

## CHAPTER TWO

### **The structure of a story: analysis of the running text**

In order to investigate the various signals directing, manipulating, and in the final analysis, constructing the reader's grasp of story structure, we open with a chapter offering a running analysis of the complete text of a single story from *Tales of Pirx the Pilot*. The story chosen for this case study is "Odruch warunkowy" [A conditioned reflex], a rather long "short story" of more than sixty pages with a quite elaborate plot involving several locations and a number of primary and secondary participants.

#### **Structure of the story**

The opening sentence of the story "Odruch warunkowy" provides its setting, locating the tale within the biography of the hero:

1. *Zdarzyło się to na czwartym roku przed samymi wakacjami.* 112<sup>1</sup>

"It happened in [his] fourth year, shortly before the summer break."<sup>2</sup>

By this initial sentence, the starting point of the plot is set. It functions as a zero point from which the subsequently relayed events develop in a chronological

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<sup>1</sup> The numbers following the examples refer to page numbers in the 1976 edition of the stories.

<sup>2</sup> As mentioned in the Foreword, the translations into English serve merely as a tool for a better understanding of the Polish examples. They are therefore kept as close as possible to the original. Often, where possible, word for word translations are preferred, even at the expense of the flow of the English text. In some cases some elements of the renderings are based on the English version by Louis Iribarne, *Tales of Pirx the Pilot* [1979] and *More Tales of Pirx the Pilot* [1982]. The tense forms (and other grammatical forms) used in the translation do not always convey the aspectual oppositions of the original.

chain and events preceding this point are presented in reference to it. Note the use of the pronoun *to* [it], cataphorically referring to the whole story to be told.

What follows is a long paragraph presenting and characterizing the hero by stating his professional status:

2. *Pirx [...] – miał zaliczone loty na symulatorach i dwa prawdziwe [...].* 112  
 “Pirx ... **had passed** his flights on the simulators and two unsimulated ones ... .”

Note the use of the periphrastic construction comprising a finite form of the verb *mieć* [to have] and a predicative perfective passive participle. This construction, not very widespread and not yet fully grammaticalized in contemporary Polish, denotes a state in the past ensuing from a previous action<sup>3</sup>. The employment of such a construction immediately locates this passage on the time axis as preceding the main developments.

The hero is presented as being rather proud of his achievements, a feeling standing in sharp contrast to his disappointment with his childish looks. A digression<sup>4</sup> follows in which a past incident concerning a young girl is recalled. There is nothing in this passage except the opening with the adverbial *raz* [once] that characterizes it formally as a flashback.

3. *[...] jego przystojna siostra, która powiedziała raz Pirxowi, że wygląda „szalenie pocziwie”.* 113  
 “... his good-looking sister – who once told Pirx that he looked ‘very decent’.”

The distribution of tense and aspect forms is not by itself unconditionally indicative of the character of this text segment. The tense used throughout is the past, except in dependent content clauses (in Polish there is no *consecutio temporum*)<sup>5</sup>:

4. *[...] dopiero po dobrej chwili zauważył [past], że wszyscy tańczą [present] coś zupełnie innego niż oni.* 113  
 “... only after a while **did** he **discover** that everybody else **was** [lit. ‘is’] **dancing** something different than they [were].”

<sup>3</sup> Many of the data and observations on the usage of this construction (see e.g. Koronczewski 1993 who regards these constructions as ‘mediopassive’) point in the direction of a grammaticalization process.

<sup>4</sup> On digressions see Chapter Three.

<sup>5</sup> See Chapter Five for a discussion of tense.

The aspectual forms indicate the distinction of actions viewed as completed vs. actions still in process at the point in time referred to in the past<sup>6</sup>. However, in main clauses, it is usually perfective-aspect verbs that occur. This distribution reflects the fact that perfective verb forms, by their very nature, are more suitable for reporting chronologically ordered past events, since perfective verb forms in the past tense denote actions brought to some kind of conclusion prior to the moment of narrating. Imperfective past-tense verb forms, on the other hand, most typically denote actions or states with various shades of incompleteness (or incompleteness), actions still in process at a narrated moment, and iterative or habitual actions. Although the question about which of the aspect forms is considered marked or unmarked in Polish is still under discussion, it seems safe to assume that any distribution of aspect forms different from that sketched above would be conditioned by additional factors. Moreover, it is impossible to assign marked or unmarked status to a given aspect independently of e.g. textemic considerations, on the one hand, and *Aktionsart*, on the other.

