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# Temporal Progression in Film Retellings in Polish: Perspectives on the Interaction of the Imperfective Aspect and Narrative Principles

## Abstract

This study examines the temporal architecture of Polish film retellings within the research framework developed by Christiane von Steutterheim and colleagues, who identified grammaticalised progressive and imperfective aspects as powerful agents capable of influencing event construal, and through it, the organisation of discourse. Based on this finding, the study explores 30 offline film retellings to find out whether their narrative structure reflects the patterns attributed to the influence of a grammaticalised imperfective (IMPF). The results show that narrators consistently build the storyline using the present tense and the IMPF. In Polish, present tense verb forms encode the IMPF predominantly in the stem or in a grammaticalised secondary imperfective (SI) marker. As revealed by the study, the SI is used rather sparingly in the retellings. Another feature of note is a scarcity of connectives, found to coincide with the presence of grammaticalised imperfective markers in the languages examined under the framework. The study concludes that, due to low usage rates for the SI, there is not sufficient evidence to support the existence of a causal relationship between the grammaticalisation of the IMPF and narrative frames in Polish, and points to a formative role of discourse mode dynamics in shaping temporal progression.

## Keywords

imperfective aspect, grammatical aspect, retelling, Polish, narrative principles

## Abstrakt

Artykuł analizuje strukturę temporalną relacji (retellingu) z niemego filmu krótkometrażowego, opierając się na podejściu badawczym stworzonym przez Christiane von Steutterheim i jej współpracowników. Badaczom tym udało się ustalić, że aspekt gramatyczny, a konkretnie aspekt niedokonany i progresywny, są czynnikami kształtującymi

konstrukcję zdarzenia, i tym samym, strukturę dyskursu. Wpływ na konstrukcję zdarzenia wywiera również brak gramatycznie wyrażanego aspektu, co ukierunkowało prace badawcze na dwie przeciwstawne konfiguracje językowe: [+/-gramatyczny aspekt niedokonany lub progresywny].

Celem artykułu jest ustalenie, w jakim stopniu struktura retrospekcyjnych retellingów odzwierciedla wzorce ram narracyjnych zaproponowanych przez von Stutterheim. Jak ujawniło badanie, narratorzy konsekwentnie budują fabułę za pomocą czasu teraźniejszego i aspektu niedokonanego (IMPF). W języku polskim formy czasowników w czasie teraźniejszym wyrażają niedokonaność głównie w rdzeniu lub w zgramatyzowanym markerze reprezentującym znaczenia wtórnie niedokonane (SI). W analizowanych narracjach SI był używany oszczędnie. Podobnie kształtowało się użycie anaforycznych określników temporalnych, co jest cechą charakteryzującą języki o konfiguracji [+gramatyczny aspekt niedokonany lub progresywny]. Niemniej, w wyniku przeprowadzonej analizy stwierdzono, że ze względu na stosunkowo niskie wskaźniki wykorzystania SI nie ma wystarczających dowodów na istnienie związku przyczynowo-skutkowego pomiędzy gramatyzacją IMPF a ramami narracyjnymi w języku polskim. Artykuł kończy konkluzja podkreślająca wpływ czynników dyskursywnych na konstrukcję struktury temporalnej (re)narracji.

#### **Słowa kluczowe**

aspekt niedokonany, aspekt gramatyczny, retelling, język polski, zasady narracji

## **1. Introduction**

This study has been designed around the widely reported research into event construal and discourse structure that was initiated by Christiane von Stutterheim (von Stutterheim and Nüse 2003; von Stutterheim and Lambert 2005; Bylund 2011; Vanek 2012; Vanek and Hendriks 2015; Carroll and von Stutterheim 2018). The research examined video retellings obtained in response to a silent film and the stimulus question: what happened in the film? The retellings were analysed in terms of language-specific patterns of conceptualisation, including the choice of tense and aspect, sequencing strategies, ways of maintaining temporal coherence and progression, as well as the inclusion of endpoints. The baseline for comparison was the linguistic representation of an event. Originally, the focus was on German and English and their temporal structuring preferences. As the work progressed, the researchers were able to expand the number of languages under investigation and include members of different rhetorical traditions, e.g., Standard Arabic. The selection process was guided by Dahl's (1985) typology of tense and aspect, and subsequent modifications based on research findings (see Table 1).

