Remarks on the non-use of the Perfective aspect in Russian

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1. Introduction

It is well-known that reference to single completed events in Russian is not the exclusive territory of perfective (Pf) aspect. Sometimes Pf is not used, the imperfective (Ipf) being chosen instead. The two examples in (1) can both be read as utterances reporting on a completed event in the past (from Padučeva 2006):[1]

(1)   Anja   {vymyla/   myla}   pol.   (Ru)
         A.   clean;pfv;pst clean;ipfv;pst floor;acc
         'Anja has cleaned the floor.'

This special function of an Ipf verb is traditionally called "(general-)factual" use.[2] It is in clear contrast to the canonical Ipf reading, likewise available in (1), which expresses that the event is ongoing at reference time.[3]

Among the many accounts to factual Ipf that have been put forward, Grønn (2004:91) identifies two general strategies, which are, in a way, orthogonal to each other. There are those approaches that assume a simpler meaning for factual Ipf in comparison to what Pf expresses. And there are those approaches that, on the contrary, consider factual Ipf to express a more elaborate meaning. While the former assume that factual Ipfs express less than completedness of the event, the latter assume that factual Ipfs express more than completedness. In the present paper I will confront the two strategies, and I will give two arguments in favor of the latter kind of approach, one empirical argument and one theoretical argument.

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[1] Abbreviations in the gloss: ipfv=imperfective, pfv=perfective, pst=past, fut=future, acc=accusative, gen=genitive, dat=dative, ins=instrumental, imp=imperative, pl=plural.

[2] In this paper, I use the term limited to the cases of completed Ipf called "existential" (Grønn 2004) or "obščefaktičeskoe-èkzistencial'noe" (Padučeva 1996), excluding those cases called "presuppositional" (Grønn) or "akcional'noe" (Padučeva). An example for the latter would be *Anja myla pol uksusom* ('Anja cleaned the floor with vinegar'), where focus lies on *uksusom*.

[3] Under the ongoing interpretation, the sentence would translate as 'Anja was cleaning the floor'. The assumption that the ongoing reading is the canonical interpretation of an Ipf verb is debatable but standard, see Zaliznjak & Šmelev (1997:19).

The paper is structured as follows. In section 2 I briefly recall the classic 'simple denotation'-view, originated by Forsyth (1970). In section 3 I introduce the proposal of Šatunovskij (2009), according to whom many factual Ipfs trigger special inferences, which are absent with Pf aspect. I will argue for extending this approach to *all* cases of factual/existential Ipf. In section 4 I present an empirical argument in favor of the latter kind of approach. Section 5 shows that the assumption of obligatory inferences in factual Ipfs is also theoretically superior to the 'simple denotation'-view, because it enables a simple treatment of aspect choice in terms of OT. Section 6 concludes the paper.

2. The 'simple denotation'- view

The perhaps most prominent proposal that has been put forward to account for factual Ipfs is the 'simple denotation'-view. The idea behind it is, as the wording suggests, that the factual use of an Ipf verb expresses a meaning which is simpler than the meanings expressed by other Ipf uses or by the use of a Pf verb.

2.1 Simple denotation in the conception of Forsyth (1970)

The term "simple denotation" has been coined by John Forsyth in order to grasp what he thinks is the "most basic and general function of the imperfective verb; to identify the type of action […] naming it without reference to the question of its 'perfectivity'" (Forsyth 1970:82). According to the author, this meaning component, simple denotation, is entailed in any interpretation that an Ipf verb can give rise to; it is, in effect, nothing but the verb form's semantic content. Due to pragmatic inferences "derived from […] the implied opposition to the meaning of the perfective in a given context" (ibid.), this Ipf semantics will be enriched by additional meaning components as soon as the verb is put to use, which then yields the well-known range of Ipf readings (the ongoing reading, the iterative reading, the conative reading, …).[4]

Forsyth's idea now is that factual Ipfs are outstanding among the various Ipf uses in that they involve *no* enrichment of the basic Ipf meaning. They function to express no more than just the simple denotation associated with an Ipf verb. Factual Ipfs therefore represent "the clearest manifestation of this function […] where the speaker is merely interested in the fact that the type of action named did occur (or alternatively that it did not occur)" (ibid.). Thus, in a context where an Ipf verb is used factually, for some reason, the "implied opposition to the

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[4]   For a summary of the possible Ipf readings, see Švedova et al. (1980), Zaliznjak & Šmelev (1997), Sonnenhauser (2006).

meaning of the perfective" does not trigger any inference that would enrich the basic Ipf meaning.

