice (552).

Boswell also discusses a method for teaching the compound past and the imperfect. He presents a twenty-two step inductive approach to teaching the French compound past and imperfect, which can be simplified into four stages interspersed with other material.

1. "The passé composé of active verbs"
2. "The imparfait of non-active verbs"
3. "Tense switching"
4. "Comparison with English" (73)

Boswell suggests instructors begin by narrating their daily routines, for example, in the present, and asking students questions in the present about their routines. The exercise should be repeated using the compound past, with attention drawn to the auxiliary verbs *avoir* and *être*, the latter of which is used for "motion verbs," as Boswell points out (74), and to verbs with reflexive pronouns. "No detailed explanations should be gone into at this point. The *je* and *vous* forms should be mastered in this kind of non-mechanical drill before the other persons are taught" (74). Students can also practice asking each other questions using *vous*. Next, the class studies and practices the formation of the compound past, first with verbs that use *avoir* and later with verbs that use *être*, including verbs with reflexive pronouns. The instructor should drill the forms for each verb, "not following the traditional paradigm order," and the students should respond with both the subject pronoun and the verb. Students will next learn about agreement between the auxiliary and the past participle as well as how to choose between *avoir* and *être*. Boswell explains that a participle used with *être* agrees in terms of gender and number with the subject, but a participle used with *avoir* only agrees with preceding direct objects. "Since this is a writing problem, students ought to be sent to the blackboard to write answers to questions such as these: *Avez-vous vu ma voiture? Oui, je l'ai vue. Est-ce que les Martin sont arrivés? Oui, ils sont arrivés*" (75), 'Have you seen my car? Yes, I have seen it. Have the Martins arrived? Yes, they have arrived.'[3] Students will then learn that a verb is used with *avoir* if it takes a direct object, but is used with *être* if it "expresses movement and includes the concept of the direction of movement: in, out, up, down, to, from, etc." (75) or if it has a reflexive pronoun (76). Motion verbs used

[3] Italics are mine.

with *être* can be grouped in pairs of opposites: *aller/venir*, *arriver/partir*, *entrer/sortir*, *montrer/descendre*, *naître/mourir*, 'to go/to come,' 'to arrive/to leave,' 'to enter/to leave,' 'to climb/to descend,' 'to be born/to die.' Motion verbs relating to "the manner of movement," such as *courir*, *marcher*, and *voler*, 'to run,' 'to walk,' and 'to fly,' are used with *avoir* (75).

After conjugations and auxiliaries have been discussed, students should move on to the formation of past participles. Boswell notes that almost all French past participles end in [e], [i], or [y]; these should be drilled separately at first, but can later be combined with other participles. Boswell suggests teaching imperfect forms of verbs such as *aimer*, *avoir*, *être*, *croire*, *penser*, *pouvoir*, *savoir*, and *vouloir*, 'to love,' 'to have,' 'to be,' 'to believe,' 'to think,' 'to be able to,' 'to know,' and 'to want,' before teaching their compound past forms because "they are 'descriptive' rather than 'active' ones. The point should be emphasized that active verbs (the vast majority) are *normally* used in the *p.c.* [compound past, and descriptive verbs (a dozen or so) are *normally* used in the *imparfait*" (76). Boswell has found that students understand this explanation well and that "it is the single most effective rule-of-thumb we can teach them" (76). The instructor should then explain that the class has been using active verbs, which "are all normally used in the successive mode, and are therefore put into the p.c. They usually correspond to our concept of events taking place one after another" (76).

Once it is time to discuss the imperfect, the instructor should take a similar approach as was used in discussions on the compound past. First, she begins by giving simultaneous descriptions using the present tense and then gives those same descriptions in the imperfect. Next, she elicits responses from her students to questions using the same

verbs she used in her descriptions. The class then practices with the imperfect forms not already used and discusses how to form the imperfect. Boswell recommends taking the *vous* form and replacing the [e] (*ez*) ending with [je] (*iez*). The nous form ends in [jõ] (*ions*), while all other forms end in [ɛ]. More practice occurs at this step. The class then discusses non-active/descriptive verbs. Boswell points out that the use of a verb in context is of more interest at this stage than the infinitive form because once the verb is conjugated and put into context, we know whether it is active or descriptive even if the infinitive is ambiguous. Once the imperfect has been explained and drilled, the students should practice converting present-tense verbs into either the compound past or the imperfect.

Next, the class practices using active verbs in the imperfect and descriptive verbs in the compound past and compares French usage with English usage. Active verbs are used in the imperfect when they are "used in certain relation to another verb" (78). The class practices using the active verbs in the imperfect first, and then practices using descriptive verbs in the compound past. Like active verbs used in the imperfect, descriptive verbs are used in the compound past when they are "used in a certain relationship to another verb" (79). Descriptive verbs used in the compound past can be described as reactions to events, such as my becoming sad was the result of hearing about my friend's death. Once this concept has been explained, students practice using descriptive verbs in the compound past.

Boswell's last three steps involve comparing French past tenses with English past tenses. While English has three past tenses, as shown in Table 2.1 (Boswell 81) below, French has two, as the *plus-que-parfait*, the past perfect, is not included in the group of

past tenses because it relates to events even more in the past, or as Boswell states, "past past" or "anterior past" events (80).

Table 2.1

Comparison of Aspect in English and French

"English"	"French"
"I have been" "COMPOUND PAST" "I have worked"	
	"J'ai travaillé"
"I worked"	"PASSÉ COMPOSÉ"
"SIMPLE PAST"	"J'ai été"
"I was"	
	"J'étais"
"PROGRESSIVE PAST"	"IMPARFAIT"
"I was working"	"Je travaillais"

Source: Boswell, Richard E. "Teaching the French Past Tenses." *The French Review* 43.1 (1971): 72-81. Print.

According to Boswell, the English simple past of descriptive verbs translates to the French imperfect, while the present-perfect translates to the compound past. For action verbs, the English simple past translates to the French compound past, while the present progressive translates to the imperfect (80-81). Figure 2.2 summarizes this concept (81).

	"anterior present"	"past"		
		"successive"	"non-successive"	
"active verbs"	"have worked"	"worked"	"was working"	"Eng."
	"ai travaillé"		"travaillais"	"Fr."
"descriptive verbs"	"have been"	"was"		"Eng."
	"ai été"		"étais"	"Fr."

Fig. 2.2 Correspondences between English and French Past Tenses from Richard E. Boswell, "Teaching the French Past Tenses." *The French Review* 43.1 (1971): 72-81. Web.

Boswell points out that we do not typically say "was being," except in the case of "'was being silly'" (81). "[T]his is a case of 'was being' expressing an active function and so it really belongs with 'was working'" (81).

McCloskey also proposes a lesson plan for teaching the compound past and the imperfect. Her plan is structured around an interactive exercise involving clickers, which have typically been used in science classrooms. She suggests providing students with an incomplete sentence written in the past tense. Students must determine if an imperfect verb or a compound verb best completes the sentence, and then use their clickers to vote on a verb. Next, the instructor projects the results on a screen, and the students form groups and discuss their choices. Each student must defend his choice to his group members. While McCloskey focuses on the French past tense, her methods could easily be applied to any language course dealing with contrastive structures.

The literature reviewed in this chapter indicates identical acquisition patterns of the Spanish preterite/imperfect and the French compound past/imperfect and shows that both students of Spanish and students of French experience similar difficulties with past-tense aspectual distinctions. The differences lie in the methods used to teach students how to differentiate between perfective and imperfective aspect. Each has its strengths and weaknesses, and each could be applied to either Spanish or French courses. While the strategies discussed by Frantzen, Westfall and Foerster, Thomas, Dansereau, Boswell, Tomme, and McCloskey are valuable to the L2 classroom, only Boswell's, Thomas', Tomme's, and Westfall and Foerster's methods aid students in viewing aspect in terms of their L1—in our case, English. Even so, their methods could be expanded to show how

aspect functions in English discourse.[17] Students often have trouble with L2 structures

they see as being very different from their L1; therefore, being able to locate similarities

between their L1 and the L2 should make language learning less intimidating.

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[17] Thomas does introduce his discussion of aspect with examples of English aspect, but these examples are confined to sentences and could be modified to show the functions of aspect in a longer text written in English.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

In Chapter Two, I discussed current literature relating to the acquisition of verbal aspect in Spanish, problems surrounding its acquisition in L2 classes, and teaching strategies proposed by various researchers. In part one of this chapter, I include descriptions of explanations of the past tense found in Spanish and French textbooks. Part two includes the results of a survey distributed among instructors of Spanish and French that relates to the teaching of verbal aspect in L2 classes. Both will be analyzed in the following chapter.

Textbook Analysis—Spanish

Vistas, *by Blanco and Donley*

Vistas is a first-year Spanish textbook consisting of eighteen chapters. The preterite conjugations are split into multiple chapters in the first half of the book, beginning with the most regular conjugations and ending with the irregular preterites. *Vistas* does present certain verbs as "verbs that change meaning in the preterite" (314), but does not explain that the meaning changes do not always apply. The imperfect conjugations are explained in one section, and the two conjugations are contrasted in the following section. The text provides the following chart, shown in Table 3.1, to explain the preterite and the imperfect (346).

Table 3.1

Vistas' Preterite/Imperfect Explanations

"Use the preterite to…"	"Use the imperfect to…"
1. "Explain actions that are viewed by the speaker as completed." "*Sandra* se rompió *la pierna.*" "*Fueron a Buenos Aires ayer.*"	1. "Describe an ongoing past action without relation to its beginning or end." "*Sandra* esperaba *al doctor.*" "*El médico* se preocupaba *por sus pacientes.*"
2. "Express the beginning or the end of a past action." "*La película* empezó *a las nueve.*" "*Ayer* terminé *el proyecto para la clase de química.*"	2. "Express habitual past actions or events." "*Cuando* era *joven,* jugaba *al tenis.*" "*De niño, Eduardo* se enfermaba *con frecuencia.*"
3. "Narrate a series of past actions or events." "*La doctora me* miró *los oídos, me* hizo *unas preguntas y* escribió *la receta*". "Me di *con la mesa,* me caí *y* me lastimé *el pie.*"	3. "Describe physical and emotional states or characteristics." "*La chica* quería *descansar.* Se sentía *mal y* tenía *dolor de cabeza.*" "*Ellos* eran *altos y* tenían *ojos verdes.*" "*Estábamos felices de ver a la familia.*"

Source: Blanco, José A. and Philip Redwine Donley. 4th ed. *Vistas: Introducción a la lengua española*. Boston: Vista Higher Learning, 2012. Print. and Blanco, José A. and Philip Redwine Donley. 5th ed. *Vistas: Introducción a la lengua española*. Boston: Vista Higher Learning, 2016. vText.

Puntos de partida, *by Knorre et al.*

Puntos de partida, also a beginning Spanish textbook, has nineteen chapters, including a preliminary chapter. The past tense is spread over chapters seven through ten. Chapters seven and eight contain lessons on the preterite, chapter nine introduces the imperfect, and chapter ten contrasts the two. Although students learn that Spanish has two simple past tenses, the preterite and the imperfect, in chapter seven, they do not learn about its uses until later. They do learn that the preterite can translate to the English simple past and to did + verb. Both chapters seven and eight instruct students on preterite conjugation paradigms. The imperfect conjugation paradigms are presented in chapter nine, as are the English translations of the imperfect: the simple past, would, used to, and the past progressive. Students are also given several uses of the imperfect (301):

1. Descriptions
   a. *Repeated habitual actions* in the past.
   b. Actions *in progress* when another action occurred and interrupted the in-progress action.
   c. Ongoing *physical*, *mental*, or *emotional states* in the past.
2. Telling *time*
3. Age expressions with *tener*

Chapter ten presents students with a series of contrasts relating to the uses of the preterite and the imperfect, as well as examples to illustrate these uses (328-329). This information is summarized in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2

Puntos de partida's Preterite/Imperfect Explanations

"Preterite"	"Imperfect"
"Beginning/end"	"Habitual"
"Completed"	"Ongoing"
"Series of completed actions"	"Background"
"Interrupt*ing*"	"Interrupt*ed*"
"Action"	"Stage (Background)/condition/ongoing"

Source: Knorre, Marty, Thalia Dorwick, Ana M. Pérez-Gironés, William R. Glass, and Hildebrando Villarreal. *Puntos de partida: An Invitation to Spanish*. 8th ed. Boston: McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., 2009.

Students also learn about meaning-change verbs. *Puntos de partida*, like other texts, lists communicative goals for its grammar topics.

Nexos, *by Spaine Long et al.*

Nexos, a beginning Spanish textbook, contains fourteen chapters. The preterite of regular and some irregular verbs is presented in chapter seven; more irregular preterites and the –ir stem-changing preterites are explained in chapter eight; and the imperfect and preterite/imperfect contrasts are outlined in chapter nine. These topics are mixed in with other grammar topics, such as object pronouns, informal commands, comparisons and superlatives, and *se* constructions. Each grammar topic has a communicative goal. The

goals for the past tense "talking about what you did" (the preterite) "talking about what you used to do" (the imperfect) and "talking about the past" (contrasting the preterite and the imperfect) (xiii).

Each lesson on the preterite teaches the conjugation paradigms. Explanations on the uses of the preterite build on each other in that section 7.1 states that the preterite is used for "actions that occurred and were completed in the past" (242), and section 7.2 adds to this definition by explaining that the preterite "describes actions that began and ended in the past and refers to things that happened and are over with, whether they happened just once or over time" (245). Section 7.1 also lists some expressions that are used with the preterite.

Section 8.1 explains the following: "The preterite forms of *conocer*, *saber*, *poder*, and *querer* can mean something slightly different from their meaning in the present indicative," but "[w]hen referring to a specific time period in the past, most of these verbs keep their original meaning in the preterite: *Mi ex novio me quiso mucho, pero mi novio actual me quiere más*" (280), 'My ex-boyfriend loved me a lot, but my current boyfriend loves me more.' The authors state that the preterite is an appropriate choice in this sentence "because the focus is on the moment or the duration of the action described" (280).

The authors introduce the imperfect in section 9.1. They reinforce the use of the preterite as a tense used to refer to "completed actions and past events" (318) and state that the imperfect is another past tense used in Spanish. It refers to "ongoing actions or conditions in the past" (318) and is used under these circumstances (318):

1. "to talk about what you habitually did or used to do"
2. "to describe an *action in progress* in the past"
3. "to *tell the time* in the past"

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4. "to describe *emotional or physical conditions* in the past"
5. "to tell someone's *age* in the past"

The text also provides four translations of the imperfect using the verb *comía*: "'*I ate (routinely)*, *I was eating*, *I would eat*, or *I used to eat*'" (318). The imperfect conjugation paradigms are listed on the following page.

Section 9.2 reinforces the uses of the preterite and the imperfect outlined in previous sections. It also mentions that "[s]ometimes the choice between the preterite and the imperfect is not clear-cut. It may depend on the speaker's judgment of the event" (321). The text gives the following chart to further explain the uses of the preterite and the imperfect (321), as demonstrated in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3

Nexos' Preterite/Imperfect Explanations

"Preterite"	"Imperfect"
1. "Relates a *completed past action* or *a series of completed past actions*." "Comimos *en ese restaurante la semana pasada*." "*Ayer,* fuimos *al restaurante,* pedimos *el menú,* comimos *y luego* salimos *para ir al teatro*."	1. "Describes *habitual or routine past actions*." "Comíamos *en ese restaurante todas las semanas*." "*Siempre* íbamos *al restaurante,* pedíamos *el menú,* comíamos *y luego* salíamos *para ir al teatro*."
2. "Focuses on the *beginning* or *end* of a past event." "*La cena* comenzó *a las nueve, pero no* terminó *hasta medianoche*."	2. "Focuses on the *duration* of the event in the past rather than on its beginning or end." "Cenábamos *desde las nueve hasta medianoche*."
3. "Relates a *completed past condition* that is viewed as completely over and done with at this point in time (usually gives a time period associated with the condition)." "*Manuel* estuvo *enfermo por dos semanas después de comer en ese restaurante, pero ahora está bien*."	3. "Describes *past conditions*, such as time, weather, emotional states, age, and location, that were ongoing at the time of the description (no focus on the beginning or end of the condition)." "*El restaurante* era *famoso por su comida latinoamericana y* estábamos *muy contentos con los platos que pedimos*."
4. "Relates an *action that interrupted* an ongoing action." "*Ya comíamos el postre cuando por fin Miguel* llegó *al restaurante*."	4. "Describes *ongoing background events* in the past that were interrupted by another action." "*Ya* comíamos *el postre cuando por fin Miguel llegó al restaurante*."