Table 1. Tense-aspect systems (von Stutterheim et al. 2012: 838)

Temporal categories grammaticized	Arabic	English	Russian	Spanish	Czech	Dutch	German
Tense	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Imperfective aspect	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	no <sup>1</sup>	no
Progressive aspect	yes	yes	yes secondary imperfective	yes	yes secondary imperfective	no	no

The research results showed uniformity across all of the languages examined as regards the choice of tense. Despite the past-time orientation of the stimulus question, the majority of the retellings (94%) were framed in the present tense (von Stutterheim et al. 2012). Differences were identified with respect to the perspectives adopted by the languages, with, e.g., German speakers opting to construe events as bounded and containing an endpoint, as in *dann geht er zu der feuchten Stelle* ‘then he walks up to the wet spot’ (von Stutterheim et al. 2012: 345). In a narrative sequence in German, an event’s endpoint serves as a temporal anchor for the subsequent event, creating in this way an anaphoric referential frame, characterised by the frequent use of sequential connectives such as ‘then’ and ‘after that’<sup>2</sup> (Bylund 2011; Vanek and Hendriks 2015). The resultant pattern of perspectivation is referred to as event-based. English, by contrast, structured the timeline using perception verbs and the progressive present. The former linked the constituent events to an act of perception and presented them as coinciding with it, e.g., *now you see*, while the latter offered them an ongoing and unbounded reading. The progressive also brought to the fore the most current or intermediate stage of the activity through phasal decomposition. Since the temporal position of the events on the timeline was established relative to the *origo*, the adopted referential frame was named deictic while the perspective it offered was described as observer-anchored (von Stutterheim and Lambert 2005: 208). The frame featured a scarcity of temporal adverbials and gave the impression of a linear sequence, presented from the vantage point of an external observer. Examples 1 and 2, respectively, demonstrate deictic and anaphoric framing in a narrative (von Stutterheim and Lambert 2005: 208–209).

<sup>1</sup> Flecken (2011) shows that although the progressive aspectual marker exists in Dutch, it is still in the process of grammaticalisation. Consequently, its distribution is limited.

<sup>2</sup> Flecken (2011) points to the V2 constraint as an additional factor at play. Finite verbs in German and Swedish must be obligatorily placed in the second position in the main clause. In a narrative, the first slot is often filled by ‘then’.

- (1) *The figure is starting to dig*  
*He is digging*  
*He is being sucked in by the sand*
- (2) *Then he walks up to the spot*  
*And then he takes a piece of rock*  
*And then he hammers a hole into the ground.*

Von Stutterheim and Nüse (2003) attribute the preference for a specific referential frame to the grammaticalisation (or its lack) of the concept of ongoingness in the form of a progressive aspect and, to a lesser extent, an imperfective aspect. They explain that a grammaticalised category conveys meanings that are obligatory and are thus capable of enforcing their inherent qualities on the structure of clauses and sentences (cf. Schmiedtová et al. 2011). That these effects are not confined to narratives has been demonstrated by an offshoot of the framework, namely, research into the conceptualisation of directed motion events (Schmiedtová 2011, 2013; Flecken et al. 2015; Athanasopoulos et al. 2015; Gerwien and von Stutterheim 2022). It confirmed that languages with grammaticalised progressive and imperfective aspects, such as English and Spanish (henceforth [+aspect] languages) defocus their temporal and spatial contours through avoidance of references to the goals and endpoints of events. In turn, languages like German and Swedish, which lack a grammatical aspect (henceforth [-aspect] languages), construe events holistically and encode endpoints, especially in directed motion scenarios (Papafragou and Grigoroglou 2019). A point made repeatedly in the literature is that this characterisation is based on common usage patterns rather than the structural configurations available in the languages under discussion (von Stutterheim et al. 2012).