The following passage (page 113) illustrates the distribution of perfective and imperfective finite verb forms in main clauses and in a variety of subordinate clauses<sup>7</sup>:

5. *W lokalu, w którym tańczyli* [relat. clause impfv.], *nie stało się* [main clause pfv.] *co prawda nic z rzeczy, jakich się obawiał* [relat. clause impfv.].

“At the discotheque, where they **were dancing**, none of the things he **was afraid of happened**.”

6. *Tylko raz pomylił* [main clause pfv.] *taniec,*

“Only once **was** he **wrong** about the dance [they danced],”

7. *a ona była* [past copula] *na tyle dyskretna, że milczała.*

“but she **was** tactful enough to be silent.”

8. *i dopiero po dobrej chwili zauważył* [main clause pfv.], *że wszyscy tańczą* [content clause. impfv. pres.] *coś zupełnie innego niż oni.*

“[...] only after a while **did** he **discover** that everybody else **was** [lit. ‘is’] **dancing** something different than they [were].”

<sup>6</sup> The linguistic literature on verbal aspect is vast, and will not be surveyed here. Some notable discussions of aspect in narrative, however, should be mentioned: Hopper 1979, Fleischman 1985, 1990, 1991; Gasparov 1990, Alberg Jensen 1990; etc.; the discussion of aspect in Polish narrative is taken up in e.g. Sullivan and Bogdan 2001. The role of aspect in structuring narrative will be discussed extensively in Chapter Five.

<sup>7</sup> See also the discussion on subordinate clauses in Chapter Five.

The present tense in the content clause denotes simultaneity with the action in the main clause.

9. *Później jednak **szło*** [main clause impfv.] *jak z płatką.*

“But afterwards everything **went** smoothly.”

10. *Nie **deptał*** [main clause impfv.] *jej po nogach,*

“He **did not step** on her feet,”

11. *jak mógł **starł się*** [main clause impfv.] *nie śmiać, [...]*

“as much as he could, he **tried** not to laugh, ...”

12. *a potem **odprowadził*** [main clause pfv.] *ją do domu.*

“and afterwards he **took** her home.”

13. *Od ostatniego przystanku **szli*** [main clause impfv.] *dobry kawał pieszo*

“From the last stop they **went** quite a distance on foot”

14. *i przez całą drogę **zastanawiał się*** [main clause impfv.], *co by też zrobić takiego, żeby **pojęła*** [purpose clause pfv.], *że wcale nie jest „szalenie poczywy” – te słowa zalaży mu za skórę.*

“and during the whole walk he **was wondering** what he could do **to make her understand** that he was not a ‘decent fellow’ – those words really got to him”.

15. *Kiedy już **dochodzili*** [temporal clause impfv.] *do celu, **ogarnął*** [main clause pfv.] *go popłoch.*

“When they **were** already **nearing** [their destination], panic **seized** him.”

16. *Niczego bowiem nie **wymyślił*** [causal clause pfv.]

“For he **did not come up** with anything”

17. *a jeszcze, wskutek wytężonego namysłu, **zamilkł*** [main clause pfv.] *jak pień;*

“and in addition, following all his mental exertions, he **became silent** as a log;”

18. *w głowie jego **rozprzestrzeniała się*** [main clause impfv.] *pustka [...].*

“in his head a void **was spreading** ...”

19. *W ostatniej chwili **przeleciały*** [main clause pfv.] *mu jak meteory dwa czy trzy pomysły: żeby się z nią umówić, żeby ją pocałować [...].*

“At the last moment two or three ideas **flashed** [through his head] like meteors: to ask her out on a date, to kiss her ... .”

20. *Ani jej nie **pocałował*** [main clause pfv.],

“[But] he neither **kissed** her,”

21. *ani się z nią nie **umówił*** [main clause pfv.] [...].

“nor **did** he **ask** her out on a date ... .”

22. *I gdybyż na tym się skończyło* [modal conditional clause pfv.]!

“And if only it **would have ended** at that!”

23. *Kiedy powiedziawszy dobranoc [...], odwróciła się* [temporal clause pfv.] *do furki i ujęła* [temporal clause pfv.] *klamkę, ocknął się* [main clause pfv.] *jego diabeł.*

“When after saying goodnight ... she **turned** to the door and **reached** for the handle, the devil in him was aroused.”