2.2 Simple denotation in Comrie (1976)

The idea that factual Ipfs would be cases of simple denotation has spread. It was promoted, for instance, by Bernard Comrie in his famous book on aspect. There the author writes that "even where, on other grounds, one might expect the Perfective to be used, it is possible in Russian to use the Imperfective, when there is no specific reference to the completedness of the event" (Comrie 1976:113).

Attention should be paid to the word "completedness" in this quote. The clue of the approach is that, by uttering a factual Ipf, the speaker does refer to a completed event, but she does not refer to the event's completedness. In order to refer to the completedness of the event, the speaker will have to choose the Pf form.[5] Thus, whereas a speaker who is using a Pf verb is interested in expressing completedness, a speaker who is factually using an Ipf verb "is simply interested in expressing the bare fact that such and such an event did take place, without any further implications" (Comrie 1976:113).

2.3 Section summary

According to the 'simple denotation'-approach, the factual use of an Ipf verb and the use of a Pf verb are identical in meaning apart from that the Pf use involves a further meaning component: Pf aspect additionally imposes on interpretation the requirement of completedness.[6]

3. An orthogonal approach

In the previous section we saw how proponents of the classic 'simple denotation'-view account for factual Ipfs. In the present section an alternative possibility of looking at things will be introduced. According to that alternative view, factual Ipfs express in fact more than merely reference to a completed event, i.e. more than merely completedness.

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[5]   One would of course like to know what "completedness" precisely means, but, unfortunately, Comrie is not explicit on that.

[6]   Compare Grønn's (2004:109) summary of the 'simple denotation'-view: "Ipf does not necessarily contradict the meaning of Pf, but it is by nature less explicit w.r.t. the aspectual configuration".

3.1 Šatunovskij (2009) on the attributive use

Building on suggestions of Leinonen (1982), Šatunovskij (2009:168ff.) discusses what he calls the "attributive use" of an Ipf verb in Russian. This use is presented by the author as a special case of the factual use. According to Šatunovskij, the attributive use is special in that it highlights the type of the event (= event kind) described by the VP of the sentence. It is not the occurrence of the denoted event token which is important, but that an event token of a certain type has taken place.[7]

The exposition of the kind information ensures that the VP can semantically be related to other senses evoked in the given text segment.[8] This, in turn, has the effect that the speaker, by referring to a completed event of the given kind, will invite the hearer to draw a certain logical conclusion about the agent of the event. To see what is meant, it will be instructive to have a closer look at an example discussed by Šatunovskij:

(2) Čubajs {vzjal/ bral} den'gi u amerikanskogo pravitel'stva.
    Č.   take;pfv;pst take;ipfv;pst money at American;gen government;gen
    'Chubais has taken money from the American government.'

The observation is that, upon hearing the Ipf version of (2), the addressee will unavoidably understand that the speaker condemns Chubais for what he has done. If aspect is Pf, this information is not necessarily communicated. Šatunovskij (2009:180) explains this effect as follows: With Ipf aspect, the event kind 'take-money-from-the-American-government' is highlighted and, therefore, put in relationship to other senses evoked by the given text. In particular, it relates to an assumption in background knowledge which says that taking money from the American government is bad. As a consequence, the inference is invited that the performer of the event, Chubais, is a bad person.

It is crucial for the attributive use that the "logical inference", as Šatunovskij calls it, *must* be drawn because otherwise the choice of the Ipf form would be unmotivated, as it would match the function the Pf form.[9]

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[7] "[Z]des' važno ne to, čto imelo mesto takoe-to *sobytie* [...], a važno, čto imelo mesto *takoe* sobytie, *sobytie takogo tipa*" (Šatunovskij (2009:169; emphasis orig.)