Source: Spaine Long, Sheri, María Carreira, Sylvia Madrigal Velasco, and Kristin Swanson. *Nexos*. 3rd ed. Boston: Heinle Cengage Learning, 2015. Print.

After explaining the uses of the preterite and the imperfect, the authors list several terms that are associated with the preterite and the imperfect, but assert that the use of these terms with the preterite or the imperfect does not represent "hard and fast rules" (322). They also explain that the verbs that change meaning in the preterite do not change meaning when used in the imperfect.

Facetas, *by Blanco*

Facetas is an intermediate Spanish textbook consisting of six chapters. The preterite and the imperfect are discussed in the third chapter. One section each is dedicated to the preterite and to the imperfect; the third section contrasts the two. As both *Vistas* and *Facetas* are produced by the same publisher, their explanations are similar. The introduction to the preterite and to its conjugations is as follows: "Spanish has two simple tenses to indicate actions in the past: the preterite (*el pretérito*) and the imperfect (*el imperfecto*). The preterite is used to describe actions or states that began or were completed at a definite time in the past" (94). The rest of the section focuses on conjugation paradigms. The explanation of the imperfect is shorter, as this conjugation has fewer irregular forms. The authors define the imperfect as a conjugation that "is used to narrate past events without focusing on their beginning, end, or completion" (98). A short discussion on the conjugation paradigms follows, along with this explanation: "The imperfect tense narrates what was going on at a certain time in the past. It often indicates what was happening in the background" (98). Furthermore, the text explains that *hay* is expressed as *había* in the imperfect and that there are terms such as *de niño*, *todos los días, mientras*, and *siempre* that are often used with the imperfect because they indicate "habitual or repeated actions" (99).

The following section of *Facetas*, section 3.3, reviews the preterite/imperfect

contrasts with English glosses (102). These contrasts are illustrated in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4

Facetas' Preterite/Imperfect Explanations

"Uses of the preterite"	"Uses of the imperfect"
"To express actions or states viewed by the speaker as completed." "Compraste *esos muebles hace un mes, ¿no?*", "'You bought that furniture a month ago, right?'" "*Mis amigas* fueron *al centro comercial ayer.*, "'My girlfriends went to the mall yesterday.'"	"To describe an ongoing past action without reference to its beginning or end." "Se acostaba *muy temprano.*", "'He went to bed very early.'" "*Juan siempre* tenía *pesadillas.*", "'Juan always had nightmares.'"
"To express the beginning or the end of a past action." "*La telenovela* empezó *a las ocho.*", "'The soap opera began at eight o'clock.'" "*Esta mañana se nos* acabó *el café.*", "'We ran out of coffee this morning.'"	"To express habitual past actions or events." "*Pedro* jugaba *al fútbol los domingos por la mañana.*", "'Pedro liked to play [sic] soccer on Sunday mornings.'" "*Los jueves* solían *comprar verduras en el mercado.*", "'On Thursdays they used to buy vegetables at the market.'"
"To narrate a series of past actions or events." "Me levanté*, me vestí y fui *a la clase.*", "'I got up, got dressed, and went to class.'" "Lavamos *la ropa, pasamos la aspiradora y quitamos *el polvo.*", "'We did the laundry, vacuumed, and dusted.'"	"To escribe mental, physical, and emotional states or characteristics." "*En aquel entonces José Manuel sólo* tenía *quince años.*", "'At that time, José Manuel was only fifteen.'" "Estaba *tan hambriento que me comí medio pollo yo solo.*", "'I was so hungry that I ate half a chicken all by myself.'" "To tell time." "Eran *los ocho y media de la mañana.*", "'It was eight thirty a.m.'" "Era *la una en punto.*", "'It was exactly one o'clock.'"

Source: Blanco, José A. *Facetas: Nivel intermedio, curso breve*. 4th ed. Boston: Vista
Higher Learning, 2016. vText.

The preterite and the imperfect are also used together in paragraph on the next

page. This paragraph is accompanied by the following text: "When narrating in the past,

the imperfect describes what *was happening*, while the preterite describes the action that

interrupts the ongoing activity. The imperfect provides background information, while

the preterite indicates specific events that advance the plot" (103). Two boxes giving

additional information are also provided in the margins. The first lists "sequencing

expressions" (103), including *primero*, *al principio*, *antes (de)*, *después (de)*, *mientras*,

entonces, *luego*, *siempre*, *al final*, and *la última vez*. The author gives no indication as to

which aspect—the preterite or the imperfect—the student should use with each term, or if

both aspects are commonly used. The author does, however, discuss the imperfect

progressive: "The imperfect progressive is also used to describe a past action that was in

progress, but that was interrupted by an event. Both *ella estaba tocando el piano* and *ella*

tocaba el piano ['she was playing the piano'] are correct" (103).

The author also states that, "The verbs *querer*, *poder*, *saber,* and *conocer* have

different meanings when they are used in the preterite. Notice also the meanings of *no*

querer and *no poder* in the preterite" (103). The author provides a chart, shown in Table

3.5, to illustrate this concept (103).

Table 3.5

Facetas' Meaning-Change Verb Explanations

"Infinitive"	"Imperfect"	"Preterite"
"Querer"	"Quería acompañarte.", "'I wanted to go with you.'"	"Quise acompañarte.", "'I tried to go with you.'" "No quise acompañarte.", "'I refused to go with you.'"
"Poder"	"Ana podía hacerlo.", "'Ana could do it.'"	"Ana pudo hacerlo.", "'Ana succeeded in doing it.'" "Ana no pudo hacerlo.", "'Ana could not do it.'"
"Saber"	"Ernesto sabía la verdad.", "'Ernesto knew the truth.'"	"Por fin Ernesto supo la verdad.", "'Ernesto finally discovered the truth.'"
"Conocer"	"Yo ya conocía a Andrés.", "'I already knew Andrés.'"	"Yo conocí a Andrés en la fiesta.", "'I met Andrés at the party.'"

Source: Blanco, José A. *Facetas: Nivel intermedio, curso breve*. 4th ed. Boston: Vista
Higher Learning, 2016. vText.

Conversación y repaso, *by Sandstedt and Kite*

 Conversación y repaso is also an intermediate Spanish textbook. It has twelve

chapters and presents the past tense in chapter three. Both preterite/imperfect conjugation

paradigms and preterite/imperfect contrasts are addressed in this chapter, appropriately

named *Orígenes de la cultura hispánica: América,* 'Origins of Hispanic Culture:

America.' Unlike other texts, *Conversación* teaches the imperfect conjugations before the

preterite conjugations. This section does not elaborate on the conjugation paradigms very

much or explain how to use the imperfect; however, students learn that the imperfect has

three possible English translations: the simple past, used to, and the past progressive.

Like the imperfect section, the preterite sections explain only the conjugation paradigms.

The section on preterite/imperfect contrasts gives multiple examples with its list of

usages, uses example sentences to illustrate the combination of the preterite and the

imperfect, and offers examples of how certain verbs can adopt "special meanings" (41)

when used with the preterite rather than the imperfect. The following charts, Tables 3.6

and 3.7, contain the text's examples and summary of uses (39).

 Revista is an intermediate/advanced Spanish conversation textbook. It consists of

six chapters and discusses the past tense in the second. As the text is for advanced

students, most of it is written in Spanish. Chapter two contains two grammar sections on

narrating in the past. Section 2.1 deals with the contrasts between the preterite and the

imperfect. This section opens with the following explanation: "En español, tanto el

pretérito como el imperfecto se utilizan para hablar del pasado, pero cada uno tiene usos

diferentes. En general, se usa el pretérito para narrar acciones pasadas puntuales y

completas, y el imperfecto para describir acciones pasadas habituales y en progreso" (42).

Table 3.6

Conversación y repaso's Preterite Explanations

"Uses of the…preterite"	
1. "To report a completed action or an event in the past, no matter how long it lasted or how many times it took place. The preterite views the action as a single, completed past event." *"Fuimos a clase ayer."*, "'We went to class yesterday.'" *"Llovió mucho el año pasado."*, "'It rained a lot last year.'" *"Traté de llamar a Elsa repetidas veces."*, "'I tried to call Elsa many times.'" *"Ella salió de casa, fue al centro y compró el regalo."*, "'She left the house, went downtown, and bought the gift.'"	2. "To report the beginning or the end of an action in the past." *"Empezó a hablar con los estudiantes."*, "'He started to talk with the students.'" *"Terminaron la tarea muy tarde."*, "'They finished the assignment very late.'"

Source: Sandstedt, Lynn, and Ralph Kite. *Conversación y repaso: Intermediate Spanish*. 9th ed. United States (printed in China): Thomson Heinle (Thomson Coorporation), 2008.

Table 3.7

Conversación y repaso's Imperfect Explanations

"Uses of the imperfect…":	
1. "To tell that an action was in progress or to describe a condition that existed at a certain time in the past." *"Estudiaba en España en aquella época."*, "'He was studying in Spain at that time.'" *"En el cine, yo me reía mientras los demás lloraban."*, "'In the movie theater, I was laughing while the others were crying.'" *"Había muchos estudiantes en la clase de química."*, "'There were a lot of students in chemistry class.'" *"Hacía mucho frío en la sala de conferencias."*, "'It was very cold in the lecture hall.'"	3. "To describe a physical, mental, or emotional state in the past." *"Los jóvenes estaban muy enfermos.*, 'The young people were very ill.'" *"No comprendíamos la lección sobre el lenguaje culto y escolástico de la época."*, "'We didn't understand the lesson about the refined and scholastic language of the era.'" *"Yo creía que Juan era rico y poderoso."*, "'I thought that Juan was rich and powerful.'" *"La chica quería quedarse en casa."*, "'The girl wanted to stay at home.'"
2. "To relate repeated or habitual actions in the past." *"Mis amigas estudiaban todas las noches en la biblioteca."*, "'My friends used to study every night in the library.'" *"Los chicos viajaban por la península todos los veranos."*, "'The boys used to travel through the peninsula every summer.'"	4. "To tell time in the past." *"Eran las siete de la noche."*, "'It was seven o'clock in the evening.'"

Source: Sandstedt, Lynn, and Ralph Kite. *Conversación y repaso: Intermediate Spanish*. 9th ed. United States (printed in China): Thomson Heinle (Thomson Coorporation), 2008. Revista, *by Blanco*

The text provides the following explanations to illustrate the uses of the preterite and the imperfect (42), which are shown in Table 3.8.

Table 3.8

Revista's Preterite/Imperfect Explanations

"El pretérito se usa:"	"El imperfecto se usa:"
1. "Para expresar el principio y el final de una acción o un estado." "*Enrique* empezó *a despertarse.*"	1. "Para describir una acción o un estado sin principio ni final." "*Todos* adorábamos *a nuestro perrito.*"
2. "Para expresar acciones completas." "*Marta* empezó *hizo una llamada desde el móvil de Enrique.*"	2. "Para expresar acciones habituales." "*Cuando* éramos *niños, nuestros padres siempre nos* llevaban *a la escuela.*"
3. "Para narrar una serie de acciones." "*La novia de Enrique* vació *los cajones,* cogió *sus cosas,* cerró *las maletas y* se fue."	3. "Para describir estados mentales, físicos o emocionales." "Estaba *cansado.* Necesitaba *ese número y no* sabía *qué más decir para conseguirlo.*"
4. "Para indicar un cambio de estado." "*La novia de Enrique* se alegró *mucho cuando le salió el trabajo en Nueva York.*"	4. "Para decir la hora." "Eran *las siete y treinta y cinco de la tarde.*"
	5. "Para referirse al future desde el punto de vista del pasado." "*La novia de Enrique dijo que* se marchaba *a Nueva York.*"

Source: Blanco, José A. *Revista: Conversación sin barreras*. 4th ed. Boston: Vista Higher Learning, 2014. Print.

The author states the following about using the preterite and the imperfect together: "Cuando se narran hechos del pasado, es común combinar ambos tiempos. El imperfecto se suele utilizar para describir el trasfondo (*background*), mientras que el pretérito se usa para narrar los eventos que ocurrieron en este trasfondo" (42). An example paragraph using both the preterite and the imperfect is provided to illustrate this contrast. The author also notes that: "Dado que el pretérito y el imperfecto se usan para narrar diferentes aspectos del pasado, hay expresiones temporales que tienden a usarse con el pretérito y otras con el imperfecto" (42). These expressions are provided in the margin on the following page. The author goes on to explain that some verbs have a

different meaning when they are used in the imperfect versus when they are used in the preterite. Using these verbs affirmatively or negatively can also affect their meaning (43). A list of these verbs and their meanings is provided, along with examples. Only two practice exercises are included in section 2.1. The first is an incomplete paragraph that students must complete with the correct conjugation of the given verb. The second is a group exercise.

<center>*Textbook Analysis – French*</center>

Motifs, *by Jansma and Kassen*

Motifs is a first-year French textbook consisting of fourteen chapters. Each grammar section is introduced by a communicative goal, such as "talking about what happened" for the compound past and "talking about how things used to be" for the imperfect. Although the thematic sections are associated with the same communicative goals presented in the grammar sections, each thematic section is separated from its grammar section. The student must refer to the page number printed in the thematic section to find a detailed grammar explanation and grammar drills.

The compound past is introduced in the sixth chapter of *Motifs*, the imperfect is discussed in the eighth, and pronominal verbs in the compound past are taught in the tenth. An introduction to the contrasts between perfective and imperfective aspects is presented in the final lesson of the eighth chapter.

Both verbs used with *avoir* and verbs used with *être* are included in the sixth chapter, in sections 6.1 and 6.2, respectively. Chapter six is appropriately named *Qu'est-ce qui s'est passé ?*, 'What happened?,' and is divided into four themes. The

communicative goal of section 6.1, "Hier," is "Talking about what happened," and the goal of section 6.2, "Parlons de nos vacances," is "Narrating in the past."

Section 6.1 opens with a series of illustrations that use the compound past and includes the following information: "In the picture captions, you can see that the *passé composé* form has two parts, first the auxiliary, or helping verb, and then a form of the base verb called the past participle" (158). A group of practice activities follows, including three communicative exercises. A table of time expressions also appears on page 160. The corresponding grammar explanation begins on page 181. This section outlines the process for forming the compound past and using it with negatives and lists several time expressions. Several drills are included, and the authors explain that the English translation of the compound past "depend[s] on the context" (181). For example, *J'ai vu un bon film* has three possible translations: 'I saw a good movie,' 'I have seen a good movie,' and 'I did see a good movie' (181).

Section 6.2 discusses the verbs used with *être* in the compound past. According to the text, "many of them involve movement" (169). Students should "use these verbs to talk about [their] travels, where [they] went, when [they] arrived, when [they] returned, and so forth" (164). This explanation is accompanied by an illustration of the *Auberge Vandertramps*, which is used as a mnemonic device for the *être* verbs. The student is asked to match the letters in *Vandertramps* with the corresponding verbs. This section also includes exercises, most of which are communicative. A more detailed explanation of these verbs appears on pages 183 and 184. Here, the authors explain that the majority of *être* verbs can be remembered through the mnemonic *Vandertramps*. They also explain the past participle agreement rules and list the irregular participles.

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The imperfect is introduced in section 8.1 of *Motifs*. The authors state the

following about the compound past and the imperfect: "In *Module 6*, you studied the

passé composé, a verb tense used for discussing what happened in the past. The *imparfait*

is another past tense, but it serves a different function" (247). The authors then outline

three uses of the imperfect, give examples, and explain the conjugations. The following

are the uses of the imperfect provided in *Motifs* (247):

1. "To describe how things were in the past"
2. "To describe what people used to do"
3. "To describe feelings and attitudes"

Section 8.5 contrasts the compound past and the imperfect. The communicative

goal of this section is "narrating in the past" (241), and it includes both multiple choice

and partner activities. The text tells the student to "[r]emember to use the *imparfait* for

description and background information and the *passé composé* to talk about specific

events" (241). The grammar section offers a more detailed explanation: "the *passé*

composé and the *imparfait* are both used for talking about the past, but they serve

different functions. The *imparfait* sets the scene by describing what things and people are

like, as in in a stage setting before the action has begun. The *passé composé* moves the

story forward; it narrates events" (253). The authors outline the following uses of the

compound past and the imperfect (253-254), as illustrated in Table 3.8. The text also

provides three grammar exercises.