24. *A może stało się* [main clause pfv.] *to po prostu dlatego, że w jej głosie wyczuł* [causal clause pfv.] *ironię, [...]*

“Maybe it **happened** simply because he **detected** irony in her voice ...,”

25. – *dość, że zupełnie odruchowo, kiedy się właśnie odwróciła* [temporal clause pfv.] , [...] ... a więc dobrze: **dał** [main clause pfv.] *jej tego klapsa w tylek i to nawet mocnego.*

“... the fact was that, quite spontaneously, the moment she **turned** her back on him ... anyway, he **gave** her a spank on the bottom, a hard one at that.”

26. *Usłyszał* [main clause pfv.] *lekki, stłumiony okrzyk.*

“He **heard** a slight, muffled cry.”

27. *Porządnie musiała* [main clause modal verb] *się zdziwić!*

“She **must have been** really surprised!”

28. *Ale nie czekał* [main clause impfv.] *już na nic.*

“But he **did not wait** anymore for anything else.”

29. *Zawróciwszy na pięcie, zwał* [main clause pfv.] *, jakby w strachu, że będzie go gonila* [content clause fut. impfv.] ...

“He turned on his heel and **fled** as if afraid that she **would chase** him ...”

In most cases (5, 6, 8, 12, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, 26, 29) the main clauses contain perfective verb forms and communicate the main developments of the episode: “nothing happened – he confused [dances] – he noticed – he took her home – panic seized him – he invented nothing – he became silent – ideas flashed – ... – he fled”. Each of the perfective verbs denotes a closed completed event<sup>8</sup>, a stage in the episode. The sequencing of the events, apparent from their linear arrangement in the text, is further marked by adverbial expressions of chronological order: *po dobrej chwili* [after a while], *a potem*

<sup>8</sup> The term ‘event’ is used here in a non-technical sense. It will be defined more precisely in Chapter Three, in relation to other textual units, such as complex event, scene, and episode. Also relevant to this matter is linkage, treated in Chapter Six.

[and then], or of chronological reference: *przez całą drogę* [during the whole walk], *kiedy* [when], *w ostatniej chwili* [at the last moment].

The several main clauses containing imperfective verb forms have a different character, and the choice of this particular aspectual form is motivated by the semantic features of the verb in question and by its *Aktionsart*. Thus (9) rather than being a part of the report of the chronological sequence of events is an evaluative cataphoric summary of (10) and (11), which are iterative and each presents several instances of the same event collapsible into a single imperfective iterative verbal indication; (13) introduces a new setting provided for the next scene of the same incident; (14) indicates a prolonged mental process not brought to conclusion, and (18) is an indication of a mental state.

In subordinate clauses, the distribution of perfective and imperfective forms often stems from the temporal relation of the main and subordinate action<sup>9</sup>: the verbs in subordinate temporal clauses denoting actions simultaneous with the main actions are imperfective (15), whereas those preceding the main actions are perfective (23). A similar principle applies to relative clauses and to content clauses, with the imperfective verb forms indicating simultaneity with the main clause action (both instances in 5 and 9). In purpose and causal clauses (14 and 24), the perfective verb forms are used independently, with no relation to the main clause verbs. In the purpose clause of (14), “to understand” is presented as a completed process having the desired result; in (24) the cause is “feeling”, again as a completed process resulting in a definite mental state.

Of the two modal clauses, one (22) has a perfective verb and is formally marked as subordinate by means of a conditional conjunction *gdyby(ż)* [if (only)], and the other (27) is independent, with a modal verb which is indifferent to aspect. Both modal clauses are exclamative: (22) is marked as exclamative by the particle *-ż* and by the fact that it is not followed (or preceded) by a main apodotic clause; (27) is not formally marked as exclamative, apart from the punctuation. Rather, it is the verb *musieć* [must] itself that has modal value and allows both deontic and epistemic readings, with the latter often exclamative. The non-exclamative, deontic reading would result in something like “she was compelled to get fairly surprised”. The exclamative modal clauses stand out sharply from the surrounding narrative as commentative clauses.