[8] "... obespečivaet ustanovlenie smyslovyx (logičeskix) svjazej meždu dannoj GG i drugimi smyslami v tekste" (Šatunovskij 2009:169).

[9] "[V]o mnogix slučajax OF *dolžen* byt' vključen v takie svjazi, v protivnom slučae ego upotreblenie okažetsja ničem ne motivirovannym i poètomu anomal'nym. Takaja neobxodimost' voznikaet togda, kogda vo vsex inyx otnošenijax OF èkvivalenten SV" (Šatunovskij 2009:169; emphasis orig.).

3.2 Generalizing Šatunovskij's approach

For Šatunovskij, the attributive use, although important and widespread, is only a marginal case of a factual Ipf. The primary use, which constitutes the categorial meaning of factual Ipfs, is the existential use, i.e. the use in utterances that tell about that an event of a certain kind took place.[10] One may wonder: Given the proposed reason for why the attributive use of an Ipf verb comes with an obligatory inference (recall footnote 9), how can there be existential Ipfs without obligatory inferences at all? Wouldn't they be equivalent to Pf utterances? Šatunovskij himself points out that focusing on the existence of the event is nothing that would set the existential use of an Ipf form apart from the use of a Pf form.[11] Moreover, if we scroll through the examples that are presented by the author as instances of the attributive use, we encounter many examples that are standardly treated as existential Ipfs. Take (3), for instance:

(3)   Ja podnimalsja na   Èverest.
        I   climb;ipfv;pst onto E.
        'I have climbed Mount Everest'

According to Šatunovskij (2009:176), this example represents the attributive use for the following reason: The denoted event instantiates an event kind which is a subkind of the kind of grand events ("grandioznyx sobytij") and, therefore, the inference is triggered that the agent of the event, i.e. the speaker, is an outstanding person. Another example is (4):

(4)   Xotite   boršča? – Spasibo, ja obedal.
        want;imp;pl borscht   thanks   I   lunch;ipfv;pst
        'Do you want some borscht? – Thank you, I have had lunch'

With respect to (4), Šatunovskij (2009:179) writes that this utterance must be understood as a rejection, because it activates a piece of background knowledge saying that people have lunch only once a day.

   If these are all attributive uses, one may well ask whether there are any "pure" existential Ipfs left at all. Indeed, the Ipf version of our starting example (1) can likewise be said to relate to a background assumption, according to which Anja has the obligation to regularly clean the floor. Referring to the fact

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[10]   "[P]ervičnoe upotreblenie OF, formirujuščee samo ego značenie, - èto upotreblenie v vyskazyvanijax, govorjaščix o tom, čto sobytie takogo-to tipa imelo mesto (èkzistencial'noe OF)." (Šatunovskij 2009:165).

[11]   "Komponent 'imeet mesto' možet byt' v kommunikativnom fokuse i v predloženijax s glagolom SV." (Šatunovskij 2009:141).

that Anja has cleaned the floor would then invite the inference that she is free of her obligation on the present occasion. It therefore seems to be not too far-fetched to generalize the attributive use to *all* cases of factual Ipfs.[12]

3.3 Section summary

In this section, I presented a possible view on factual Ipfs that radically differs from the classic 'simple denotation'-view:[13] An Ipf verb cannot be used simply to refer to a completed event, because that function is taken by Pf aspect in Russian. Something additional has to be expressed to license a "completed Ipf". This additional piece of information is a pragmatic inference ("logical conclusion") about the agent of the denoted event.[14] It can only be drawn on condition that the VP of the sentence identifies an event kind that connects to other senses in the given text segment.[15]

4. An empirical argument

In the previous section, building on Šatunovskij (2009), I confronted the 'simple denotation'-view with an alternative. In a way, this alternative view mirrors the 'simple denotation'-view in that now the Pf utterance is simpler in meaning than its factual Ipf counterpart, as in the latter case the speaker expresses an additional piece of information.[16] In the present section, I will give an empirical argument in favor of the alternative approach.

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[12]   Recall from footnote 2 that this move does not concern cases of presuppositional Ipf.