Liaisons, *by Wong et al.*

Liaisons is also a beginning French textbook. It consists of fourteen chapters,

including a preliminary chapter and a final chapter. The compound past is introduced in

chapter five; *être* verbs are discussed in chapter six; and the imperfect and the

compound past/imperfect contrasts are presented in chapter eight.

Table 3.9

Motifs' Compound Past/Imperfect Explanations

Compound Past:	Imperfect:
1. "Tell what happened." "*Hier, j'*ai eu *un accident de voiture.*" "*Les États-Unis* ont déclaré *leur indépendance en 1776.*"	1. "Feelings and thoughts." "*J'*étais *triste parce que mon meilleur copain n'était pas à l'école.*" "*Paul* avait *froid (*was cold*) parce qu'il ne portait pas de chapeau.*"
2. "Narrates a sequence of events." "*Ce matin, j'*ai préparé *le petit déjeuner pour la famille. Nous* avons mangé *ensemble puis nous* sommes partis *pour l'école.*"	2. "What was going on or whar used to happen." "*Les jeunes filles ne* portaient *pas de pantalons à l'école.*"
	3. "Age." "*Jean-Luc* avait *seize ans quand il a appris à conduire.*"
	4. "Weather." "*Il* faisait *beau quand nous sommes sortis pour faire une promenade.*"
	5. "Time." "*Il* était *déjà six heures quand le train est arrivé.*"

Source: Jansma, Kimberly and Margaret Ann Kassen. *Motifs: An Introduction to French*. 5th ed. Boston: Heinle Cengage Learning, 2011. Print.

We find the compound past conjugation paradigm in section 5.3. The authors state

that the compound past is used to refer to completed past events or actions and give other

information such as negation, adverb placement, how to form questions with the

compound past, and a list of adverbs commonly used with the compound past. Also

indicated are the English translations of the compound past. For example, *J'ai mangé* has

three translations: "I ate, I have eaten, or I did eat" (216). Section 6.2 continues this

theme by presenting *être* verbs, their conjugation paradigm, negation, and question

formation. The semantic differences between *partir* and *quitter* are discussed, as are the

être verbs that can be used with *avoir* when they have direct objects. The authors also

explain that *être passé(e)/s* means "to pass by" and that *avoir passé* (time) means "to pass/spend time" (243). Each section contains practice exercises and has a communicative goal: "pour parler du passé."

The authors do not introduce the imperfect or the compound past/imperfect distinction until chapter eight. Section 8.1 presents the imperfect using the communicative goal "pour décrire et parler des événements habituels" (310). This section states that, "[t]he *passé composé* is used to talk about actions that occurred at a specific time in the past such as yesterday, last week, and last year. To talk about repeated, habitual or ongoing events or activities in the past or to express how things used to be, French uses the *imparfait* (imperfect). The *imparfait* has several equivalents in English: *je dansais* (I danced, I used to dance, or I would dance)" (310). The authors next present the imperfect conjugation paradigms, a list of expressions commonly used with the imperfect, and three rules of thumb for using the imperfect. They state that "[t]he *imparfait* is used to talk about age and states of mind or to provide descriptions in the past;" that the verbs *devoir*, *pouvoir*, and vouloir are commonly used in the imperfect; and that students should be familiar with the phrases *il fallait*, *il neigeait*, and *il pleuvait*. 'one should, it was snowing, it was raining.'

Section 8.2, "pour parler du passé," contrasts the compound past and the imperfect through elaborating on the definitions of the conjugations by stating that the compound past is used to refer to "an event that began or ended at a specific time in the past" (320), and that the imperfect "is used to give background information, to describe a scene, weather, physical or mental states, and to express age in the past. To describe a sequence of events, however, the *passé composé* is used" (320). Some examples of each

conjugation are given, and the text explains the combination of the two within a

discourse: "It is often difficult to tell a story in the past without using both" the

compound past and the imperfect. The role of the imperfect in past narration is to indicate

which activities or conditions were going on and to provide background information. The

compound past interrupts those activities or conditions and moves the plot forward. The

compound past also refers to a change of state, and certain terms indicate a change of

state (321). The following chart, Table 3.10, is also given, but no examples are provided

(321). Sections 8.1 and 8.2 also contain practice exercises.

Table 3.10

Liaisons' Compound Past/Imperfect Explanations[1]

"Uses of [the] imperfect":	"Uses of [the] compound past":
1. "To communicate that an event occurred repeatedly in the past (how things used to be)." a. "Events without reference to a beginning or end." b. "Habitual or continuous actions of unspecified duration."	1. "Events that happened at a particular point in time." a. "Events that are confined by time limits." b. "Completed actions of a specific duration."
2. "To describe or provide background information in the past." a. "Scene or setting." b. "Weather, age, and mental or physical states."	2. "Sequence of actions in the past."
3. "To communicate that an event was in progress."	3. "To communicate actions interrupting something in progress or changes in states."

Source: Wong, Wynne, Stacey Weber-Fève, Edward Ousselin, and Bill Vanpatten.
Liaisons: An Introduction to French. 1st ed. Stamford, CT: Cengage Learning, 2015.
Print.

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[1] "Uses of *imparfait*" and "Uses of *passé composé*" (320).

Espaces, *by Mitchell and Tano*

 Espaces, a beginning French textbook, consists of fifteen chapters, each divided into two sections. *Avoir* verbs used in the compound past are found in section 6A.2, *être* verbs in the compound past are taught in section 7A.1, the imperfect is presented in section 8A.1, and the compound past and the imperfect are contrasted in sections 8A.2 and 8B.1.

 Section 6A.2 states that French has two past tenses, the compound past and the imperfect. The compound past refers to "actions or states that were completed in the past" (234). Students also learn that the compound past has two components, an auxiliary and a participle, how to negate the compound past, how to form questions, how to use adverbs with the compound past, and how to form the past participle. Section 7A.1 explains that *être* verbs typically involve motion; explains the conjugation paradigms and agreement rules; outlines negation, inverted questions, and adverb use in affirmative statements; and explains how the verbs *sortir* and *passer* change in meaning when used with *être* and *avoir*.

 Students learn about the imperfect in section 8A.1. The text reiterates that the compound past and the imperfect are two past tenses and state that the imperfect has four English translations: the simple past, "would," "used to," and the past progressive. The book also mentions that because the imperfect is a simple tense, it does not have an auxiliary. Students next learn about the conjugation paradigms and are given the imperfect forms of *être*, *falloir*, *il y a*, *neiger*, and *pleuvoir*.

 Sections 8A.2 and 8B.1 contrast the compound past and the imperfect. The two "*boîtes d'outils*," 'tool boxes,' on page 322 remind students to practice the pronunciation differences between the past participle and the imperfect because they can sound similar

but have different meanings. We also learn that the meaning of *avoir* + state can change depending on its use with the compound past or the imperfect. For example, *il avait faim* means 'he was hungry,' but *il a eu faim* means 'he became hungry.' Other information found in this section is the importance of the speaker's perspective in determining whether the compound past or the imperfect is used.

The book provides charts, which are summarized in Tables 3.11, 3.12, and 3.13, to explain the differences between the compound past and the imperfect (322-323).

Table 3.11

Espaces' Compound Past Explanations

"Uses of the compound past":[2]	
1. "To express specific actions that started and ended in the past and is viewed by the speaker as completed." "*J'*ai nettoyé *la salle de bains deux fois.*". "'I cleaned the bathroom twice.'" "*Nous* avons acheté *un tapis.*", "'We bought a rug.'" "*L'enfant* est né *à la maison.*", "'The child was born at home.'" "*Il* a plu *hier.*", "'It rained yesterday.'" 2. "To tell about events that happened at a specific point in time or within a specific length of time in the past." "*Je* suis allé *à la pêche avec papa il y a deux ans.*", "'I went fishing with Dad two years ago.'" "*Il* est allé *au concert vendredi.*", "'He went to the concert on Friday.'" "*Nous* avons passé *une journée fantastique à la plage.*", "'We spent a fantastic day at the beach.'" "*Elle* a étudié *à Paris pendant six mois.*", "'She studied in Paris for six months.'"	3. "To express the beginning or end of a past action." "*Le film* a commencé *à huit heures.*", "'The movie began at 8 o'clock.'" "*Ils* ont fait *leurs devoirs samedi matin.*", "'They did their homework Saturday morning.'" 4. "To narrate a series of past actions or events." "*Ce matin, j'*ai fait *du jogging, j'*ai nettoyé *la chambre et j'*ai decoré *la cuisine.*", "'This morning, I jogged, I cleaned my bedroom, and I tidied up the kitchen.'" "*Pour la fête d'anniversaire de papa, maman* a envoyé *les invitations, elle* a acheté *un cadeau et elle* a fait *les decorations.*", "'For dad's birthday party, mom sent out the invitations, bought a gift, and did the decorations.'" 5. "To signal a change in someone's mental, physical, or emotional state." "*Il* est mort *dans un accident.*", "'He died in an accident.'" "*Soudain, j'*ai eu *pleur.*", "'Suddenly, I got scared.'" "*Tout à coup, elle* a eu *soif.*", "'All of the sudden, she felt thirsty.'"

Source: Mitchell, James G. and Cheryl Tano. *Espaces: Rendez-vous avec le monde francophone*. 3rd ed. Boston: Vista Higher Learning, 2015. Print.

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[2] "Uses of the *passé composé*" (322).

Table 3.12

Espaces' Imperfect Explanations

"Uses of the imperfect":[3]	
1. "To describe an ongoing past action with no reference to its beginning or end." "*Vous* dormiez *sur le canapé.*", "'You were sleeping on the couch.'" "*Tu* attendais *dans le café ?*", "'Were you waiting at the café?'" "*Nous* regardions *la télé chez Fanny.*", "'We were watching TV at Fanny's house.'" "*Les enfants* lisaient *tranquillement.*", "'The children were reading peacefully.'"	1. "To express habitual or repeated past actions and events or describe how things used to be." "*Nous* faisions *un tour en voiture le dimanche matin.*", "'We used to go for a drive on Sunday mornings.'" "*Elle* mettait *toujours la voiture dans le garage.*", "'She always put the car in the garage.'" "*Maman* travaillait *souvent dans le jardin.*", "'Mom would often work in the garden.'" "*Quand j'*étais *jeune, j'*aimais *faire du camping.*", "'When I was young, I used to like to go camping.'"
2. "To describe an ongoing mental, physical, or emotional state." "*Karine* était *très inquiète.*", "'Karine was very worried.'" "*Simon et Marion* étaient *fatigués et ils* avaient *sommeil.*", "'Simon and Marion were tired and sleepy.'" "*Mon ami* avait *faim et il* avait *envie de manger quelque chose.*", "'My friend was hungry and felt like eating something.'"	

Source: Mitchell, James G. and Cheryl Tano. *Espaces: Rendez-vous avec le monde francophone*. 3rd ed. Boston: Vista Higher Learning, 2015. Print.

Section 8B.1 gives the student more tips for using the compound past and the imperfect. Students learn that the imperfect is used for talking about the background information in a story, while the compound past "highlights specific events foregrounded in the story" (336). We also learn about the following uses of the compound past and the imperfect in narration (336).

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[3] "Uses of the *imparfait*" (323).

Table 3.13

Espaces' Additional Compound Past/Imperfect Explanations

"The *passé composé* is used to talk about:"	"The *imparfait* is used to talk about:"
1. "Main facts."	1. "The framework of the story: weather, date, time, background scenery."
2. "Specific, completed events."	2. "Descriptions of people: age, physical and personality traits, clothing, feelings, state of mind."
3. "Actions that advance the plot."	3. "Background setting: what was going on, what others were doing."

Source: Mitchell, James G. and Cheryl Tano. *Espaces: Rendez-vous avec le monde francophone*. 3rd ed. Boston: Vista Higher Learning, 2015. Print.

Students learn that the compound past interrupts actions written in the imperfect and that the expression *pendant que*, 'while,' can be used in such sentences. We can also use the compound past and the imperfect when talking about cause and effect. Furthermore, certain words and expressions are associated with the compound past, and others with the imperfect. Finally, the text explains the present and past tense conjugations of *vivre*, 'to live.'

Sur le vif, *by Jarausch and Tufts*

Sur le vif is an intermediate French textbook consisting of nine chapters and four supplementary sections. The compound past and imperfect are included in chapter three, along with a review of two irregular verbs and information on the pluperfect, the past infinitive, and semantics. As this chapter deals with immigration, discussion on the past tense is relevant. All vocabulary and culture sections are grouped together, as are all grammar sections. The user must turn to the second half of the text to access grammar explanations.

The authors define the compound past as "a tense used in French to tell what

happened in the past. It is often referred to as the tense for *narration* of past tense" (165). The authors then explain the components of the compound past, an auxiliary verb—*être* or *avoir*—and the past participle of the verb in question. They then explain the rules for choosing an auxiliary verb by stating that there are seventeen verbs that are commonly associated with the auxiliary *être* and do not take direct objects, as well as listing those verbs. They also point out that some of these verbs can take a direct object if they are used with *avoir*. Furthermore, verbs with reflexive pronouns use *être*. The authors then explain the formation of the past participle and how to negate the compound past.

The following section of the text contains a brief explanation of the imperfect and its conjugation paradigms. The imperfect is defined as a conjugation that "is used to describe *conditions* that were *taking place* when another action occurred. It is also used to talk about habitual actions or occurrences. It is referred to as the tense for *describing the past*" (166).

The authors then discuss the compound past/imperfect distinction by offering three questions students can ask themselves (167):

1. "What happened? What happened once? Then what happened? (Use the *passé composé*.)"
2. "What were the conditions at the time? (Use the imperfect.)"
3. "Was the action expressed by the verb a habitual action? Did it occur repeatedly? (Use the imperfect.)"

According to the authors, students who ask themselves these questions "should have no trouble deciding when to use the *passé composé* and when to use the imperfect" (167). They illustrate their point through sample paragraphs they analyze in terms of their three questions and then provide three more "helpful hints" (168-169) for distinguishing between the compound past and the imperfect:

1. "When used in the past context, the verb *venir + de* is always used in the imperfect."
2. "Certain verbs usually appear in the imperfect when used in a past context. They are: *avoir, être, savoir, connaître, pouvoir*, and *vouloir*. These verbs change meaning when they are used in the *passé composé*." (The authors give examples, which are supplemented by explanations relating to either the conditions at the time or what happened.)
3. "Certain words and expressions can help you decide whether to use the *passé composé* or the imperfect."
   a. "For the *passé composé* these words pinpoint a definite time of occurrence: *hier, une fois, tout à coup*, etc."
   b. "For the imperfect these words suggest repeated occurrence: *souvent, tous les jours, toutes les semaines, chaque année, en général*, etc."

Imaginez, *by Mitschke*

Both compound past conjugations as well as the compound past/imperfect distinctions are presented in the third chapter of *Imaginez*, a ten-chapter intermediate French textbook. The imperfect conjugations are included, but they are found in the optional sections at the back of the book. The other optional section discusses possessive adjectives.

The text explains that the compound past refers to "completed actions or events in the past or to describe a reaction or change in state of mind or condition" (96) and that most verbs are used with the auxiliary *avoir* (97). Students also study the uses of direct object pronouns and negation with the compound past and learn some phrases associated with the compound past. The next section discusses *être* verbs, explaining both reflexive and non-reflexive verbs. Students learn that most *être* verbs refer to motion and that verbs used with *être* typically do not have direct objects. Verbs with direct objects use *avoir*. The text also explains that the verb *se rendre compte de*, 'to realize,' does not take a direct object because its direct object is *compte* and that the preposition *à*, 'to,' should be used with indirect objects.

Students next learn about compound past/imperfect contrasts and verbs with different meanings in the compound past and the imperfect (105). The text states that speakers cannot interchange the compound past and the imperfect because each is used differently. The compound past refers to completed past events, and the imperfect is used for "*continuous* states of being or repetitive actions" (104). The text lists the uses of each form also (104), which are shown in Table 3.14.