Sentence (27) poses some difficulty in understanding the use of the imperfective verb form. It is definitely not subordinate, but is rather an

<sup>9</sup> See Chapter Five.

independent clause pertaining to an action within the chronological chain of events. The use of an imperfective verb form may be related to the negation of the predication<sup>10</sup>. *Nie czekał* [did not wait], itself commentative in nature, is paraphrased and resumed by a perfective verb form in the next sentence, *zwiął* [he fled], finally moving the narration forward. In fact, the verb *czekać*, itself durative, does not have a “true” perfective counterpart, in the sense that the action cannot be conceived of as brought to completion. The available morphological perfective compounds are *poczekać* [to wait for a certain unspecified period of time and then to stop waiting], *zaczekać* [to wait for a (short) period of time], or *przeczekać* [to wait until something is over], and a few others. In any case, depending on the semantic features of the verb and on its *Aktionsart*<sup>11</sup>, aspect use in negated statements may be different from that in positive statements. Other negated verbs in the passage *stało się* [happened], *pocałował* [kissed] and *umówił się* [made a date] are perfective; their imperfective counterparts *stawalo się*, *całował* and *umawiał się* in positive statements may denote actions in process, but in a negative context can only be iterative.

The closing of the incident reintroduces a previously mentioned character, the girl’s brother Matters. The verbal aspect is the imperfective:

30. *Matters, do którego nazajutrz zbliżał się* [impfv.] *jak do bomby z czasowym zapalnikiem, nic o tym incydencie nie wiedział.* 113

“Matters, whom he was **approaching** the next day as though he were a time bomb, **knew** nothing about the incident.”

Note that verbs of knowing denote mental states and are usually employed in commentative text segments. Unlike verbs of mental grasping (e.g. *zrozumieć* [to reach understanding], *dowiedzieć się* [to find out]), which do allow an aspectual opposition, verbs of knowing have always the imperfective form.

<sup>10</sup> Bogusławski [2003: 190–191] regards such imperfective verb forms in negated statements as oriented not to the action but to the agent and his potential actions.

<sup>11</sup> The distinction used here, namely that *Aktionsart* is lexical in nature, as opposed to the grammatical character of aspect distinctions, is widely accepted (see e.g. Comrie 1976: 31). The finer points of this distinction are not especially relevant to our present discussion, and will not be expanded upon here. Note, however, reservations such as those made by Sasse [1991: 44], who remarks that *Aktionsart* is an unnecessary category, as “Aspect is always a matter of the correlation of lexical semantics and TAM categories, and can be ordered along a continuum from zero lexical and maximal grammatical distinctions to maximal lexical and zero grammatical distinctions”.

After a paragraph in which Pirx's discontent with his facial features is related, the return to the events implied in the very first sentence of the story is made by a recapitulative theme<sup>12</sup> (*troski*) with an anaphoric pronoun (*te*):

31. *Troski te, tak nurtujące, zbladły nieco wobec nadciągającego egzaminu [...].*  
114

"These concerns, so festering, paled beside his upcoming exam ... ."

The link to the next, more elaborate episode, describing another, much more difficult test, is made again by comparing the two tests. Juxtaposition and relating, by means of a comparative adjective, the previous event to the upcoming one, construct the links between the consecutive episodes:

32. *Tak Merynosa osadził. Wziął go za rogi. Daleko większą treść odczuwał przed „wariacką kąpielą” [...].* 115

"This way he reined in Merynos. He took him by the horns. He felt a much greater fear about the 'crazy bath' ... ."

It should be borne in mind that cohesive links, as we call them, have a double nature. On the one hand they are indications of cohesion, and on the other they create at the same time a clear narrative delimitation, since the means marking two passages as linked necessarily mark the boundary between them as well.

"*Wariacka kąpiel*" [crazy bath] is mentioned again in a transitional sentence linking the comparison of the two tests with a long paragraph that interrupts the line of events to provide a generalized description of the second test Pirx is to undergo. One of the features characterizing this passage is not only the absence of the main character, but indeed the absence of any specific character in the story<sup>13</sup>. There are two acting parties in the passage: the examiners and the examinees, neither of them referred to by any specific term. The examinees are denoted by such unspecific indications of agents as *każdy* [everyone], *człowiek* [a person], or by more specific but generic titles such as *kandydat* [a/the candidate], *pacjent* [a/the patient], etc. For designating the examiners there is no substantival expression at all. In such cases one of two specialized morphological verb forms is used, which are incompatible with substantival or pronominal agent expressions. One of these general-person verb forms, both often

<sup>12</sup> For recapitulative substantives, see Chapter Five.

<sup>13</sup> See Chapter Four.



erroneously called ‘impersonal’, the form in *-no/-to*, denotes a past action performed by a human agent whose identity is either unspecified, unknown or insignificant but who may be described as the one who typically performs such actions or whose duty it is to perform them. The other, a reflexive third person form, has a similar function but occurs in all tenses and may have an even broader scope (e.g. it may denote unspecified generalized agents including the speaker himself)<sup>14</sup>. In fact, the only specific agent occurring in the whole passage is Albert, a janitor preparing the test.