[13]   Grønn's (2004) theory is a manifestation of that view. Unlike Šatunovskij, however, he does not offer a positive specification of the additional piece of meaning expressed by factual/existential Ipfs, but only the negative characterization that the speaker presents the event in abstraction away from the particular conditions of its target state.

[14]   Šatunovskij's approach cannot be considered an elaboration of the 'simple denotation'-view, as one reviewer suggested. The reason is that expressing the additional piece of information, although it is inferred from the context, is clearly in the interest of the speaker. This is at odds with that "the speaker is merely interested in the fact that the type of action named did occur" (Forsyth).

[15]   Note, by the way, that the alternative account is offering an *explanation* for why, as it is often stated, factual Ipfs are "type-focussing" (Dahl & Hedin 2000) or "type-referring" (Mehlig 2001, 2011).

[16]   "SV označal by *prosto* naličie rezul'tata, NSV OF […] vstraivaet fakt v stukturu logičeskix ožidanij" (Šatunovskij 2009:175; emphasis added). [A Pf would designate *simply* the presence of a result, a factual Ipf will build this fact into the structure of logical expectations]

4.1 Different predictions

So which position is correct? The classic view, according to which factual Ipfs exhibit meanings that are simpler than the meanings expressed by Pf utterances?[17] Or the alternative view, presented in section 3, according to which a factual Ipf is actually more complex in meaning than its Pf counterpart? Let us call the latter the 'obligatory inference'-view from now on.

If the 'simple denotation'-view was correct, we would expect the following to be a valid generalization:

(5) If there is an utterance context in which a given Pf sentence can successfully be used to denote a completed event, then there will be also an utterance context in which its Ipf counterpart can successfully be used in that function.

This should be valid if the 'simple denotation'-view was correct. The reason is that, according to this view, a Pf utterance requires more specific contextual conditions to be fulfilled than a factual Ipf. Whereas an utterance context suitable for a Pf has to support the existence of a completed event and the event's completedness (whatever that is, see above), an utterance context suitable for a factual Ipf has to support merely the existence of a completed event.

The 'obligatory inference'-view comes with a different prediction:

(6) If there is an utterance context in which a given Ipf sentence can successfully be used to denote a completed event, then there will be also an utterance context in which its Pf counterpart can successfully be used in that function.

This follows from the 'obligatory inference'-view because on this account, an utterance context suitable for a factual Ipf has to support not only the existence of a completed event, but also the possibility of a "logical conclusion" along the lines described in section 3. That is to say, the context should provide a piece of background knowledge to serve the basis for the inference. For utterance contexts that enable Pf utterances, such a requirement is not demanded.

4.2 Testing the predictions

Can we find empirical data to determine which of the different predictions is correct? We can. Consider the following two pairs of examples. The critical contrast is in (8). Given that the speaker has an uncle, and that this uncle performed a jump with a suitcase, the speaker may refer to this event by means of the Pf

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[17]   To be clear on that issue, let me point out that I take the "meaning" of an utterance to be the semantic information encoded by the sentence uttered plus pragmatic specifications, and let me repeat that the label "factual Ipf" refers to an utterance type.

sentence without problems. If the speaker used an Ipf verb, however, reference to the completed event would fail. Unlike the Ipf sentence of (7), the one of (8) cannot be read as a factual Ipf:

(7) Moj djadja {prygnul/   prygal}   s   parašjutom.
     my   uncle jump;pfv;pst jump;ipfv;pst with parachute;ins
     'My uncle has parachuted'

(8) Moj djadja {prygnul/   ?prygal}   s   čemodanom.
     my   uncle jump;pfv;pst jump;ipfv;pst with suitcase;ins
     'My uncle has jumped with a suitcase'

The observed pattern runs against the prediction of the 'simple denotation'-view (5). It is, however, explicable under the 'obligatory inference'-view. Recall that, according to that approach, the utterance context has to supply a piece of background knowledge to ensure the possibility of the obligatorily required inference. So the absence of a factual Ipf in (8) could be due to the absence of this piece of knowledge. And indeed, as soon as we furnish the context with the relevant information, a factual interpretation becomes possible:

(9) V našem gorode est' takoe sueverie,   čto esli prygneš'
     in our   town   exist such superstition that if   jump;pfv;prs
     s   čemodanom iz vagona na   platformu, to   budet
     with suitcase   out wagon onto platform   then be;ipfv;fut
     tebe   sčast'e. No xotja   ja prygal   s   čemodanom,
     you;dat luck   but although I jump;ipfv;pst with suitcase
     i   ne raz, ničego xorošego ne proizošlo.
     and not once nothing good;gen   not happen;pfv;pst
     'In or town, we have the superstition that if you jump with a suitcase from the train
     onto the platform, you will be in luck. But although I jumped with my suitcase, and
     not only once, nothing good has ever happened.'

4.3 More examples

Here are some more examples making the same point. (12) should be considered in comparison to (1).

(10) Babuška   {posolila / solila}   sup.
      grandmother salt;pfv;pst salt;ipfv;pst   soup
      'Grandma has salted the soup'

(11) Babuška   {posolila / ?solila}   puding.
      grandmother salt;pfv;pst salt;ipfv;pst   pudding

'Grandma has salted the pudding'

(12) Anja {vymala /   ?myla}   potolok.
      A.   clean;pfv;pst clean;ipfv;pst ceiling;acc
      'Anja (has) cleaned the ceiling'

What we observe is a stereotypicality effect. Factual Ipfs require the activity named by the verb and the object nominal to be well-established in background knowledge. If this condition is not met, there will be no basis to draw the inference which is obligatory for factual Ipfs.

5. A theoretical argument

The 'obligatory inference'-view is impressive not only owing to its empirical adequacy (section 4), but also to its theoretical attraction, as it suggests a simple way of capturing the distribution of morphological aspect among sentence interpretations in Russian. Let us take for granted a semantics for the two aspects as it has been proposed by Grønn (2004). As I am going to show in this section, given Grønn's semantic assumptions and given the 'obligatory inference'-view on factual Ipf, aspect choice can be modelled in terms of OT in a minimal and straightforward way.

According to Grønn (2004), Pf entails a condition that requires the end of the assertion time to be included in the time of the target state.[18] This implies that (i) Pf verbs can only be used to denote completed events (i.e. where a target state has been reached) and (ii) the properties of the target state will be relevant to the speaker's message.[19] Ipf, by contrast, semantically requires no more than that the assertion time somehow overlaps the event time. Taking these assumptions for granted, I now move on to formulating the relevant OT-constraints.

For the sake of the argument, let us begin by assuming three constraints, to be discussed in rank order, the highest ranked first: TRUTH provides a preference for interpretations that do not entail contradictory conditions. RELEVANCE "prefers interpretations which […] make sense with respect to the goals of the conversation" (Zeevat 2008:7). Finally, *SURPRISE favours interpretations that come as no surprise given a certain form.[20] Then define three types of context

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[18]   Grønn (2004) actually advocates a more narrow notion of target state than I reproduce here. But see Tatevosov (this volume) for an argument that Pf *always* requires the predicate to have a target state.

[19]   This is, I guess, what Comrie has in mind when he speaks of the Pf expressing "completedness".

[20]   The first constraint follows from the Grician Maxim of Quality ("Do not say what you believe to be false"). The second one is argued for in Zeevat (2008). The third one is less clearly motivated, which does not matter, however, as it will be abandoned in the end an-

that a Russian (declarative) sentence may be used in. In contexts of type 1 (henceforth "context 1"), the sentence is used to refer to an eventuality which is not a completed event. In context 2, the sentence is used to refer to a completed event, with the properties of the target state being relevant. In context 3, the sentence is used to refer to a completed event, with the properties of something else than the target state being relevant.