Originally, these patterns were consistently reported for several [ $\pm$ aspect] languages mainly from the Indo-European group and across a variety of task types. For example, Bylund (2011) found that in online oral retellings, Spanish monolinguals used sequential connectives sparingly (comprising 2.1% of all event clauses in the dataset), while speakers of Swedish used a connective in every fourth clause (comprising 26% of event clauses). In Flecken's (2010) analysis of post-viewing oral retellings, German monolinguals produced a connective in 11.72% of clauses. The results for Dutch were marginally lower (10.15%). In Vanek and Hendriks's (2015) study of spoken and written retellings, users of Hungarian, a [-aspect] language, resorted to sequential connectives significantly more often than speakers of Czech and English. However, as the research in the field became increasingly nuanced and inclusive of a broader range of languages, it revealed a degree of irregularity that could not be explained in terms of aspectual grammaticalisation or its lack. For instance, in analysing English narratives from Berman and

Slobin's (1994) *Frog Story* study, Vraciu (2015; cf. Flecken 2011) observed that the narratives did not systematically invoke a specific referential frame and used either deictic or anaphoric framing. This lack of consistency was also reported by several other studies, especially with reference to child and bilingual narration (Berman 1995; von Stutterheim and Nüse 2003), and Slavic languages. As regards the latter, Vanek (2012) found that Czech showed a distinct preference for anaphoric framing and encoding endpoints, while Schmiedtová et al. (2011; von Stutterheim et al. 2012) ascertained that the typologically related Russian did the opposite, i.e., favoured the deictic frame and defocused endpoints. The evidence for this comes from studies examining the construal of goal-oriented motion which portrays the movement of a person or object towards a target. The difference between the encoding and defocusing of endpoints is illustrated by the following sentences: *Two boys are walking to a house* (endpoint) and *Two boys are walking along a road* (no endpoint). A canonical context for detecting aspectual influence is a scene showing motion towards a goal that is in sight but has not been reached. Flecken (2010) shows that in such contexts Czechs encode endpoints more often (65% of respondents) than Russians (25%). Czechs also show a preference for perfective forms under a present tense reading while Russians opt for the secondary imperfective (Schmiedtová 2011, cf. Gehrke 2022). These differences in preference for one aspectual value over the other led von Stutterheim et al. (2012) to group Czech with [- aspect] languages and Russian with [+aspect] languages. Initial research into the construal of motion events in Polish (Schmiedtová 2013) suggests that Polish may follow the Russian model.

In view of this, the motivation behind the current study is to investigate whether the temporal structure of Polish film retellings follows the patterns identified by the von Stutterheim team. Given the conspicuous lack of relevant data for Polish, the study hopes to bridge this gap by analysing film retellings composed immediately after viewing a stimulus film. Following Latkowska (2013), who analysed paragraph-long excerpts describing a fast-paced video scene, this study examines complete narratives depicting the plot from beginning to end. The von Stutterheim's framework will henceforth be referred to as the Grammatical Aspect Hypothesis (GAH).

The structure of the article is as follows: Sections 2 and 3, respectively, focus on selected theoretical perspectives on narratives and a description of the imperfective aspect of the present tense in Polish. Section 4 discusses the design of the study, including its objectives and participants, as well as the data collection and analysis procedures. Section 5 presents the results of the study, and Section 6 evaluates their relevance to the study's objectives and the research framework.

## 2. The temporal frame and progression in video retellings: Major themes from the literature review

Von Stutterheim and colleagues ground their work on the assumption that texts are shaped by the question they are meant to answer (Carroll and von Stutterheim 2018). The question or *Quaestio* determines the main structure of the text, i.e., the foreground, which addresses it directly, and the side structures bent on providing additional background information. The *Quaestio* that von Stutterheim's research attempted to resolve was 'what happened' in the video. The main structure of the elicited texts was composed of a series of clauses depicting the sequential order of events in the video and as such matched Dahl's (1985) definition of a narrative. As explained in Section 1, the majority of the retellings were framed in the present tense, with the foreground comprising dynamic predicates.