33. *Kandydat [...] rozbierał się [impfv.] i wchodził [impfv.] do wody, którą ogrzewano [general-person impfv.]<sup>15</sup> dopóty, aż przestawał [impfv.] odczuwać jej temperaturę. [...] Dość, że kiedy spoczywający na wznak w basenie młody człowiek podnosił [impfv.] rękę, wodę przestawano [general-person impfv.] nagrzewać [...]. Następnie dodawano [general-person impfv.] do wody jakiejś soli [...]. 115*

“The candidate ... **would strip** and **climb** into the water, which they **would heat** until he **stopped** feeling its temperature. ... Anyway, when the young man floating on his back in the pool **would raise** his arm, they **would stop** heating the water ... Then they **would add** some kind of salt to the water ... ”

34. *Dodawano się [general-person impfv.] jej tyle, żeby „pacjent” (zwany też topielcem) pływał [impfv.] swobodnie [...]. 116*

“They **added** such an amount of it that the ‘patient’ (also called the drowning victim) [**could**] **float** freely ... ”

The other striking feature of this passage is the consistent use of imperfective verb forms. Although the description of the test is structured as a chain of chronological actions, these consecutive actions taken together do not represent a specific episode but rather a series of potentially repeatable, more or less identical events, or a presentation of a generic procedure. The repeatability of events is marked both by the unspecified agent expressions that allow the events to be perceived as similar but their agents as not necessarily identical in every instance, and by the imperfectivity of the verb forms that, unless perceived as not completed, receive an iterative interpretation that stresses the repeatability of the usual procedure<sup>16</sup>:

<sup>14</sup> On general-person forms, see Chapter Four.

<sup>15</sup> The general-person forms are usually translated here into English as “they ...” to keep their finite active character; a more idiomatic translation would probably require a passive construction.

<sup>16</sup> Despite the attestation of foregrounded imperfectives in Russian and Polish, it appears that their very existence is still considered controversial. For an exposition of the matter in Russian see e.g. Chvany 1985.

35. *Najpierw człowiek **szedł** [impfv.] do Alberta [...]. Albert [...] **wiódł** [impfv.] kandydata do małej salki w podziemiu, gdzie **sporządził** [impfv.] mu parafinowy odlew twarzy. Odlew ten [...] **poddawał** [impfv.] małemu zabiegowi: w negatyw nosa **wstawiał** [impfv.] dwie metalowe rurki.* 115

“First the person **went** to Albert ... . Albert ... **took** the candidate to a small room in the basement where he **made** a paraffin cast of his face. He **performed** a small operation on the cast: in the negative of the nose he **put** two metal tubes.”

The occurrence of a present tense commentative statement further strengthens the non-specific, almost generic character of these descriptions:

36. *Jak gdyby nic szczególnego. Jednakże z człowiekiem w takim położeniu **zaczynają** [present] **dziać się** dziwne rzeczy.* 116

“It seems [to be] nothing much. However, strange things **start** to happen to a person in this condition.”

Since the preliminary information is already given in the general description of the test, we are brought back to the storyline and to our hero by the first mention of his name. After a series of general-person verb forms and of non-specific agents, Pirx is again the agent and the subject of the new episode<sup>17</sup>. After a long sequence of imperfective verb forms, the verb in the first sentence of the new episode is in the perfective aspect<sup>18</sup>. These two simultaneous shifts mark the boundary of the new episode:

37. # *Pirx przeszedł początek dość gładko*<sup>19</sup>. 116

“# Pirx went through the beginning quite smoothly.”

This opening sentence is followed by a detailed account of the sensations Pirx experiences during the test, and consists of short paragraphs describing the test's consecutive stages. The very essence of the experiment is immobility or, as it is scientifically labeled in the story, immobility under conditions of *pozbawienie bodźców aferentnych* [sensory deprivation]; the only development in this episode concerns the development of Pirx's inner state of consciousness.

<sup>17</sup> See Chapter Three on theme maintenance vs. theme shift, and on the status of Pirx's character, see Chapter Four.

<sup>18</sup> While *tense* shift as a means of structuring narrative texts is well-explored, the junctural value of *aspect* shift has yet to be fully appreciated.

<sup>19</sup> I use the sharp sign # to indicate a textual boundary.