Table 3.14

Imaginez' Compound Past/Imperfect Explanations[4]

"Uses of the Compound Past"	"Uses of the Imperfect"
"Use the *passé composé* to express actions viewed by the speaker as completed."	"Use the *imparfait* to describe ongoing past actions without reference to beginning or end."
"Use it to express the beginning or end of a past action." "*L'émisson* a continué *à huit heures.*", "'The show started at eight o'clock.'" "*J'*ai fini *mes devoirs.*", "'I finished my homework.'"	"*Tu* faisais *la cuisine.*", "'You used to cook.'" "*Et moi, je* faisais *la vaisselle.*", "'And I would do the dishes.'"
"Use it to tell the duration of an event or the number of times it occurred in the past." "*J'*ai habité *en Europe pendant six mois.*", "'I lived in Europe for six months.'" "*Il* a regardé *le clip vidéo trois fois.*", "'He watched the music video three times.'"	"Use it to express habitual actions in the past." "*D'habitude, je* prenais *le métro.*", "'Usually, I took the subway.'" "*On se* promenait *dans le parc.*", "'We used to take walks in the park.'"
"Use it to describe a series of past actions."	"Use it to describe mental, physical, and emotional states."
"Use it to indicate a reaction or change in condition or state of mind." "*Il* s'est fâché.", "'He became angry.'" "*À ce moment-là, j'*ai eu *envie de partir.*", "'At that moment, I wanted to leave.'"	"Use it to describe conditions or to tell what things were like in the past." "*Les effets spéciaux* étaient *superbes!*", "'The special effects were superb!.'" "*Il* faisait *froid.*", "'It was cold.'"

Source: Mitschke, Cherie. *Imaginez: le français sans frontières*. 2nd ed. Boston: Vista Higher Learning, 2012. Print.

The author then explains how to combine the compound past and the imperfect in a narration. "When narrating in the past, the *imparfait* describes *what was happening*,

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[4] "Uses of the *passé composé*" and "Uses of the *imparfait*" (104).

while the *passé composé* describes the actions that *occurred* or *interrupted* the ongoing

activity. Use the *imparfait* to provide background information and the *passé composé* to

tell what happened" (105). The margin on page 105 contains words connector words that

can be used in a past narration. Section 3.5 in the back of the book outlines the imperfect

conjugation paradigms and elaborates on the uses of the imperfect (402):

1. "The imperfect is used to talk about what used to happen or to describe conditions in the past."
2. "The imperfect is used to talk about actions that took place repeatedly or habitually."
3. "When narrating a story in the past, the imperfect is used to set the scene, such as describing the weather, what was going on, the time frame, and so on."
4. "The imperfect is used to describe states of mind that continued over an unspecified period of time in the past."

Students are also reminded of the uses of the compound past "to talk about completed

actions or events in the past" (402).

Face-à-face, *by Ghillebaert*

The compound past and the imperfect are included in section 1.1 of *Face-à-face*,

an advanced conversation text that consists of six chapters and is mostly written in

French. The section begins with a reminder that both the compound past and the

imperfect are used to talk about the past, but which aspect is chosen depends on the

speaker's perspective and the context. The text next provides examples of when each

form should be used (10), which are seen in Tables 3.15 and 3.16.

Table 3.15

Face-à-face's Compound Past/Imperfect Explanations

"Emplois du passé composé :"	"Emplois de l'imparfait :"
1. "On utilise le passé composé pour parler d'un fait passé, spécifique et achevé (*completed*) au moment où on parle." "*Martin* a rencontré *Julie chez des amis communs.*"	1. "On utilise l'imparfait pour parler d'une action passée sans en préciser le début ni la fin." "*Je* croyais *que j'aurais le temps de te le dire, mais j'*étais *bien avec toi, tu sais ?*"
2. "On l'utilise aussi pour parler d'un fait qui s'est passé à un moment précis du passé." "*Ils* se sont mariés *il y a deux mois.*"	2. "On utilise l'imparfait pour parler d'un fait habituel dans le passé." "*Ils se* voyaient *tous les jours.*" "*Chaque année, ils* passaient *leurs vacances ensemble.*"
3. "On utilise le passé composé pour parler d'une action passée en précisant le début ou la fin de l'action." "*Ils* sont rentrés *chez eux à onze heures.*" "*Voilà, c'est Manon…elle* a eu *un accident.*"	3. "On l'utilise aussi pour décrire quelqu'un (son âge, son état d'esprit) ou quelque chose dans le passé." "*C'*était *quelqu'un de calme et de réfléchi.*" "*Les arbres* étaient *en fleurs.*"
4. "On utilise le passé composé pour parler d'une action passée qui a eu lieu un certain nombre de fois sans être une action habituelle." "*Alain et Murielle* se sont téléphoné *trois fois hier.*"	
5. "On l'utilise pour parler d'une suite d'événements passés." "*Karim et Sonia* se sont parlé*, se sont plu et* ont décidé *de se revoir.*"	

Source: Ghillebaert, Françoise. *Face-à-face: Conversation et rédaction*. 1st ed. Boston: Vista Higher Learning, 2011. Print.

Information relating to the combination of the compound past and the imperfect is also given. According to the text, the compound past is used for telling the main events in the story and the events that advance the plotline. The imperfect describes the background, the context, and the framework. It is also used as a progressive conjugation and for describing people and objects. The compound past and the imperfect can be used in the same sentence as well. In this circumstance, the compound past is used to indicate which action interrupted another action in progress. The action in progress is written in the imperfect. "Dans certain cas, l'emploi de l'imparfait et du passé composé indique une relation de cause à effet, une conséquence" (11).

Some details are provided in the margins of the text. One note states that *être* verbs can usually be used with *avoir* if they have a direct object, and another lists the conjugation of *être*. A third lists expressions commonly used with the compound past, and the fourth discusses the verbs that change meaning when used in the compound past—*connaître*, *devoir*, *pouvoir*, *savoir*, and *vouloir*—along with example sentences.

Survey Results

While textbooks give us ways to explain concepts, they do not always reflect how concepts are taught in the classroom or the difficulties students have with those concepts. This information seems to be acquired best through learning of instructors' experiences. I therefore set out to determine the experiences of instructors at my university through a survey on the teaching and acquisition of past-tense verbs in Spanish and French. This survey was completed by seven Spanish instructors and five French instructors. Table 3.15 lists the percentages of Spanish and French instructors who teach

each level: beginning, intermediate, or advanced. It should be noted that most instructors

teach multiple levels, and all instructors teach aspectual distinctions in their courses.

Table 3.16

Levels Taught by Spanish and French Instructors

Level	Spanish Instructors	French Instructors
Beginning Level	100%	60%
Intermediate Level	85.7%	100%
Advanced Level	42.9%	80%

I also asked the instructors at which point in the semester they teach aspectual

distinctions. Some instructors vary their timing according to the course. Table 3.17

indicates these results.

Table 3.17

Points in the Semester at which the Past Tense is Taught

Time Period	Spanish Instructors	French Instructors
Beginning (weeks 1-5 of the semester/first week of summer)	57.1%	60%
Middle (weeks 6-10 of the semester/middle of summer sessions)	57.1%	60%
End (weeks 11-16 of the semester/last week of summer)	42.9%	20%

I then asked the instructors several questions that dealt with how they teach

aspectual distinctions to their students, which teaching strategies they believe to be most

effective, and what they find to be the primary difficulties students have with aspect.

Q. 4: How do you typically introduce this topic? The Spanish instructors listed several methods of introducing the preterite and the imperfect. One introduces this concept by explaining that there are several ways to talk about the past. Another explains that the preterite is used to talk about what we did at a particular point in the past and that learning the preterite expands students' communicative abilities. Both instructors state, as a transition to the past tense, that up until now, the class has been using the present. A third tells students that Spanish has two past tenses and that they are used differently. This instructor states that intermediate students begin to grasp that both the preterite and the imperfect may be possible in a given situation, but that the choice between the two "affect[s] a speaker's meaning." Another discusses the preterite and the imperfect in terms of "'interrupting' versus 'interrupted actions," using both written practice and videos to reinforce this concept. Students then learn about the other uses of the preterite and the imperfect and do listening exercises that require them to fill in a transcript with a conjugation of either the preterite or the imperfect as they listen. The class then discusses the speaker's choices. One Spanish instructor uses a multi-step process for teaching the preterite and the imperfect. She explains that the imperfect is used to talk about cyclic actions, while the preterite refers to non-cyclic actions. That is, the preterite refers to the beginning or end of an action, and the imperfect refers to the middle. She uses a drawing to illustrate this point. Furthermore, the imperfect describes background information and the setting, and the preterite is used to talk about what happened within that scene. Students also practice using a "*semáforo*," 'stoplight.' Red represents the preterite in that

the action has to stop. Green represents the imperfect because imperfect actions do not have to stop. Beginning students also receive a list of adverbs that signal the use of each aspect, while intermediate students choose sentences from their readings that contain examples of the preterite and the imperfect. Other strategies used by this professor include acronyms, charts, instruction on the differences between *haber* in the preterite and *haber* in the imperfect, and practice questions. Students also learn that the choice between the preterite and the imperfect can depend on the speaker's intent. This instructor emphasizes experience, practice, and time as factors affecting acquisition of the preterite and the imperfect. A sixth professor responded that students know the conjugations ahead of time, so class time is spend analyzing a text for the uses of the past tense: "1. a nostalgic memory versus 2. an event from the day before." Students look for words that signal the use of each aspect and try to determine the uses of each form. The instructor then asks students questions that require them to answer in either the preterite or the imperfect. Finally, one instructor begins with the preterite because students are able to understand its uses more easily. Understanding the uses of the preterite helps students understand the uses of the imperfect, as the two aspects are "mutually exclusive."

Two French instructors use drills to introduce compound past/imperfect distinctions. One instructor begins with "verb-only drills" (j'ai mangé, tu as mangé, etc.), and then moves into contextualized questions, such as *Qu'est-ce que tu as mangé ce matin ?*, 'What did you eat this morning?,' when discussing the compound past. Later, students do activities such as presenting a story to the class using the past tense. The other discusses the two aspects separately because they are found in different chapters of the book and drills them to give students practice with conjugations and pronunciation.

Both instructors use stories to illustrate the uses of the compound past and the imperfect. One instructor who teaches an intermediate class tells stories about a trip and has students pick out the compound past and imperfect verbs. Another teaches beginning, intermediate, and advanced classes, and uses stories in beginning and intermediate classes to illustrate how the compound past and the imperfect are used. A fourth first has his students consider the English past tense and then has them sing the first line "Joy to the World" to illustrate that Old English used auxiliaries, also, as do other modern languages, in order to help students appreciate the differences between the English and French languages. Finally, one begins by teaching the compound past and then teaches the compound past/imperfect distinction in French, using brief English explanations if necessary, and another uses both her own examples and examples provided by students in addition to comparisons to demonstrate the uses of the compound past and the imperfect. She begins with simple examples and progresses to examples showing more complex uses of the aspects. Finally, students write compositions using the compound past and the imperfect. This instructor does not explain the grammar in class, as she expects students to review the material and do practice exercises on their own.

Q. 5: *What kinds of explanations do you typically give? Do you vary your strategies depending on the level of the course?* Several types of explanations were found among the Spanish instructors. For example, one introduces the preterite first and later moves on to the imperfect. Preterite/imperfect contrasts are presented in terms of the situations in which each would be used. Another uses short explanations in English, charts, and handouts. Although this instructor does not vary his strategies depending on

the level, he moves more slowly in beginning classes. A third presents beginning students with "guidelines and trigger words" to help them distinguish between the preterite and the imperfect as well as the use of the preterite for talking about actions and the imperfect for talking about descriptions and conditions. No grammar explanations are given in this instructor's intermediate class; questions regarding use are addressed using examples rather than explanations. Another responded that the strategies used would depend on the level of the course as well. This instructor also gives students "trigger words" to help them choose between each form. Finally, one begins with the uses of the preterite, which "are circumscribed to completed actions and definite time frames, more or less." This instructor explains that all other circumstances require the imperfect and gives examples. Students then do exercises involving structured output, cloze questions, situational practices, and games. Advanced students must "produce more complicated utterances" and use the preterite and the imperfect at an earlier point in the course.

One French instructor responded that he uses "little to no grammatical jargon," such as *aspect*, when explaining the compound past and the imperfect to his intermediate students. Instead, he tells them that the imperfect is used for description and the compound past is used for action and uses a system of lines and dots to illustrate this concept. He draws a line, plots dots on the line, and uses a single dot to represent the compound past and a set of three dots to refer to the imperfect. He does not usually explain the distinctions in his advanced classes. Another uses limited "meta-grammatical instruction" with her intermediate students but does explain the distinction briefly in English and provides handouts, as "students in Intermediate level should be able to study/review the structures outside of class." A third uses the same strategy for both her

beginning and intermediate courses although she does not teach grammar in her advanced class. She explains that the imperfect answers the question, "What were the circumstances?", and the compound past, "What happened?" Other distinctions she teaches are the use of the imperfect to give background information to "describe the setting/situation or on going activity" and to mean "used to," and the use of the compound past to "mov[e] the story forward and advanc[e] the plot."

Other strategies mentioned by the French instructors include the use of "lots of structured input;" and then asking students questions using the first compound past and later the imperfect and having students do partner exercises; and examples from the instructor's childhood that illustrate the uses of the two aspects. Two instructors responded that they reinforce the uses of the aspects by asking their students questions. Another uses images and has advanced students consider action verbs and verbs of state as a starting point, as action verbs are typically used in the preterite and verbs of state are typically used in the imperfect.

Q. 6: Which strategies have proven to be the most effective? The Spanish instructors found multiple strategies to be effective. One uses stories familiar to the students and has them provide the context and the events. This instructor has also found that students enjoy talking about what happened in humorous images. Images are used in another instructor's course as well. This instructor emphasizes communication, "pointing out when students are using the preterit and the imperfect" in order to "raise consciousness of the issue," early presentation of the concepts, and repetition because students may master aspect in writing much earlier than in speaking. Another stated that

"cognitive control" was most effective because understanding conjugation and usage is very helpful to his students. He also uses oral repetition for practicing conjugations and partner exercises involving questions and recommends students practice verbs aloud. A third responded that instructing students to consider aspectual distinctions in terms of preterite=action and imperfect=condition/description as well as trigger words helps them most. Another instructor wrote that students "grasp the concept of using preterite for a one-time action in a capsule of time in the past, so [the class] talk[s] about 'what I did yesterday.'" This instructor's students also write two narratives, one in the preterite and one in the imperfect, which helps them see the uses of each aspect. Finally, one instructor introduces the preterite first, gives examples, and has students do a variety of activities including structured output, cloze, situated practice, and games. This instructor explains that the preterite is limited to discussing "completed actions and definite time frames, more or less," and that the imperfect is used for all other circumstances.

The French instructors listed several strategies as being the most effective. One found that his use of a line and dot system to illustrate aspectual distinctions rather than grammar-heavy explanations was most helpful to his students. Another responded that repetition, drills, games, and a verb quiz seem to help her students most, while a third stated that her use of the questions "What were the circumstances?" and "What happened?" was most helpful, as was her explanation that students should look for expressions that signal either the imperfect or the compound past. A fourth instructor found that his use of oral questions at the beginning of class helped his students most because the students learned think quickly and were able to "integrate the grammar…naturally." Finally, one instructor stated that the use of "clear examples of the

difference between the p.c. and the imparfait and repetition" was most helpful to her students.

Q. 7: What kinds of activities do your students do to reinforce this topic? The activities used among the Spanish instructors varied as well. One uses interactive activities in class, texts that require students to choose between the preterite and the imperfect, and images that the students discuss using the past tense. A second stated that students do online homework exercises. Another has beginning students complete exercises that require them to circle the correct conjugation and later has them complete fill-in-the-blank exercises. Students are told to look for "clues and triggers" when doing the activities. "At the intermediate level, they write paragraphs and tell guided stories using both tenses." A fourth groups students together and has them create two past-tense narratives relating to an illustration. One narrative is in the preterite, and the other is in the imperfect, which helps students differentiate between the two aspects. Students do a similar exercise with verbs with reflexive pronouns. They use the imperfect to talk about their daily routines as children and the preterite to explain what their routine was like yesterday. A fifth Spanish instructor uses previously assigned videos to reinforce the preterite and the imperfect through asking students to talk about individual scenes using the past tense. This activity "helps them focus energy on controlling aspect." Finally, one uses "structured input, structured output, cloze, situated practice, [and] games."