The von Stutterheim group interpreted their findings against the background of Klein's (1994) theory of time in language. Under the theory, present tense sentences rest on a temporal synchronisation between the time at which the sentence is uttered, i.e., the Utterance Time (TU), the time talked about, i.e., the Topic Time (TT), and the actual interval for which the situation in question holds, i.e., the Situation Time (TSit). Klein understands tense to represent the relationship between TU and TT, while the viewpoint aspect is a relationship between TSit and TT.<sup>3</sup>

In an online retelling task, the synchronisation of TT with TU results from the nature of the task at hand whereby the narrators report on situations unfolding before their eyes. In video retellings produced post-viewing, as is the case with this study, the viewing of the film precedes the production of the text (TU>TSit). The use of the present tense indicates that either "the situations are felt to be present at the time of utterance, or the speaker imagines himself to be present in the situations" (Klein 2009: 11; see also Langacker 1991). More precisely, the narrator may choose the 'now' of the recollection of the film and present the story as if it was unfolding before their eyes (Carroll et al. 2003). In either case, the storyline is anchored to a fictionalised, non-actual, or psychological present, which is far less objective than the deictic 'now' in online reports. Carroll et al. (2003) additionally point out that the situation itself (TSit) is atemporal in the sense that, being fictitious, it cannot be linked to a specific point on the physical timeline. Nevertheless, Klein (2009) condones the use of the present tense in retellings, classifying it as non-canonical, since it refers to events in the more or less indeterminate

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<sup>3</sup> Lexical aspect or Aktionsart, which specifies the inherent temporality of verbs and predicates, has no direct connection to the timeline (Klein 1994), and, as such, received little attention from researchers working under the von Stutterheim approach.

past. Dickey (2000) puts it on par with the narrative or historical present (HP, *praesens historicum*).

An account of the domain of discourse has been offered by Smith (2003), who, based on discourse mode theory, argues that, in a temporally coherent narrative in the English language, the main structure of the text emerges out of the interaction between tense and aspect, on the one hand, and the pragmatic ramifications of the discourse mode, on the other. The latter include the typical situation types occurring in the mode, i.e., events and states, a notion of temporal advancement based on the principle of the natural order unless indicated otherwise, and the presence of temporal adverbials. Smith (2003) further observes that narrative time (cf. Topic Time) progresses with bounded events and temporal adverbials. Clauses express boundedness through the perfective aspect and the simple verb form. Bounded events involve some kind of change that takes place over time and each event has its own run-time. In a narrative, events are assumed to take their generic run-time by default. "Events are bounded when they have reached the end of their run-time or when an explicit stopping time is given" (Smith 2003: 26). States and ongoing situations do not advance time. In a narrative, tense does not locate events in time but rather expresses continuity through the temporally uniform chronology of the foreground timeline. Within it, the timing of unbounded events is anaphorically connected to the timing of the preceding bounded event. These principles apply to past- and present-based narratives alike, including the HP.

In a complementary approach to Smith's analysis, Altshuler (2012, 2016) explains that aspectual markers encode both temporal information and information about discourse connectivity, and in so doing, determine the coherence relation that will in turn determine the narrative order of the events in the discourse. Accordingly, narrative chronology is a function of an interaction among the relation of narration, the aspectual status of eventualities, and inferable logical relations between the eventualities concerned, based on the available context, world knowledge, and other relevant knowledge types. In the words of Altshuler (2016: 26), "narration between two discourse units holds if Event 2 is a consequence of (but not strictly speaking caused by) the discourse unit describing Event 1." The consequence is further specified as "an entailment of change from the final state of discourse unit 1 to the initial state of discourse unit 2." The entailment is enthymematic.

Concerning the Polish language, the available evidence (Latkowska 2013) shows that fast-paced narrative sequences are designed around a timeline composed of events in the present tense and few explicit sequential connectives. This is in line with Dickey's (2000) characterisation of the HP, which states that the links between individual sentences in HP are weak and each

