How factive is the perfective? On interaction between perfectivity and factivity in Polish

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The introspective judgement of Polish data shows a strong tendency for perfective predicates to either presuppose factivity of embedded object sentences, or to let it be derived via conversational implicature.

First, kind of inference available depends on lexical properties of perfective matrix verbs. A case of factivity being presupposed by perfectivity can be seen in examples (1) and (2). The two embedding perfective verbs: przewidzieć ‘to predict’ and przepowiedzieć ‘to foretell’ only slightly differ in their lexical meanings, but they differ significantly with respect to the factivity inference they cause on embedded object sentences. In (1), where the truth of the proposition expressed by the embedded sentence has been verified in the actual world, both lexemes appear acceptable. In contrast to that, only przepowiedzieć can be used in (2), where the truth of the proposition of the subordinate clause cannot be verified in the actual world. Nevertheless, when applying the maxim of quantity to both the perfective verb przepowiedzieć and its imperfective twin przepowiadać, the perfective is classified as factive. Since the imperfective variant clearly lacks factivity inference, the speaker might prefer this form in the context where the truth of the proposition is being questioned. Otherwise the speaker would be too informative. Examples (3) and (4) make it evident that only przewidzieć presupposes factivity of its sentential complement. In (3), in contrast to (4), factivity inference remains under matrix verb negation.

Second, imperfective matrix verbs tend to block factive interpretation of embedded sentences (See Młynarczyk 2004 for a semantic classification of aspectual verb pairs in Polish that results from their formational possibilities). As example (5) shows, only the perfective variant of the verb ‘to guess’ forces ‘the truth’ of its complement. If Iza zgadła (pfv) what would be served for dinner, it means that she knows it. That is why the sentence followed by but she was wrong causes a contradiction. On the other hand, if Iza zgadywała (ipfv) what would be served for dinner, it does not automatically mean that she succeeded in finding it out.

The assumption that perfectivity correlates with factivity holds for many other types of embedding verbs, for instance speech act verbs, such as poinformować (pfv) – informować (ipfv) ‘to inform’, verbs of perception, such as poczuć (pfv) – czuć (ipfv) ‘to feel’ or attitude verbs, such as uwierzyć (pfv) – wierzyć (ipfv) ‘to believe’. Example (6) confirms that only the imperfective variant of the verb ‘to inform’ can be followed by but he interrupted her. This is due to the fact that using its perfective twin implies successful performance of all speech act’s parts, including, among others, the addressee being completely informed by the speaker (Austin 1962, Grice 1975). This is where the factive component of the perfective speech act verbs comes from. The concept of commitment state (Cohen & Krifka 2014, Krifka 2015) will be crucial for integrating speech act verbs into my account.

The correlation between perfectivity and factivity discussed so far can be found in Hungarian as well. In example (7), only the imperfective variant of the verb ‘to say’ does not cause any logical conflict when followed by but he was not right. Using the lexeme with the perfective meaning requires being right (See also Kiefer 1986).

My proposal is to treat factivity as an inherent component of perfectivity. Different stages of factivity can be assumed depending on the semantics of the embedding perfective verb, which makes it possible to classify every perfective verb as factive. Also the type of embedding itself (declarative vs. interrogative) must be taken into consideration (Ślodowicz 2008, Spector & Egré 2015).
Examples

(1) That is good that we went to the lake anyway. They were not wrong in the weather forecast yesterday.

Prze-widzieli / prze-po-wiedzieli, że znowu będzie ciepło!
PFV-see.PST.VIR.3PL PFV-po-know.PST.VIR.3PL that again will.3SG warmly
‘They predicted / foretold that it will be warm again!’

(2) Let’s risk it and go to the lake tomorrow.

W prognozie pogody nie prze-widzieli,
in forecast weather NEG PFV-see.PST.VIR.3PL
że znowu będzie ciepło.
that again will.3SG warmly
‘In the weather forecast yesterday, they did not predict that it will be warm again.’

(3) Wczoraj w prognozie pogody nie prze-widzieli,
yesterday in forecast weather NEG PFV-see.PST.VIR.3PL
że znowu będzie ciepło.
that again will.3SG warmly
‘In the weather forecast yesterday, they did not predict that it will be warm again.’

(4) Wczoraj w prognozie pogody nie prze-po-wiedzieli,
yesterday in forecast weather NEG PFV-po-know.PST.VIR.3PL
že znowu będzie ciepło.
that again will.3SG warmly
‘In the weather forecast yesterday, they did not foretell that it will be warm again.’

(5) Iza *zagadła / zygad-ywa-la, co będzie na obiad
Iza guess.PFV.PST.F.3SG guess-IPFV-PST.F.3SG what will.3SG on dinner
ale się po-myliła.
but REFL PFV-be.wrong.PST.F.3SG
‘Iza guessed / was guessing what would be served for dinner, but she was wrong.’

(6) Anna *po-informowała / informowała Piotra,
Anna PFV-inform.PST.F.3SG inform.PFV.PST.F.3SG Piotr
że dostali stypendium, ale on jej przerwał.
that get.PFV.PST.M.3SG scholarship but he her interrupt.PFV.PST.M.3SG
‘Anna informed / was informing Piotr that he got a scholarship, but he interrupted her.’

(7) Peter *meg-mond-t-a / mond-t-a, hogy ki megy a
Peter PFV-say-PST-OBJ say-PST-OBJ that who go.PRS.3SG the
parti-ra, de nem volt igaza.
party-to but NEG was right
‘Peter said / mentioned who will go to the party, but he was not right.’