One French instructor responded that he first gives his students separate sentences and they must determine whether to use the compound past and the imperfect in each sentence. Students are then given paragraphs and sentences that use both formss and must determine which aspect best fits each situation. A second reinforces this concept with repetition, drills, games, and a verb quiz; and another uses "short narrations with non-

conjugated verbs" and images about which students must create a past-tense "story line" in both her beginning and intermediate classes. She also uses compositions in her intermediate class. Another responded that he uses many homework exercises to reinforce aspectual distinctions, in addition to compositions in his intermediate courses.

Q. 8: What do you consider to be the primary difficulties students have with preterite/imperfect or passé composé/imparfait distinctions (whichever applies to your course)? The Spanish instructors found that students have trouble with "the lack of correspondence between English and Spanish;" distinguishing between complete and incomplete actions; choosing the correct tense, aspect, and mood of verbs dealing with abstract concepts, such as *conocer*, *poder*, *querer*, *saber*, and *tener* because some of them adopt different meanings in the preterite; preterite conjugations and "alternate meanings;" the terms "preterite" and "imperfect" themselves because they are not used in English; conjugations; the late acquisition of aspectual distinctions; and instructors' emphasis on choosing the right answer in written exercises even though students' ability to choose the correct answer does not indicate their ability to use the grammar in real life.

The French instructors listed several difficulties they found their students to experience. One instructor found that transference from English hinders students because they fail to use the imperfect in circumstances in which the compound past would be used in English. The instructor provided the following example to illustrate this difficulty: *J'*allais *chez ma grand-mère tous les weekends*, 'I went to my grandma's house every weekend.' However, another instructor wrote that students' understanding improves "once they realize the tenses are used in the same way in English (past progressive, perfect, "used to")" and stop "overthink[ing] and mak[ing the concept] more complex

than it is." Another instructor found that overthinking was a problem for students as well, even though students usually understand perfective/imperfective distinctions. Other students have difficulty using the compound past and the imperfect even though they understand the differences, while others initially understand the distinctions, but forget them. A fourth professor noted that students struggle with the compound past/imperfect distinction because it is "determined by the intent of the speaker" rather than "lexically," and that it is therefore possible to use any verb in either the compound past or the imperfect. Finally, one instructor indicated that students' lack of confidence in choosing between the compound past and the imperfect can hinder them: "They seem to get confused about contrasting the [compound past and the imperfect] within a single sentence."

I also met with a Spanish instructor who had taught French previously. He stated that speakers cannot be incorrect when choosing between perfective and imperfective aspect, but they can give their speakers the wrong impression. For example, *yo sabía* versus *yo supe*, 'I knew (all along)' versus 'I found out/knew (at that moment).' This instructor also gave several ways of teaching aspect. He taught the French compound past by having students perform the actions they were discussing, which helped them grasp the concept better. For him, "mak[ing] all classes as experiential as possible" helps with socialization. Another strategy he mentioned includes mnemonics for remembering the irregular Spanish preterites, such as "I knew Campbell's soup" (to remember the preterite forms of *saber*, 'to know'), "The tire has an inner tuvo," and "Oh, fui!" Visual metaphors, such as timelines or those that represent a "time-space continuum" help the visual learner, and group activities in which one group describes someone's progressive

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action and another talks about an action that interrupted that progressive action are another possibility.

This instructor also stated that students' abilities in English also help with their abilities in Spanish in that there is a difference in meaning between the sentences, "I was walking" versus "I walked." While this difference mostly applies to action verbs, it does help students distinguish between perfective and imperfective aspect. He also discussed the morphological differences between Spanish and English verb conjugations. "English has a more practical approach to verbs" because an ending is simply attached to the verb. Spanish verb conjugations are more complex in that they have a stem and an ending that must be conjugated.

As has been demonstrated in this chapter, a variety of explanations of perfective and imperfective aspect is possible, not only in terms of textbooks' presentations of the material but also in terms of instructors' explanations. Students can also encounter a range of problems, including transference from and contrasts with English; affective filters, such as lack of confidence; and the late acquisition of aspect. The following chapter will be an attempt to address these issues through an analysis of the textbooks discussed in the present chapter and provides an outline of possible exercises and explanations for the L2 classroom.

CHAPTER FOUR

Analysis

The previous chapter included the results of a survey distributed among instructors of Spanish and of French and a discussion of textbook explanations of aspect. This chapter discusses the textbook explanations and survey results in addition to offering exercises that can be used in the Spanish or French classroom to explain aspect to students. I will also attempt to address difficulties experienced by students learning aspectual distinctions through an analysis of the textbooks discussed in Chapter Three and an outline of possible exercises for the L2 classroom.

Textbook Explanations

Chapter Two outlined Frantzen's, Westfall and Foerster's, Dansereau's, and Abrate's critiques of typical textbook explanations. While I agree with some of their observations, I find that there are additional concerns with the methods textbooks use to teach aspect. For example, only one of the texts I surveyed uses the term *aspect*. Perfective and imperfective aspect are instead referred to as tenses in the other texts, when they are in fact two ways of using the past tense. Other problematic features of the texts include the locations of the chapters dealing with aspect and inaccurate or incomplete explanations. In this section, I will analyze the chosen texts in terms of the following criteria:

1. Use of the term *aspect*.
2. Organization of the text.
3. Accuracy, thoroughness, and potential effectiveness of explanations.

The reasons for these criteria are as follows. First, the perfective and imperfective aspect are both part of the past tense rather than separate tenses. While students are likely to be more familiar with the term *tense*, they could become confused when the preterite, the compound past, or the imperfect—whichever is taught first—is referred to as the past tense. Second, the text's organization could play a role in its effectiveness. If several challenging topics are presented back to back, students may become overwhelmed and be less likely to fully absorb the information or receive inadequate practice of the more difficult concepts. Moreover, the chapter in which aspectual distinctions are taught could affect students' comprehension as well. If aspectual distinctions are located in a chapter taught toward the end of the semester, students may not be able to practice enough. Finally, the textbook explanations can affect student learning, as shown by Frantzen, Westfall and Foerster, and Dansereau. If textbooks use inaccurate or incomplete explanations, students may feel confused and mislead if they find examples that run counter to the explanations they received from their course textbooks.

Vistas, *by Blanco and Donley*

In breaking up the preterite conjugations into three chapters, *Vistas* allows the student adequate time to learn and practice the preterite paradigms. The placement of the imperfect in section 10.1, followed by the preterite-imperfect contrasts in section 10.2 could be problematic for the student as these sections are located in the middle of the textbook and would either be covered at the beginning or the end of the semester, potentially allowing inadequate time for practice, given the heavy emphasis placed on modality and the perfect tenses in the second half of the book, unless the preterite-imperfect distinction is discussed in both the first and the second semester of introductory

Spanish. Furthermore, the preterite-imperfect distinction is taught right before accidental and passive *se* constructions, a challenging topic for the beginning student. Accidental *se* constructions are often used with the preterite, so it seems more logical to teach this concept in an earlier chapter while the preterite is still being covered rather than to overwhelm the student with two challenging topics back-to-back and to potentially allow for insufficient practice of either concept.

Vistas' strengths lie in its presentation of the uses of the preterite as a conjugation that indicates that the speaker views the action as completed, that references the action's beginning or end, and that narrates a sequence of past events or actions. The textbook explains the uses of the preterite thoroughly, although the explanations could be expanded to include past events, such as becoming sad or being sick. Moreover, the text defines a certain class of verbs as "verbs that change meaning in the preterite." I agree with Frantzen that this explanation can be problematic. A possible solution is referring to these verbs as "verbs with two possible meanings in the preterite."

Vistas' explanation of the imperfect is for the most part strong. The first two explanations, "Describe an ongoing action without relation to its beginning or end" and "Express habitual past actions," are sound as they accurately reflect the typical uses of the imperfect; however, I find the third explanation, "Describe physical and emotional states or characteristics," to be lacking as it does not state that these states or conditions must be viewed by the speaker as ongoing or background information.

Puntos de partida, *by Knorre et al.*

While *Puntos de partida* does not use the term *aspect* either, it contains good explanations of the preterite and the imperfect. For example, the chart in chapter ten that

contrasts the information each aspect conveys—preterite=beginning/end, imperfect=habitual, et cetera—is relatively complete and seems as though it would help students choose the proper aspect with a few comments from the instructor. For example, the term "action" listed under the preterite column might indicate to students that they can use only the preterite with action verbs. The instructor might clarify by explaining that the preterite tells the listener what the main actions, states, and events are.

The chart also that the preterite is used to talk about completed actions and events, which as Dansereau states, could confuse students as all past actions are completed at the time of speaking. However, as Lunn indicates, the preterite is used to talk about actions or events viewed in-focus as a whole. From Lunn's comments, we can extrapolate that "completed" is an appropriate term for describing the uses of the preterite because a past event that can be viewed as a whole will have likely been completed.

The ninth chapter presents students with a list of the uses of the imperfect, which fall into three main categories: descriptions, telling time, and "age expressions with *tener*." While I agree with the latter two categories, I believe that category one needs refining. This category contains three subcategories: repeated habitual actions in the past; actions in progress when another action occurred and interrupted the in-progress action; and ongoing physical, mental, and emotional states in the past. I agree with item 1b, in-progress actions interrupted by another action, but argue that items 1a and 1c should be modified to point out that the imperfect is used in these situations only when the verb refers to what was going on at the time rather than what happened. As the instructors surveyed in Chapter Three pointed out, imperfective aspect refers to past conditions, and

perfective aspect refers to past events. This distinction is key in explaining the differences between an action that was going on and an action that happened.

The layout of *Puntos de partida* is both a strength and a weakness. The division of the preterite and the imperfect into several chapters allows students time to practice the conjugations but may not give them enough time to practice using the preterite and the imperfect together, as this topic is introduced in chapter ten, halfway through the text. Although students do learn about the uses of the imperfect in chapter nine and that the preterite translates to "did + verb" in chapter seven, this information will likely be dealt with in the latter part of the semester, meaning students may not receive adequate practice making distinctions between the preterite and the imperfect. Furthermore, the preterite and the imperfect are mixed in with other challenging topics, including indirect object pronouns, *gustar*—this section is a continuation of a previous section—double-object pronouns, superlatives, more uses of interrogative words, and reflexive pronouns. While combining these topics may help students see relationships between seemingly unrelated concepts, the potential for inadequate practice and for overwhelming the student still remains.

Nexos, *by Spaine Long et al.*

Nexos, like *Vistas* and *Puntos de partida*, divides its aspectual explanations into multiple chapters. If *Nexos'* fourteen chapters are to be divided equally between two semesters, students will not reach the preterite until the end of the first semester as this concept is presented in chapter seven. This chapter presents students with a partial list of the conjugation paradigms—the rest are learned in the eighth chapter—meaning that they will have less time to practice the conjugations than if they had learned them earlier.

Students who do not take the first and second semesters consecutively may have difficulty with conjugations once they begin their second semester of study. Furthermore, the combination of preterite/imperfect conjugations and contrasts with other challenging topics, such as object pronouns and *se*-constructions, may be difficult for some students.

Nexos' explanations on the uses of the preterite and the imperfect are acceptable if they are accompanied by further explanations from the instructor. For example, section 7.1 states that the preterite refers to "actions that occurred and were completed in the past" (245). As has been stated, Dansereau would find this explanation problematic because any past action, whether it is stated in the preterite or the imperfect, occurred in the past. While an imperfect action may continue into the present, it may also have been completed and simply portrayed as background information. The instructor should clarify the text's explanation by stating that speakers use the preterite to view past events as a whole (Lunn), and therefore implies that they are completed. An event expressed in the imperfect is not viewed as a whole and therefore may not have been completed yet. This concept should also be applied to the explanation given in section 7.2, which indicates that speakers use the preterite when talking about "actions that began and ended in the past and…to things that happened in the past and are over with, whether they happened just once or over time" (245). This explanation makes sense to someone familiar with the uses of the preterite and the imperfect, but must be clarified to avoid confusion, as inexperienced students may erroneously apply it to the imperfect, reasoning, as Dansereau does, that an imperfect action could begin and end in the past and/or no longer apply.

Section 8.1 explains meaning-change verbs well, as it states that these verbs can have "slightly different" (280) meanings when used in the preterite, but their traditional meanings still apply in the majority of cases in which the verb used references "a specific time period in the past" (280). As Frantzen states, pointing out that certain verbs have a "special meaning" when used in the preterite can be inaccurate, and *Nexos* takes into account the inaccuracy of this statement through its inclusion of the explanation discussed above and an example using the verb *querer*, 'to want.'

The explanations for the imperfect given in section 9.1 are mostly accurate as well. As the text states, the imperfect refers to habitual past actions, actions the speaker used to perform, time, and age. The authors also indicate that the imperfect "describe[s] emotional or physical conditions in the past," which is true; however, the student would be better served if the explanation indicated that the imperfect "describes emotional or physical conditions in the past a. without reference to when they began or ended and/or b. as secondary to other events in the speaker's narration." Students should be reminded that the lack of a stated time frame does not necessarily indicate that the imperfect must be used, but rather tells students that using the imperfect is possible. For example, *estar* could be rendered in both the preterite and the imperfect in the phrase *estar triste*, 'to be sad.' *Estaba triste*, 'I was sad,' references the speaker's conditions at the time other events were taking place. Being sad is secondary to these events. *Estuve triste* implies that the speaker *became* or *is no longer* sad and therefore indicates the beginning of her conditions and gives them more narrative weight. Other information given in section 9.1 includes the translations of the imperfect: the simple past done routinely, the past progressive, would + verb, and used to + verb (318). The text uses the verb *comía*, 'I ate,'

and a series of English translations to illustrate this point. This example helps students see the various ways the imperfect can be transferred to English discourse. One area for clarification is the translation 'would eat,' which must be contrasted with the conditional so that students do not confuse "I would often eat at 8:30" with "I would eat at 8:30 if I had time" (Dansereau 36 and Tomme 1101).

The explanations discussed above are summarized and clarified in section 9.2, the final section on the preterite and the imperfect. The authors assert that the choice between the preterite and the imperfect can depend on the speaker's perception of the event and "is not [always] clear-cut." I believe the inclusion of this information is important in helping the student understand the distinctions between the preterite and the imperfect. The chart on page 321, which summarizes and elaborates the uses of the preterite and the imperfect is fairly accurate as well. However, it does state that the imperfect emphasizes the duration of an action, information that contrasts with a statement found in section 8.1 which explains that the preterite is an appropriate choice in the sentence, *Mi ex novio me quiso mucho, pero mi novio actual me quiere más*, 'My ex-boyfriend loved me a lot, but my current boyfriend loves me more,' because the verb *querer* emphasizes the duration of the relationship. This contradiction may confuse students. Another area of potential confusion is the use of more developed explanations in section 9.2 than appear in other sections. Students may read the previous sections dealing with the preterite and the imperfect and overgeneralize their uses because they do not receive as detailed information on the semantic implications of each aspect until later.

Like the other beginning Spanish texts, *Nexos* refers to the preterite and the imperfect as tenses rather than aspects. Nevertheless, its treatment of the semantic implications of the preterite and the imperfect is sound.

Facetas, *by Blanco*

Facetas presents the preterite and the imperfect in the third out of six chapters. As the text's cover states that it is for a "*curso breve,*" 'short course,' the third chapter is an appropriate location for discussions on preterite/imperfect contrasts because they would be covered halfway through the semester, allowing for review at a later point in the semester if necessary. Even if the text is used over a two-semester course, the limited number of chapters allows for extensive study of preterite/imperfect contrasts, meaning that they can be studied in the last third of the semester as opposed to the last week.

The text provides good, semantically-based explanations of the preterite and the imperfect as the author emphasizes the preterite's use in referring to events with definite beginnings or ends (94), events that interrupt an ongoing event (103), or to events that "advance [a narration's] plot" (103), and the imperfect's use in talking about events whose "beginning[s], end[s], or completion[s]" (98) are not stressed, that are part of a narration's background information, or that indicate "what was going on at a certain time in the past" (98). *Facetas* also points out the speaker's role in determining which aspect to use. The chart on page 102 states that speakers use the preterite to talk about actions they consider completed.

The chart mentioned above succeeds in several other areas as well. For example, it states that the preterite refers to an action's beginning or end and to a sequence of events. Moreover, it reminds the student that the imperfect "describe[s] an ongoing past

action without reference to its beginning or end" (102), is used to tell time, and "express[es] habitual past actions or events" (102), the latter of which is also explained on page 99. The chart falls short in its explanation that the imperfect is used to talk about "mental, physical, and emotional states or characteristics" (102) because there is no indication that these conditions must form part of the background information and must be ongoing in order to be used in the imperfect. Characteristics that begin or end must be expressed in the preterite.