sentence seems to exist autonomously without causal or organisational links to other sentences. More structural detail is given by Łaziński (2020), who shows that, in Polish, the HP allows future perfective constructions to denote sudden events, e.g. *dziewczyna krzyknie* ‘the girl will give a shout’. In this use, the future tense has a present reading and is referred to as *praesens perfecti*. Additionally, Łaziński (2020) remarks that the HP accommodates imperfective verbs from all *Aktionsart* categories, conceptualising them as singular events, often at the expense of clarity; for example, the iterative *mrugać* ‘blink repeatedly’ conveys the idea of a single blink in HP. A corresponding argument is given by Kwapiszewski (2022: 102), who adds that in this context “imperfective verbs are compatible with telicity/culmination.” Moreover, in keeping with Maslow (1948, in Łaziński 2020), imperfective verbs in the HP convey singular meanings that are equivalent to those of perfective verbs. It comes as no surprise, then, that the HP narrative sequence may feature frequent switches between the imperfective present and the perfective past tense with no apparent disruption to the timeline. The HP also allows temporal adverbials that typically accompany perfective predicates. The characteristics of the Polish imperfective and their assumed consequences for research into narrative chronology are the subject of the next section.

### 3. Morpho-semantic ramifications of the present tense imperfective aspect in Polish

A central premise of the GAH is that the presence or absence of a grammaticalised marker of the imperfective aspect invokes preferential selection of a specific referential frame in narratives. Accordingly, this section looks into the morpho-semantic constitution of the Polish present tense imperfective aspect, intending to establish its relevance to the assumptions of the GAH. In particular, attention will be paid to how the Polish language expresses the imperfective aspect, whether it has grammaticalised means dedicated to encoding the aspect transparently and unequivocally, and whether these means are used consistently and preferentially to their unmarked alternatives.

In Polish, verbs encode aspect obligatorily. In the present tense, most verbs are imperfective. Traditionally, the imperfective aspect has been assumed to present actions as unfinished and/or incomplete (Comrie 1976)<sup>4</sup>. Łaziński (2020, 2021, cf. Laskowski 1999) expands on this view by adding

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<sup>4</sup> Śmiech (1971) and Karolak (2010) show that imperfective verbs are capable of expressing completed events in Polish. See Kwapiszewski (2022) for a related interpretation.



a few specific readings such as duration, factuality, iterativity, habituality, and to some extent, performativity in first-person statements. Since some of them are context-dependent, Klimek-Jankowska and colleagues (2018, cf. Frąckowiak 2015) conclude that imperfective verbs are semantically underspecified. To illustrate, Polish lacks the progressive aspect and conveys the concept through imperfective and secondary imperfective verbs in conjunction with temporal adverbials such as *w tej chwili* ‘at the moment’ and *właśnie* ‘just’.

The imperfective intersects with the predicate’s internal temporal structure, otherwise known as situation type, aspectual class, or Aktionsart (Vendler 1957; Bach 1986; Smith 1999; Filip 2012). It overrules the temporal ramifications of the situation type, as in *przepisać<sup>P</sup>* and *przepisywać<sup>I</sup>* where both verbs denote the same situation type, i.e., accomplishment, but differ in grammatical aspect (Klein 2018). The imperfective imposes an atelicising viewpoint on the eventuality concerned (De Swart 1998: 348; Łazorczyk 2010; Filip 2012).

Generically, the imperfective is a lexico-grammatical category that expresses the grammatical concepts of imperfectivity lexically and/or morphologically (Grzegorzczkova 1997: 25–26; Kleszczowa and Pastuchowa 2009). The following encoding options are available:

1. A bare unprefixated stem that has a morphologically marked perfective counterpart. Imperfective verbs are the unmarked members of the perfective/imperfective opposition. However, some unprefixated stems are perfective, e.g., *rzucić<sup>P</sup>* → *rzucić<sup>I</sup>* ‘throw’, others are aspectually ambiguous, e.g. *oferować* ‘to offer’ is biaspectual, i.e., both perfective and imperfective. Still others are inherently (im)perfective, i.e., (*im*)*perfectiva tantum*, and cannot be reset to the opposite value, e.g. *runąć<sup>P</sup>* ‘to collapse violently’ and *posiadać<sup>I</sup>* ‘to possess’ (Willim 2006; Cockiewicz 2007; Łazorczyk 2010: 16–17; Kwapiszewski 2022).
2. The secondary imperfective (SI). This is derived from the attachment of the imperfectivising suffix *-ywa-/-iwa-/-wa-/-a-* to a prefixed perfective base. The derivation is productive and predictable, and determines only the aspectual value of the verb without influencing its lexical meaning, as in *wypisać<sup>P</sup>* → *wypisywać<sup>SI</sup>* *receptę*<sup>5</sup> ‘write a prescription’ or *wbić<sup>P</sup>* → *wbijac<sup>SI</sup>* *gwoździe w ścianę* ‘to knock nails into a wall’. Such behaviour is a hallmark of grammaticalisation as proposed by von Stutterheim and colleagues (cf. Nagórko 2010).