Let us begin with the 'simple denotation'-view. As the following three tableaus show, it will correctly predict the distribution of Ipf and Pf:

Context 1	TRUTH	RELEVANCE	*SURPRISE
Pf	*	…	…
☞ Ipf		…	…

Context 2	TRUTH	RELEVANCE	*SURPRISE
☞ Pf			
Ipf			*

Context 3	TRUTH	RELEVANCE	*SURPRISE
Pf		*	
☞ Ipf			*

The first tableau shows that Pf breaks the constraint TRUTH in context 1. This makes Ipf the optimal candidate, independently of the results of the lower constraints (indicated by "…"). The second tableau shows that neither aspect will violate TRUTH in context 2. This is because, given a Grønnian semantics, completed event reference is semantically compatible with both Pf and Ipf. RELEVANCE is likewise broken by neither of the aspects: Since Ipf expresses a simple denotation, it does not supply its own relevance condition, and the one supplied by Pf matches the one of the context (i.e. target state relevance). The lowest constraint decides in favor of Pf which, unlike Ipf, does not violate *SURPRISE (see footnote 20). The third tableau shows that Ipf wins in context 3, where something other than the target state is relevant to the speaker's message. TRUTH is, again, not decisive, but RELEVANCE is: Since Pf implies target state relevance, its use in context 3 does not make sense.

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yway. One might want to relate it to the notion of conditional informativity ("surprise value"), exploited in Grønn (2008:128): Since a Pf verb cannot but denote a completed event, its probability to do so is maximal (i.e. 1), which implies a surprise value 0. The probability of Ipf denoting a completed event is <1 (Grønn suggests 0.5), which implies a surprise value >0.

Now we turn to the 'obligatory inference'-view. As can be seen, it likewise makes the correct predictions:

Context 1	TRUTH	RELEVANCE	*SURPRISE
Pf	*	…	…
☞ Ipf		…	…

Context 2	TRUTH	RELEVANCE	*SURPRISE
☞ Pf			
Ipf		*	*

Context 3	TRUTH	RELEVANCE	*SURPRISE
Pf		*	
☞ Ipf			*

Thus, both approaches correctly predict aspect choice in Russian. But see that there is an important difference, related to context 2. Under the 'simple denotation'-view, it is the constraint *SURPRISE that decides the competition between Pf and Ipf. Not so under the alternative view, according to which factual Ipfs come with an obligatory pragmatic implicature creating a relevance center other than the target state, so that the choice of Ipf would violate RELEVANCE.

The difference is crucial. Note that there is no context other than context 2 for which the constraint *SURPRISE would be significant. Therefore, the 'obligatory inference'-view can dispense with *SURPRISE, whereas the 'simple denotation'-view is reliant on it. Taking into account Ockham's razor, we thus have a theoretical argument for preferring the 'obligatory inference'-view.[21] [22]

6. Summary

Proponents of the 'simple denotation'-approach hold the view that factual Ipfs express reference to a completed event "without any further implications"

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[21] Note that the 'simple denotation'-view will be committed to three constraints even if *SURPRISE was raised to the second rank. By the way, I take the ranking of TRUTH over RELEVANCE to be self-explanatory.

[22] Note also that the OT-account sketched here correctly predicts aspect choice for *all* sorts of factual Ipf, not only for those of the existential sort, to which I restricted discussion up to now (see footnote 2). Given that presuppositional Ipfs are those cases "kogda go-vorjaščego interesuet, gde, kogda, začem, kto zaveršal dejstvie" (Rassudova 1982:55) [when the speaker is interested in where, when, why or by whom the action was per-formed], they will violate RELEVANCE in context 2, just like existential Ipfs.

(Comrie). In this paper, I have presented empirical and theoretical arguments against that view. A more appropriate theory would assume that the factual use of Ipf will always give rise to a certain pragmatic implicature.[23] Grønn's (2004) theory meets this requirement, but it is not explicit on the precise content of the implicature. To fill this gap, I have suggested in this paper that the obligatory inference invited by factual Ipfs is the kind of implicature ("logical conclusion") about the agent of the denoted event that was described by Šatunovskij (2009).

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[23] One reviewer was wondering whether proving that there are implicatures involved in factual Ipf really falsifies Comrie's view. It does. Since implicatures are something that speakers are interested in expressing, their presence runs counter to the basic idea of the 'simple denotation'-view, i.e. that "the speaker is simply interested in expressing the bare fact that such and such an event did take place" (see also footnote 13).