Other weaknesses found in *Facetas* include lists of time expressions that are associated with either the preterite or the imperfect. While there is a list of expressions that communicate habituality or repetitiveness and are therefore used with the imperfect in a previous section, this list does not give the student any indication of which expressions to use with each aspect. Furthermore, the text states that the verbs *conocer, (no) poder, (no) querer,* and *saber,* 'to be familiar with/know,' '(not) to be able to,' '(not) to want to,' and 'to know,' change meanings when used in the preterite. Although this can be true, as Frantzen points out, it does not always apply. Despite *Facetas'* weaknesses, it does discuss the past progressive and includes an example paragraph that demonstrates how the preterite and the imperfect are combined in a narrative, both of which are helpful information to the student.

Conversación y repaso, *by Sandstedt and Kite*

Conversación y repaso presents the preterite and the imperfect early in the text in chapter three and relegates this chapter to talking about the past. This layout is one of the text's strengths, as students will tackle aspect one fourth of the way through the semester if the text is used over one semester and halfway through the semester if the text is split

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between two semesters. Students would benefit more from using the book over two semesters, as its large number of chapters—twelve—makes using the text over one semester challenging because the class will not be able to cover the chapters in depth. Covering the text in two semesters allows for ample practice of preterite/imperfect distinctions.

Unlike other texts, *Conversación y repaso* discusses the imperfect before the preterite and teaches conjugation paradigms before usage. Its explanations on usage align well with those given by Frantzen and are strong. According to the text, the preterite indicates that an action began or ended in the past or is complete. The imperfect on the other hand refers to habitual, in-progress, or repeated actions and is used to tell time. Frantzen points out that the term "repeated" is inaccurate because the preterite can refer to actions that occurred multiple times, but the authors of *Conversación y repaso* take this area for potential confusion into account by stating that the preterite refers to completed actions and events regardless of the number of times they took place. The third item under the imperfect heading in the text is problematic because it states that the imperfect "describe[s] physical, mental, or emotional states in the past" (39). This inconsistency is found in texts I have discussed previously in this section and is inaccurate because the preterite can refer to any of the states mentioned in the explanation, provided the speaker references the state's beginning or end. The explanation should be modified to state that the imperfect is employed in such circumstances if the state is ongoing or forms part of the background information.

Other areas for improvement in *Conversación y repaso* include the explanation that some verbs have "special meanings" (41) when used in the preterite. While this is

true, it does not occur every time one of these verbs is used. However, the example sentences in this section would help students see the potential semantic differences.

Despite these shortcomings, *Conversación y repaso* does have many strengths. In addition to those already discussed, the text eliminates "would + verb" in its lists of possible English translations of the Spanish imperfect. This is important because students often confuse the imperfect "would" with the conditional "would" (Dansereau 36) and have to choose between the English conditional and the English imperfect when translating (Tomme 1102). Lastly, the text uses examples to illustrate how the preterite and the imperfect are used together, giving students an idea of how to combine the two aspects in their own narratives.

Revista, *by Blanco*

Revista also has an advantageous layout. The placement of the preterite and the imperfect in the second chapter in the six-chapter text allows for adequate practice of the conjugations and the aspectual distinctions, whether the text is used over one semester or two. However, there are only two practice exercises dealing specifically with the preterite and the imperfect, meaning that the instructor must come up with additional exercises. Furthermore, the authors write that some verbs have different meanings when used in the preterite.

Despite the lack of activities dealing with preterite/imperfect distinctions and the somewhat inaccurate explanation of meaning-change verbs, the text has solid explanations, written in Spanish because it is for intermediate-advanced students. Although they do not use the term *aspect* at this point in the text, the authors completely leave out the term *tense*, instead defining the preterite and the imperfect as ways to talk

about the past, each one having different uses (42). The authors use more linguistically-oriented explanations when outlining the uses of the preterite, stating that the preterite refers to "*acciones pasadas puntuales y completadas*," 'punctual and completed past actions' (42). The instructor may need to define the term *punctual* as actions that occur instantaneously, but this definition is otherwise sound. Their definition of the imperfect is accurate as well, as it states that it is employed when talking about "*acciones pasadas habituales*," 'habitual past actions' (42). The chart found on page 42 that contrasts the uses of the preterite and the imperfect is for the most part sound, particularly as it states that the preterite refers to changes of state and the imperfect is used to talk about the future from a past perspective. One area for improvement, however, is the fact that the chart states that speakers use the imperfect to discuss emotional, mental, or physical states. This explanation could be modified to indicate that states expressed in the imperfect are ongoing, but as the chart tells students that the preterite refers to changes in state, this clarification is not as necessary.

The authors also discuss the uses of the preterite and the imperfect in narration. Students learn that the imperfect usually refers to the background information, while the preterite indicates the events that occurred within this background (42), a semantically-accurate explanation. It is at this point that the authors mention the term *aspect*, stating that because the preterite and the imperfect each refer to a different aspect of the past, each corresponds to a group of time expressions (42). While not necessarily a linguistic explanation, the use of the term *aspect* is impressive as it introduces students to the concept that the preterite and the imperfect are not two separate tenses, but rather two aspects of the past tense.

Motifs, *by Jansma and Kassen*

The most problematic aspect of *Motifs* is its organization. Each chapter is divided into sections, including sections dealing with the thematic focus of the chapter and sections outlining the grammar topics. The grammar topics are introduced in the thematic sections and more thoroughly explained in the grammar sections. The student must reference the thematic section to determine on which pages the grammar sections fall, as these are not listed in the table of contents. While some students may appreciate finding all of the grammar topics in one section at the end of the chapter, others may prefer that the grammar explanations be combined with the thematic sections. Moreover, the compound past is introduced in the sixth chapter, meaning that students will learn its conjugation paradigms in the next-to-last chapter of the semester if the book is used over two semesters. The compound past has a somewhat complex conjugation paradigm as it is a compound tense and sometimes requires participle agreement, so the topic's placement at this point in the text raises questions of whether or not students will be able to practice it adequately. However, as some have pointed out, the compound past is morphologically simpler than the present in French, so students should have less trouble with conjugations and consequently may not need as much practice. Furthermore, the text contains multiple exercises. Students should get enough practice with the imperfect and the compound past/imperfect contrasts, as they are presented in chapter eight, the second chapter covered in the second semester of a two-semester course. The compound past of verbs used with reflexive pronouns is taught in chapter ten, an advantageous location for the beginning student because these verbs require both a pronoun and participle agreement, making them more complex than other compound past verbs.

Despite the organizational setbacks, *Motifs* gives strong explanations in the

sections dealing with the compound past. For example, the authors state that the

compound past's English translation is contextually-based and that *être* verbs typically

express movement and can be remembered through the mnemonic *Vandertramps*, all

helpful tips for the student. The explanations dealing with the imperfect, on the other

hand are somewhat unspecific. The compound past is contrasted with the imperfect

through the statement that although both are past *tenses*, the compound past refers to

"what happened in the past" (247) and the imperfect has three uses: "describ[ing] how

things were in the past," "describ[ing] what people used to do," and "describ[ing]

feelings and situations" (247). While I agree that the compound past tells us what

happened, students may become confused upon reading this explanation because all past

events, whether expressed in the compound past or the imperfect, relate to what happened

in the past. Students must understand, however, that the compound past indicates what

actually happened and which events move our narrative forward. The imperfect, in

contrast, does not tell us what happened, but rather what was going on at the time our

main events happened. The first two imperfect explanations, "how things were in the

past" and "what people used to do" (247) are accurate and will help the student

distinguish between the compound past and the imperfect. The third, "describing feelings

and situations" (247), while accurate, is incomplete and confusing. It must be modified to

state that the imperfect refers to feelings and situations only when those feelings and

situations are part of our narrative's background information. These and other

explanations make up a chart on pages 253 and 254 that summarizes the uses of the

compound past and the imperfect. All other explanations are accurate and potentially helpful to the student.

Liaisons, *by Wong et al.*

Liaisons' layout is both a strength and a weakness. Students learn about the compound past in chapters five and six of a fourteen-chapter book, meaning that these topics will be covered in the last third of the semester if the text is used in a two-semester course. Students should have adequate time for practicing the conjugations. However, students do not learn about the imperfect or its contrasts with the compound past until the eighth chapter, meaning that these topics will potentially be covered at the beginning of the second semester. Classes that remember the compound past conjugations well may not need to review them the second semester, but other classes may require review, taking time away from practicing the imperfect and compound past/imperfect distinctions.

Liaisons' explanations are of variable quality as well. The text accurately states that the compound past indicates a completed past action or event, but this definition should be modified to include the speaker's role and the fact that states can be expressed using the compound past. A better explanation would read, "Speakers use the compound past to talk about past actions, events, or states that they view as complete and as a whole." *Liaisons*' strengths in its explanations of the compound past lie in its inclusion of syntactic and semantic information relating to the compound past (see Chapter Three) and its translation into English, with an example, as the simple past, the present perfect, and "did + verb," which helps students determine the situations that require the compound past as they know how it should translate; and its chart on page 321. Although

the chart is accurate and gives students helpful information, including the use of the imperfect to talk about background information such as weather and age, it does not include examples. Moreover, the uses of the compound past and the imperfect build on each other throughout the text. While some might find this strategy helpful, others might view it as confusing and misleading to the student, who may believe that the uses of each aspect are limited to those presented in earlier sections.

Espaces, *by Mitchell and Tano*

Espaces' layout may also indicate the necessity of splitting the preterite and the imperfect over two semesters, as it has fifteen two-part chapters and deals with these topics in chapters six through eight. The text's organization means that students will either not learn about the imperfect or its contrasts with the compound past until the second semester, leaving time to forget the compound past conjugations; study only half the sections dealing with compound past/imperfect conjugations in the first semester; or learn about the imperfect and its contrasts with the compound past in the last chapter covered in the first semester, leaving inadequate time for practice. One solution that has been carried out in first-year Spanish courses at my institution is discussing perfective/imperfective contrasts both semesters. Perhaps this method would be of use to universities that use *Espaces*.

Right away, the reader notices an inaccuracy in the text. Although section 6A.2 does mention both the compound past and the imperfect, it states that they are past *tenses*, when in reality they are *aspects* of the past tense. Nevertheless, the inclusion of both the compound past and the imperfect in this section is advantageous, even though the section

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deals with only the compound past, because students know at the beginning that French has multiple ways of talking about the past.

Although the authors leave out the role of the speaker at this juncture, they do tell students that the compound past refers to completed actions or states. As has been stated previously, some researchers may find the term "completed" inaccurate, but the semantic information implied by the speaker supports this definition because speakers view events described by the compound past as completed wholes. The inclusion of the term "states" is also significant because it alerts students that the compound past is not limited to use with action verbs. The fact that the authors state that *être* verbs usually involve motion is also helpful to students.

Although students do not learn about the compound past's translations into English, they do learn that the imperfect translates to the simple past, "would," "used to," and the past progressive. These translations are accurate, but the instructor must take care to insure that students can differentiate between the past "would" and the conditional "would" (Dansereau 36 and Tomme 1102).

Espaces is the only French text I have surveyed that instructs students to practice the pronunciations of the compound past and the imperfect as they can sound similar in French. While this information may seem unnecessary because the compound past has an auxiliary and the imperfect does not, it is still effective because it encourages students to focus on pronunciation, a key element in spoken French; and to differentiate between pronunciation and writing, as French is a more etymologic than phonetic language because there is less of a correspondence between French spelling and pronunciation than occurs in other languages, such as Spanish.

Other strong explanations found in the text include the meaning changes implied by using *avoir* + adjective in the compound past as opposed to in the imperfect, which helps students pay attention to how aspect affects semantics. The charts presented on pages 322 and 323 are good as well. The speaker's role in choosing between the two aspects is emphasized, as is the change in state indicated by the compound past. Moreover, the text points out that the imperfect does not reference an event's timeframe, while the compound past does. The second section on compound past/imperfect contrasts explains the imperfect's role in talking about a narration's background information as well as the compound past's role in discussing the events that occurred within that background. The chart that accompanies this section is excellent, as it is accurate, semantically-based, and brief enough that students should have no trouble memorizing the information. Lastly, the text explains that the compound past and the imperfect can be used to talk about causes and effects, which is good information for the student.

Sur le vif, *by Jarausch and Tufts*

Although the explanations of the compound past and the imperfect offered in *Sur le vif* are effective and rather complete, they do still leave room for potential confusion. The authors' three questions to ask oneself when choosing between the compound past and the imperfect accurately capture the uses of the two aspects, but question three, "Was the action expressed by the verb a habitual action? Did it occur repeatedly? (Use the imperfect)," would be better expressed as follows: "Was the action expressed by the verb a habitual action that occurred repeatedly without reference to a specific time frame? (Use the imperfect.) This explanation includes what Frantzen calls "repetitious actions"

in that it specifies that the action has to take place without reference to a certain time frame—for five years, three hours, six days—in order to be expressed in the imperfect.

Moreover, this list of questions does not take into consideration the use of the compound past to refer to ongoing or repeated actions that were completed in the past. I propose the addition of a fourth item to *Sur le vif*'s list of questions: "Was the action repeated a certain number of times? Did it occur within or over a specific time frame? (Use the *passé composé*.)"

The authors' three "helpful hints" are mostly sound as well, but like the three questions, leave room for error. These hints state that *venir* + *de* must be used in the imperfect; that certain verbs are typically used in the imperfect, and that these verbs change meaning when used in the compound past; and that certain time expressions can be associated with either the preterite or the imperfect. The first hint regarding *venir* + *de* is logical since French speakers express the past perfect using an imperfect conjugation of an auxiliary and a past participle and *venir* + *de* translates to "to have just…" However, the second hint needs modification as any verb can be used in either the compound past or the imperfect, and students may become confused when they encounter a typically "imperfect" verb used in the compound past. Students would be better served with the following explanation: "While you may be more likely to encounter certain verbs in either the compound past or the imperfect, you can use the two conjugations with any verb. Your choice will depend on whether you view the action or state as part of the narrative sequence or as background information."

Furthermore, while some "meaning change" verbs such as *connaître* do change meaning when used in the compound past because the compound past indicates the

initiation or finalization of an action or state, others such as *savoir* and *vouloir* do not have to change meaning in order to be used in the compound past. I therefore recommend that explanations of meaning change verbs be modified to reflect the possibility rather than the guarantee of a change in meaning. Nevertheless, the authors of *Sur le vif* provide effective examples of possible meaning changes as they indicate which examples refer to the conditions at the time and which refer to what actually happened.

The third hint the authors provide is effective in that it specifies which time expressions students are likely to find associated with either the compound past or the imperfect. While some instructors might find this hint overly simplistic or potentially confusing as sentences such as *J'ai lu tous les jours pour deux années*, 'I read every day for two years' and *Marie lisait pour trois heures chaque jour quand elle était petite*, 'Mary read for three hours every day when she was little,' are possible in French, hint three is still valid because it encompasses more complex sentences such as the ones listed above. These sentences would simply have to be used as examples to illustrate the combination of time expressions and the use of specific and non-specific overarching time frames as a way to distinguish between the compound past and the imperfect.

Imaginez, *by Mitschke*

Imaginez' strength is its presentation of compound past/imperfect distinctions in the third chapter of a ten-chapter text, meaning this topic will be covered halfway through the first semester if the book is used in a two-semester course. Unlike other texts, there is no mention of the term *tense*. Aspect is not mentioned, either.

A potential drawback is the inclusion of the imperfect conjugation paradigms in a supplementary section at the back of the text while the compound past paradigms are

taught as part of the regular text. Students will have to turn to the back of the text to access this material. Nevertheless, the placement of the topic within the text seems effective because it gives students adequate time to practice the material.

Although students receive accurate explanations of the compound past in *Imaginez*—the emphasis on the use of the compound past to talk about a reaction or a "change in state of mind" (102) is particularly strong—they do not learn about the role of the speaker's perspective until they reach the section that contrasts the compound past and the imperfect, nor do they learn about the uses of the imperfect unless they review the supplementary section at the back of the book.