<sup>5</sup> *wy-pis-yw-a-ć<sup>SI</sup> receptę*

PREF-ROOT-SECONDARY.IPFV-THEME.VOWEL-INF ACC  
‘to write a prescription’

Not every derived perfective verb can be secondarily imperfectivised. Cases in point are verbs containing pure perfectivising prefixes, as in *pisać*<sup>1</sup> → *napisać*<sup>P</sup> → \**napisywać*<sup>SI</sup>. Secondary imperfectivisation occasionally involves thematic vowel/suffix and stem alternation, as *przebić*<sup>P</sup> → *przebijać*<sup>SI</sup> ‘to puncture’ and *zasłużyć*<sup>P</sup> → *zastugiwać*<sup>SI</sup> ‘to deserve’ (Willim 2006: 185), and even suppletion, as in *wyjść*<sup>P</sup> → *wychodzić*<sup>SI</sup> ‘go out’ (Kwapiszewski 2022: 124). Furthermore, the mechanism for implementing secondary imperfectivisation may involve a shift in conjugation class, also referred to as defaulting to *-aj*. This template is adopted by verbs whose stems end in *-i/-y-*, e.g., *wytopić*<sup>P</sup> → *wytapiać*<sup>SI</sup> ‘melt’. As has been demonstrated, the process is accompanied by vocalic alternation to ‘a’ (Kwapiszewski 2022: 120, cf. Czaykowska-Higgins 1997). Finally, Klimek-Jankowska and Błaszczak (2022) point out that most SI forms do not have primary imperfective equivalents, which is why the term “secondary” is misrepresentative.

The imperfectivising suffix (or the suffix’s homophone) may also encode habitual and iterative readings, which are derived through suffixing bare imperfective stems, e.g., *czytać*<sup>1</sup> → *czytywać*<sup>Ď</sup> *godzinami gazety* ‘read newspapers for hours’ and *pisać*<sup>1</sup> → *pisywać*<sup>Ď</sup> *artykuły do Newsweeka* ‘to write articles for Newsweek’. Referring to these derivations, Kwapiszewski (2022: 111; cf. Grzegorzczkowska et al. 1984; Łazorczyk 2010) explains that they are few in number and as such have no impact on the functioning of the SI (Willim 2006; Klimek-Jankowska et al. 2018). Bare imperfectives and their secondary variants exhibit the same temporal functions and behave similarly in diagnostic tests (Kwapiszewski 2022).

3. Prefixation. A few prefixes encode imperfectivity, as well as inducing meaning modification/change in the stem, e.g., *grać*<sup>1</sup> → *przygrywać*<sup>1</sup> ‘play → accompany on a musical instrument’ and *stuchać*<sup>1</sup> → *nastuchiwać*<sup>1</sup> ‘to listen → to listen closely’ (Willim 2006: 186).<sup>6</sup> Imperfectivising prefixes are rare and are more of an exception than a rule.

Based on the analysis of data from the National Corpus of the Polish Language, Łaziński (2020, cf. Wiemer et al. 2020) shows that, quantitatively, imperfective forms, particularly those in the non-past tense and imperfectiva tantum, are more frequent than perfectives.

Extrapolating from the level of diversity demonstrated by the exponents of imperfectivity, in what follows, we outline those characteristics and irregularities of the Polish aspectual system that hold relevance for the GAH. By way of a reminder, it posits that grammaticalised imperfective markers convey obligatory, semantically specific, and salient meanings that induce

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of the typology and aspectual functions of prefixes see Slabakova (2005) and Klimek-Jankowska and Błaszczak (2022).

open-ended patterns of event construal, and in so doing, project onto the structure of narrative sequences. Disruptions to this pattern result in structuring inconsistency.