Imaginez' explanations of the imperfect could be seen as contradictory or inconsistent. The text defines the imperfect as a way to express "*continuous* states of being or repetitive actions" (104). The imperfect does indicate this information, but students must apply it to the uses of the imperfect outlined in the chart also on page 104. The chart informs students that the imperfect refers to habitual actions, conditions, and states, but the phrase "continuous states of being or repetitive actions" (104) does not appear anywhere on the chart. Moreover, the phrase "repetitive actions" could be viewed as contradictory as the chart states that students should use the compound past to indicate how many times an action occurred. Frantzen considers the term "repetitive actions" inaccurate and prefers the term "repetitious actions" because actions expressed using perfective aspect can also occur multiple times.

The chart's list of uses of the compound past is relatively accurate and complete, but one explanation of the imperfect needs modification. The authors state that speakers use the imperfect to refer to past states, and although they do indicate that the compound

past refers to changes in state and to the beginning or end of a past action, they should clarify their explanation of the imperfect by writing that it refers to states whose focus is not a beginning or an end. Interestingly, this modification is taken into consideration in the supplementary section on the imperfect, indicating that this section should be included with the regular sections. The other explanations found in the supplementary section are also well-written.

Equally well-explained is the information on narrating in the past, which in *Imaginez*' case is semantically based, as it is founded on the background-information/what-happened-in-that-background explanation (105). However, the authors state that the imperfect "describes what was happening" and that the compound past tells us which "actions occurred or interrupted the ongoing activity" (105), a potentially misleading statement, as students may confuse "what happened" with "what was happening." This is more a question of semantics, but students might find it easier to differentiate between what was going on in the background=imperfect/what actually happened=compound past. They should know that the imperfect does not tell us in any way what happened.

Face-à-face, *by Ghillebaert*

Face-à-face, which is written in French, has the most advantageous layout of any of the French texts surveyed. The author discusses perfective/imperfective contrasts in section 1.1 of the six-chapter text, leaving plenty of time for students to practice the material. Ghillebaert does not use the terms *aspect* or *tense*, but she does emphasize the role of context and the speaker's perspective in determining which aspect to use. The chart outlining the uses of each aspect is accurate, specific, and requires few

modifications. Any modifications needed would be made for clarity. For example, the student learns that the compound past refers to actions that are either completed at the moment of speech or at a specific point in the past. The instructor should point out that students do not need to reference a certain time if they want to use the compound past. Another area for modification is the use of the imperfect to refer to past states. This information is true, but students should also learn that the compound past indicates the beginning or end of a state, and that both aspects can be used with action verbs and verbs of state. Students also learn the semantic differences between the compound past and the imperfect, which will be important to them when they write their own narrations. For example, the compound past tells us which events advance the plot and that the imperfect tells us which events form the background information, context, or framework of the story. The author also states that the two aspects can indicate a cause-and-effect relationship, an explanation that is absent from other texts but nevertheless helpful to students (11).

A definite area for improvement is the note on meaning-change verbs that is accompanied by example sentences. Students must learn that these verbs can indeed change meaning, and some must in order to make sense when used in the compound past, but that some of the verbs can maintain their original meanings when written in the compound past. Which situation applies depends on the verb and its context.

Although none of the textbook explanations were as a whole weak, each had areas for improvement. The most notable areas include the absence of the term *aspect*, the texts' organization, and the explanations of the meaning-change verbs. Not every book

emphasizes the role of the speaker and the context in choosing between perfective and imperfective aspect, but each text gives overall strong, accurate explanations.

Sample Textbook Explanations

The previous section critiqued several Spanish and French textbooks in terms of their presentation of past-tense aspectual distinctions. While each text has its strengths, none provided an ideal explanation of perfective and imperfective aspect. The most significant area for improvement is the definition of the preterite/compound past and imperfect forms as tenses rather than as aspects. I propose the following explanation as a solution, based on the literature reviewed in Chapter Two: "The preterite/compound past and the imperfect are two *aspects* of the past tense. This means that they communicate the speaker's perception of the action, event, or state. Is the speaker indicating that the action, event, or state began or was completed at a certain point in the past, or is he or she simply stating that the action, event, or state was part of the past without referencing its timeframe? Asking yourself these questions will help you determine which aspect you should choose.

"You can also think of a past event as a story. If you were writing a story, you would include some elements in your plotline, and others would be background information. You would use the preterite/compound past to talk about the elements on your plotline, while the elements that make up the background information would be written in the imperfect, as shown in Figure 4.1.
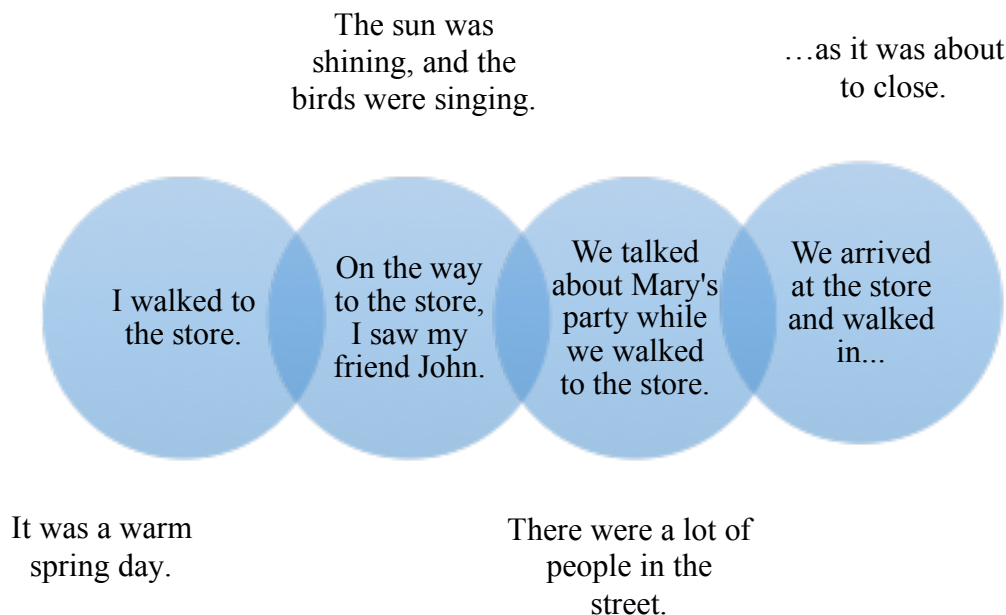
The sun was
shining, and the
birds were singing.

…as it was about
to close.

I walked to
the store.

On the way
to the store,
I saw my
friend John.

We talked
about Mary's
party while
we walked
to the store.

We arrived
at the store
and walked
in...

It was a warm
spring day.

There were a lot of
people in the
street.

Fig. 4.1 Visual Model of Aspect in Narration

"The circles represent your plotline. They list the order in which the events occurred: first I walked to the store, then I saw my friend John, next we talked about Mary's party, and finally, we arrived at the store and walked in. The information written around the circles is what was going on as those events occurred. As the speaker, I determine which events form my narrative sequence and which events refer to what was going on in the background when the narrative sequence occurred. While there is some objective truth to how I report the events—for example, it *was* a warm spring day when I began my walk to the store—the way I report the events depends on how I subjectively viewed them as or after they occurred.

"When talking about a past event, you can view it as an Impressionist painting. You can view the brush strokes up close or stand back to examine the whole painting. Aspect works the same way. The imperfect is like the individual brushstrokes because it tells the reader which information you are viewing out of focus. The preterite/compound

past is like the entire painting because you use this aspect to view an event in focus and as a whole.

"The following list will also help you distinguish between the preterite/compound past and the imperfect.

Uses of the preterite/compound past:

1. Talking about the beginning of an action, event, or state.
2. Talking about the end of an action, event, or state.
3. Talking about an action, event, or state as a whole.
4. Talking about a sequence of actions or events.
5. Talking about an action, event, or state you view as completed.
6. Talking about your reaction to an event after it ended.

Uses of the imperfect:

1. Talking about your past habits, whether or not you still have those habits.
2. Talking about a past action, event, or state that may or may not be completed.
3. Talking about what was going on at the time other past events happened.
4. Talking about past events without viewing them as a whole.
5. Talking about your reaction to a past event as it was occurring.

These explanations, while many, should help students differentiate between perfective and imperfective aspect. It should be noted, however, that textbook explanations should be supplemented by the instructor's own explanations, as he or she often has information to add that is absent from the textbook. The following section deals with the analysis of the instructors' explanations and survey responses discussed in Chapter Three.

Analysis of Survey Results

In Chapter Three, I outlined the results of a survey distributed to thirty-five instructors of Spanish and French, returned by twelve, and answered in full by eleven. Although half of the questions have only eleven responses, I calculate the percentages for

those questions out of twelve. In addition to collecting the written survey, I also discussed orally with a thirteenth instructor of Spanish his perspectives on teaching past-tense aspectual distinctions in Spanish and French. The results of this conversation are discussed in Chapter Three but are not calculated into the percentages.

In this chapter, I compare teaching techniques used among the instructors of Spanish with those used by the instructors of French in terms of the percentage of instructors who use each technique. I then extend my comparisons to the difficulties students of each language experience with past-tense aspectual distinctions. Table 4.1 outlines the percentage of instructors who use each technique.

Table 4.1

Techniques Used among Spanish and French Instructors

Technique	Percentage of Spanish Instructors	Percentage of French Instructors
Grammar Explanations	14.3%	40%
Games	42.9%	20%
Input	100%	100%
Output	71.4%	80%
Semantic Explanations	14.7%	20%
Verbal Morphology	14.3%	40%
Other Techniques	57.1%	40%

By far the most popular techniques among both the Spanish instructors and the French instructors were input and output.[1] All of the Spanish instructors and all of the French instructors use some form of input, and seventy to eighty percent use output. This phenomenon is likely due to the necessity of input in the L2 classroom as students must receive examples of the uses of the L2 in order to determine its mechanics. Students must

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[1] Input is defined as any instructional material that uses the target language. Output refers to the students' productions in the target language.

produce output in order to practice the L2's structures. The French instructors outnumbered the Spanish instructors by approximately five percent in their preferences for semantic explanations[2] and other techniques. The semantic differences between perfective and imperfective aspect are the same in Spanish and French, so the greater percentage of Spanish instructors who give semantic explanations is probably due to the greater number of responses from the Spanish instructors. The disparity in response rates between the two groups of instructors is also a likely explanation for the greater number of Spanish instructors who listed other techniques.

The compound past's complex morphology is a probable explanation for the higher percentage of French instructors who responded that their techniques include grammar explanations and discussions on verbal morphology. While the morphology of the Spanish preterite is complex, the preterite is a simple aspect. The compound past, on the other hand, requires both an auxiliary and a past participle. Students must know how to choose the correct auxiliary, conjugate it, form the past participle, and make the past participle agree with the subject or direct object if necessary. Therefore, it makes sense that more French instructors would include grammar explanations and verbal morphology in their repertoire of techniques.

A final disparity between the techniques found among the instructors is the use of games. The Spanish instructors vastly outnumbered the French instructors in their use of games. This is likely due to personal preferences among this group of instructors rather than on aspectual differences between Spanish and French. Average age could be viewed as a factor affecting the greater number of Spanish instructors who use games because the

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[2] Semantic explanations include the "imperfect=background information, preterite/compound past=narrative sequence" explanation.

average age of the French faculty at the institution surveyed is higher than that of the

Spanish faculty. However, the demographics of the respondents indicate that this is an

unlikely explanation.

The instructors were also asked what they found to be the primary difficulties

their students experience with aspect. Table 4.2 summarizes these results.

Table 4.2

Difficulties with Aspect Experienced by Students of Spanish and French

Type of Difficulty	Percent of Spanish Instructors Who Reported This Difficulty among Students	Percent of French Instructors Who Reported This Difficulty among Students
Affective Filters	0%	60%
Semantics	0%	20%
Transference from English	28.6%	20%
Verbal Morphology	42.9%	0%
Other Factors	42.9%	20%

Student difficulties reported by the Spanish instructors differed percentage-wise

from those reported by the French instructors.[1] For example, none of the Spanish

instructors stated that they found affective filters among their students, but 60% of the

French instructors reported that they did. More Spanish instructors than French

instructors responded to the survey, so a difference in numbers seems an unlikely

explanation. Furthermore, the affective filters reported by the French professors included

confidence and overthinking perfective/imperfective distinctions, which could easily be

found among students of Spanish. The most likely reason for this phenomenon is the

small number of responses overall. Out of the thirty-five instructors who received the

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[1] Verbal morphology includes items such as "the large number of patterns (weak, irregular, stem-changing, orthographic changing, etc.)"/the Spanish preterite's conjugations, and uncertainty with regard to verb conjugations. Semantics include understanding that aspectual distinction "is determined by the intent of the speaker."

survey, only twelve responded in writing. Furthermore, one of the instructors did not list difficulties experienced by her students, bringing the total number of responses to that question down to eleven. Perhaps a greater number of responses would yield less of a disparity between the two groups of instructors.

I also asked the instructors at which point in the semester they teach aspectual distinctions. Most Spanish and most French instructors teach this topic at either the beginning or the middle of the semester. In fact, 57.1% of Spanish instructors reported teaching the preterite and the imperfect at the beginning, and 57.1% reported teaching this concept during the middle of the semester. 60% of French instructors reported teaching the compound past and the imperfect at the beginning, and 60% teach these concepts during the middle of the semester. Interestingly, 42.9% of Spanish instructors and 20% of French instructors reported teaching aspect at the end of the semester. The timing reported by the instructors could be due to the courses themselves, the arrangement of their textbooks—the most likely factor, or individual preferences of the instructors. For example, one Spanish instructor stated that she teaches the preterite and the imperfect at the beginning of the semester and that "[r]emediating, revising, and re-teaching are semester-long tasks."

Class Activities and Exercises

In the previous section, I discussed the types of class exercises used among a group of Spanish instructors and French instructors. I will now outline other possible exercises that can be employed in the L2 classroom to teach aspectual distinctions.

While Westfall and Foerster's method of providing students with sentences written in English is helpful, I believe students would be better able to analyze how

perfective and imperfective aspect function in English if they were provided with a

passage while the teacher introduced the preterite and the imperfect. Students should then

examine each past tense verb to determine whether the speaker views the action or state

as a complete event that moves the story forward, or as incomplete, ongoing information

that provides background to the story, like they do in Westfall and Foerster's example.

Westfall and Foerster do not allow for an "ambiguous" category of verbs represent either

completed or ongoing actions. However, it should be pointed out to students that some

verbs can belong to either category. Exercises such as Sutter's, shown below, will prove

helpful at this stage.[2]

<div align="center">Preterite or imperfect</div>

A train *approached* the railroad crossing at a moderate rate of speed. A red lantern *hung* out the window of the locomotive and *swayed* lazily from side to side. Suddenly, the engineer *noticed* that a vehicle *blocked* the tracks ahead. She *sounded* her whistle but the car *did not move***.**

The brakeman *locked* up the massive drive wheels as she *attempted* to slow the ponderous train. It *was* 2:00 p.m. and the afternoon sun *shone* brightly upon the landscape. Cattle *grazed* along the tracks, apparently indifferent to the high drama that *was unfolding*.

Sparks *flew* from beneath the wheels. Both the engineer and the brakeman *knew* all too well that it would be extremely difficult to stop in the distance remaining. The crossing *was coming* up fast.

At last, the motorist *abandoned* any hope of starting the engine and *ran* to the siding. He *trembled* as he *watched* the inexorable advance of the hurtling locomotive. In a move born in desperation, the engineer *disengaged* the wheels and then quickly *reversed* their rotation. With this, the whole train *shuddered* violently.

The engineer, the brakeman and the hapless motorist all *gritted* their teeth in unison as the train *slid* forward. Enveloped in a cloud of smoke and sparks, the train finally *ground* to a halt. Less than 35 feet *separated* the cold black cattle guard from the stalled auto.

The motorist first *uttered* a phrase audible only to the cows and then *addressed* the pallid trainmen: "Pardon me, guys, you wouldn't happen to have any gas, would you?"

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[2] Sutter, Ralph. "Preterite or imperfect." Fullbean.com. 2008. Web. Additional exercises available at http://fullbean.com/spanish/spanish/sp202/handouts/index.html.

As can be seen, there are two uses of past tense verbs in this passage. One type of verb provides background information and sets the stage, while the other refers to the sequence of events that moves the story forward. Students can make charts like the one below to list the verbs that belong to each category. An "ambiguous" category is included because several of the verbs in the story can be viewed as either background information or part of the narrative sequence depending on the intentions of the speaker and, in written texts, the interpretations of the reader.[3] Table 4.3 shows the verbs that belong to each category.

Table 4.3

Categorization of the Verbs Shown in the Previous Exercise

background information	narrative sequence	Ambiguous
approached, hung, swayed, blocked, was, shone, grazed, was unfolding, flew, knew, was coming, separated	noticed, sounded, did not move, abandoned, ran, disengaged, reversed, shuttered, ground, uttered, addressed	locked, attempted, trembled, watched, gritted, slid

Once students have categorized the verbs, they can begin learning the perfective and imperfective conjugations and uses in the L2. Teachers should explain to students that L2 passages will have some verbs that set the stage and others that move the story forward, just as the English passage they have analyzed did. This explanation should be supplemented with a list of broad usage rules similar to Frantzen's that is accompanied by examples in both English and the L2. The inclusion of English examples aids students

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[3] Unlike in English, the reader's interpretation does not play a role in the selection of aspect in Spanish because speakers indicate their choices through the use of either the preterite or the imperfect.

in understanding that aspect is not unique to the L2 and not as much of a foreign concept as they think.

In order to master the use of perfect and imperfect aspect, students must be taught that their use, like the use of the indicative and the subjunctive moods, depends on how the speaker wishes to communicate the information. Once they have learned and practiced conjugations, they should begin analyzing the use of the perfect and the imperfect in texts, the importance of which is discussed in Lunn 1985; Ozete 1988; and Blyth 1997 (Koike and Klee 98). Beginning students can practice with simple sentences or dialogues provided by the instructor, and intermediate students can tackle short texts, such as passages from their textbook. Advanced students will find it helpful to analyze sections from texts of their choosing, such as short stories, magazine and newspaper articles, or even novels. The instructor should remind students to view each past-tense verb within the context of the sentence or passage.

An advanced student might perform the following analysis of the opening paragraph of Octavio Paz' "Mi vida con la ola," shown below.[4]

> Cuando dejé (*action viewed as completed*) aquel mar, una ola se adelantó (*advanced—action viewed as completed*) entre todas. Era esbelta y ligera (*she was slender and light—she still is*). A pesar de los gritos de las otras, que la detenían (*action in progress in the past—doesn't move the story forward—background information*) por el vestido flotante, se colgó (*hung onto—action viewed as completed*) de mi brazo y se fue conmigo saltando (*she went jumping away with me—action viewed as completed*). No quise (*I didn't want to—this feeling is no*

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[4] "When I left that sea, a wave moved ahead of the others. She was tall and light. In spite of the shouts of the others who grabbed her by her floating skirts, she clutched my arm and went leaping off with me. I didn't want to say anything to her, because it hurt me to shame her in front of her friends. Besides, the furious stares of the larger waves paralyzed me. When we got to town, I explained to her that it was impossible, that life in the city was not what she had been able to imagine without all the ingenuousness of a wave that had never left the sea. She watched me gravely: No, her decision was made. She couldn't go back. I tried sweetness, harshness, irony. She cried, screamed, hugged, threatened. I had to apologize." Paz, Octavio. "My Life with the Wave." Trans. Eliot Weinberger. Ed. Jorge F. Hernández. *Sun, Stone, and Shadows: 20 Great Mexican Short Stories*. México D.F.: Impresora y Encuadernadora Progreso, S.A. de C.V. (IEPSA), 2008. 27. Print.

longer relevant) decirle nada, porque me daba pena (*it pained me/was painful to me—still viewed as relevant*) avergonzarla entre sus compañeras. Además, las miradas coléricas (*angry*) de las mayores me paralizaron (*emotion/state viewed as completed/over—the narrator is not literally paralyzed*). Cuando llegamos (*action viewed as completed*) al pueblo, le expliqué (*action viewed as completed*) que no podía ser (*state/condition still viewed as relevant*), que la vida en la ciudad no era (*the city is still this way*) lo que ella pensaba (*not viewed as over*) en su ingenuidad (*naïveté*) de la ola que nunca ha salido (*has never left*) del mar. Me miró seria (*she looked at me seriously—action viewed as completed*): No, su decisión estaba tomada (*speaker doesn't view this as over—it's still going on/relevant*). No podía (*she didn't try—she just couldn't*) volver. Intenté (*tried to—action viewed as completed*) dulzura, dureza, ironía. Ella lloró, gritó, acarició, amenazó (*series of completed actions*). Tuve que (*I had to and I did*) pedirle perdón.

Each past tense verb has been analyzed in terms the information Paz conveys through the choice of either the preterite or the imperfect, and potentially unknown words have been defined. Were a student to complete this exercise, he would define unknown words himself. This exercise could also be completed using the symbols proposed by Westfall and Foerster.

The purpose of such exercises is three-fold. First, the student is exposed to examples of what she has just learned within the context of authentic input; second, she must analyze the *why* of the speaker's or the author's grammatical choices and thus reinforce the concepts she has learned; and third, she is exposed to new vocabulary.

After analyzing texts, students can practice forming sentences orally with the preterite/imperfect or with the compound past/imperfect. An enjoyable class activity would consist of their forming sentences about what celebrities were doing when other celebrities interrupted them. The instructor prints photos of celebrities, one per student, and distributes them to the class. The celebrities can be either American celebrities with whom the students are familiar or celebrities from the French- or Spanish-speaking world. The exercise would occur as follows:

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Student A : Gérard Depardieu a construit une nouvelle maison.
Student B : Gérard Depardieu construisait une nouvelle maison quand Marion
     Cotillard est arrivée.
Student C : Marion Cotillard arrivait quand Nicolas Sarkozy a téléphoné.

As shown, the first student, A, describes what her celebrity, Depardieu, did, and the second, B, states what his celebrity, Cotillard, did to interrupt the first Depardieu's action. The game continues until the last student gives her response. If time allows, doing a practice round in English so that the students become familiar with the nature of the game before doing a round in the L2 would be helpful. Several rounds can be done in the L2 by moving in different directions around the room.

Students will at some point need to practice using the preterite/compound past and the imperfect in writing. Classroom exercises dealing with this topic have traditionally involved completing an incomplete text with the appropriate conjugation of a given verb. These exercises are indeed practical as they allow students to limit their focus to two concepts—conjugation and perfective/imperfective contrasts—and are relatively easy to implement in assessments. However, such exercises fall short in that they portray aspectual distinctions as a multiple choice question with one correct answer rather than as a way for speakers to communicate how they viewed a situation. Perhaps compositions requiring the student to describe a past event using perfective and imperfective aspect would be more effective exercises than completing a pre-written paragraph because they obligate the student to rely on her own perception of the event. Not even native speakers agree on which situations are best described using perfective aspect and which are better suited to imperfective aspect, so exercises requiring the student to determine which is the "better" choice will not reflect the aspectual choices speakers make in real life and may not be as helpful in the long run. In situations in which fill-in-the-blank type exercises are

required, students would be better served choosing between perfective and imperfective aspect and explaining their choices rather than trying to determine the speaker's thought processes, as in an exercise suggested by Tomme (1102).

Another difficult concept in teaching the Spanish preterite and the French compound past is teaching verbs that can change meaning in the preterite. As has been stated in the second chapter, explaining that these verbs take on a "special meaning" when they are used in the preterite is only partially true. For example, *supe que iba a casarme con Juan* can be translated as both 'I knew (at that moment) that I would marry John' and 'I found out that I would marry John.' Textbooks explain that *saber,* 'to know,' is translated as 'to find out' the preterite and in the compound past, but as the example shows, this is not always true. Other verbs that "change meaning" in the preterite are listed below in Table 4.4 with their meaning changes.

Table 4.4

Meaning-Change Verbs in Spanish and French

Verb	Meaning	"Special" Meaning in the Preterite and the Compound Past
conocer, connaître	to meet, to know a person, to be familiar with a place or an object	to meet
poder, pouvoir	to be able to	to succeed in doing
no poder, ne pas pouvoir	to be unable to	to fail in doing
querer, vouloir	to want to	to try to
no querer, ne pas vouloir	not to want to	to refuse to
saber, savoir	to know	to find out
tener (King and Suñer 88), avoir	to have	to receive (King and Suñer 88)
tener que	to have to	to have to and to do

Source: King, Larry D., and Margarita Suñer. *Gramática española*. Boston: McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., 2008. Print.

As textbooks explain the meaning changes as absolutes, students will likely be confused when they encounter a use of these verbs that does not imply a meaning change, such as *No quise decirle nada* en Paz' "Mi vida con la ola." These verbs could be explained more successfully if they are called "verbs with two possible meanings in the preterite." I suggest the students do an exercise with example sentences that reflect both meanings, as shown below.

Los verbos con dos significados posibles en el pretérito

1. Supe que María Elena se rompió con Félix.
2. En aquel momento supe qué coche quería para mi cumpleaños.
3. Rafael quiso hablar con Jorge, pero éste estaba ocupado.
4. Elisa no quiso decirle nada a Felipe porque no quería avergonzarlo.
5. Elisa no quiso decirle nada a Felipe porque le hacía el vacío (*she was giving him the silent treatment*).
6. Pudimos hacer toda la tarea anoche.
7. No pudisteis hablar con vuestros profesores.
8. El Sr. DuPont conoció bien a Madrid durante sus vacaciones.
9. Carlos y Sofía se conocieron en la universidad.
10. Tuviste que entregar el ensayo ayer.

Students will examine the sentences and write possible translations for each one. If a sentence could have more than one translation, the students will write possible contexts for each translation. A student might respond in the following ways to the sentences, as shown below.

1. I found out/knew that María Elena broke up with Félix.—I knew at a specific point in time, so I found out.
2. At that moment, I knew which car I wanted for my birthday.—I wouldn't say that I found out which car I wanted.
3. Rafael tried to/wanted to talk with Jorge, but the latter was busy.—Rafael attempted to talk with Jorge vs. wanted to talk with him—his desire began at a specific point in time.
4. Elisa didn't want to/refused to say anything to Felipe because she didn't want to embarrass him. .—the subordinate clause both translations
5. Elisa refused to/didn't want to say anything to Felipe because she was giving him the silent treatment.—the subordinate clause both translations, particularly the first

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6. We were able to/succeeded in doing all the homework last night.—you had the ability to do it and you did it
7. You guys were unable to/failed to talk with your professors.—y'all tried, but y'all couldn't.
8. Mr. DuPont became very familiar with Madrid during his vacation.—Mr. DuPont can't meet Madrid, but he can become familiar with it.
9. Carlos and Sofía met in college.—college marks the beginning of their knowing each other.
10. You had to turn in the essay yesterday.—you had to and you did.

Students who have completed this exercise should have learned that the definitions of some verbs can change when used in the perfective aspect, but not necessarily. Their meaning changes will depend on the context and the original definition of the verb.

Students may also have trouble using verbs such as *ser* and *être*, 'to be,' in their perfective forms as these are verbs of state. As Lunn notes, perfective aspect denotes the speaker's reaction to the event after it was completed, while imperfective aspect refers to the speaker's reaction as the event occurred. A speaker might narrate a story that involves seeing a movie and state: *Le film était mauvais.*, 'The film was bad.' A speaker reacting to the film after he has seen it would instead state: *Le film a été mauvais.*, 'The film was bad.' The differences between these two sentences is that the first is the speaker's reaction as the event, the movie, was occurring, and the second references his reaction after the event was completed. The sentence written in the imperfect can also imply that the speaker is talking about his reaction to the movie after he has seen it and plans to tell the listener more about it. The use of the compound past in the second example indicates that the hearer should not expect more information about the movie. Students can practice these semantic differences by discussing their middle or high school experiences, using

the imperfect to talk about their reactions to those experiences as they occurred and the preterite/compound past to react to these experiences from a present standpoint.

Other aspectual uses of *ser* and *être* that students should be able to recognize are talking about historical figures and someone's former profession. When discussing historical figures, students should observe the following guidelines. When asked, *¿Quién fue F. Scott Fitzgerald?*, 'Who was F. Scott Fitzgerald?,' they have two options. They can respond, *Fue autor.*, 'He was an author.,' in order to indicate that they will not give more information (PC). Although his article deals with the French past tense, Thogmartin's research indicates that *Fue autor.* would be an appropriate newspaper headline. *Era autor.,* 'He was an author.,' on the other hand, implies that the speaker will talk more about Fitzgerald. The hearer will expect more information, such as *Participó en los "Roaring Twenties" y escribió obras como, por ejemplo,* El gran Gatsby *y* Los bellos y los malditos*., 'He participated in the Roaring Twenties and wrote works such as *The Great Gatsby* and *The Beautiful and the Damned*.' Students also have two options when talking about the former professions of people who are still alive. *Mi padre fue médico.*, 'My father was a doctor.,' does not communicate the same information that *Mi padre era médico.*, 'My father was a doctor.,' communicates. The first sentence implies that my father will never be a doctor again, but the second implies that he may return to the profession. It is recommended that students write practice sentences in order to grasp these semantic differences (PC).

As has been demonstrated in this chapter, a variety of activities dealing with aspect of Spanish and French past-tense verbs is possible, and it is important to use these

activities as a means of illustrating that the speaker's perception informs the selection of either perfective or imperfective aspect.

Further studies might explore the efficacy of the above-mentioned methods not only in Spanish and French classes, but also in other Romance language courses, as well as possible uses with other contrastive structures such as *ser*/*estar*, indicative/subjunctive, and *por*/*para* in which questions of perception come into play.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

The previous chapters explored the teaching and acquisition of past aspect in Spanish and French, specifically the preterite/imperfect and composed past/imperfect distinctions. Chapter One outlined the uses of perfective and imperfective aspect in English, Spanish, and French; Chapter Two reviewed relevant literature on the teaching and acquisition of past-tense aspect in Spanish and French, as well as primary difficulties experienced by students; Chapter Three examined textbook explanations of aspect and contained the results of a survey distributed among Spanish and French teachers; and Chapter Four analyzed the textbook explanations and survey results seen in Chapter Three. It has been demonstrated throughout this thesis that although many explanations and class activities relating to perfective and imperfective aspectual distinctions are possible, students must understand that the choice between the two is based on which information is considered part of the narrative sequence and which elements form the background information. Arming students with this knowledge should facilitate students' understanding of the distinction between perfective and imperfective aspect, but students also need to be given the autonomy and confidence to choose between the two aspects when writing. This is especially important because, as one of my professors stated, "you can't be wrong" in the selection of perfective or imperfective aspect, but the listener or reader's interpretation of the event will be different if one conjugation is chosen over the

other. Furthermore, readers or listeners may disagree with the speaker or writer in terms of which conjugation is a better choice.[1]

The gray areas present in the distinction between perfective and imperfective aspect, and in many other areas of grammar, can frustrate the student and leave him or her wondering how to possibly know which choice is correct and if aspect can ever be mastered. These questions lead us to perhaps the most important lesson to be learned— and that teachers should impart to their students—through studying perfective and imperfective aspect is that the choice between the two is question of perception rather than of objective truth. This concept seems to be the key to mastery.

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[1] I am referring to an anecdote told to me by one of my professors in which two people compared a text and found that the aspectual selections in the text differed from the selections they would have made.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

Survey on the Teaching and Acquisition of Spanish and French Past-Tense Verbs

Thank you for taking time to complete this survey on the teaching and acquisition of aspect of past-tense verbs in Spanish and French. The information you provide will be included in my thesis, titled, "Teaching Aspect of Spanish and French Past Tenses." No personal information will be collected. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at katie_samples@baylor.edu. Thank you so much for your time and participation.

--Katie Samples

1. Subjects taught (please select all that apply):
    a. French
        i. Beginning
        ii. Intermediate
        iii. Advanced
    b. Spanish
        i. Beginning
        ii. Intermediate
        iii. Advanced

2. Does your course include discussions on preterite/imperfect or passé composé/imparfait distinctions?
    a. Yes
    b. No

3. If so, at which point in the semester is this topic usually discussed?
    a. Beginning (weeks 1-5 of the semester/first week of summer)
    b. Middle (weeks 6-10 of the semester/middle of summer sessions)
    c. End (weeks 11-16 of the semester/last week of summer)

4. How do you typically introduce this topic?

5. What kinds of explanations do you typically give? Do you vary your strategies depending on the level of the course?

6. Which strategies have proven to be the most effective?

7. What kinds of activities do your students do to reinforce this topic?

8. What do you consider to be the primary difficulties students have with preterite/imperfect or passé composé/imparfait distinctions (whichever applies to your course)?

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