In the context of this discussion, two factors emerge as significant. The first is the lack of transparency and of unity of form and function, induced by the number of encoding options, encoding inconsistency, and conflation of functions. The Polish language does not have a single perfective or imperfective marker, and, reversely, a sizable number of markers, e.g., at least 18 prefixes, perform aspectual functions to a varying degree (Łazarczyk 2010). The markers are productive and have considerable combinatorial potential but no consistent rules guiding prefix-stem combinations. For instance, *pisać*<sup>I</sup> co-occurs with 15 different prefixes, giving rise to 15 distinct but semantically related forms (e.g., *prze-pisać*<sup>P</sup> → ‘copy’, *pod-pisać*<sup>P</sup> → ‘sign’, *o-pisać*<sup>P</sup> → ‘describe’, and *nad-pisać*<sup>P</sup> → ‘overwrite’, to mention just a few), while *kończyć*<sup>I</sup> → ‘to end’ can be perfectivised by *do-kończyć*<sup>P</sup>, *u-kończyć*<sup>P</sup>, and *s-kończyć*<sup>P</sup> with no obvious difference in meaning. Some prefixes have no aspectual role at all, e.g., *współ-* as in *współpracować*<sup>I</sup> ‘cooperate’ is aspectually void. There are also cases of homonymy between aspectually opposite forms, e.g., *porzucić*<sup>I</sup> *partnerów/partnerki* vs. *porzucić*<sup>P</sup> *zabawki na podłogę* ‘leave one’s partners vs. dump toys onto the floor’ (Bogusławski 1963; Piernikarski 1969; Laskowski 1999; Willim 2006; Klimek-Jankowska and Błaszczak 2022). The suffix *-ywa* is similarly inconsistent.

This widespread variability raises significant implications for the perfective/imperfective contrast. Although firmly embedded in the grammar of the language, the derivation of the contrast and its grammatical character seem to be diffused, not least because pure aspectual pairs are numerically in a minority. The process is additionally fuelled by the conflation of aspectual meaning with lexical semantics. It is noteworthy that the lexical contribution of prefixes is so powerful that Laskowski (1999: 84), Willim (2006) and more recently, Klimek-Jankowska and Błaszczak (2022) consider perfective and imperfective forms of the same verb to be distinct lexemes (cf. Bogusławski 1963; Piernikarski 1969; Wróbel 2001; Bańko 2002).

The second factor is the availability and use of alternative ungrammaticalised imperfective forms. Given the productivity and grammaticalised status of secondary imperfective suffixes, one could hypothesise they encode imperfectivity with sufficient salience to influence conceptualisation and discourse structuring patterns in ways exhibited by [+ aspect] languages. The counter-argument is that SIs are obfuscated by a competing form, i.e. the bare imperfective, and by the (partial) lexicalisation of the perfective/imperfective contrast. The question to resolve is how users of a language with such a complex aspectual configuration conceptualise and construct temporal sequences in a narrative and what structuring preferences they exhibit,

given that, in the light of existing data, the available options are parallel and do not diverge significantly usage-wise. What follows is an analysis of a sample of video retellings collected to clarify this issue.

## 4. The study

### 4.1. Objectives

Based on the research discussed earlier in the article, the study seeks to investigate how native speakers of Polish structure temporal information in a film retelling. Consequently, the research questions addressed are as follows:

1. What is the temporal composition of narrative sequences found in film retellings in the Polish language?
2. What is the preferred pattern of temporal progression in the retellings? Does it fit the template predicted by the Grammatical Aspect Hypothesis for [+aspect] languages?

Also, in line with the assumptions of the GAH discussed in Section 1, the study seeks to test the following prediction:

The preferential use of verbs featuring the grammaticalised (secondary) imperfective marker in present-tense film retellings results in a timeline characterised by a scarcity of sequential connectives.

### 4.2. Participants

Thirty-two Polish nationals (n=32) who were undergraduate students of biology and geography at a university in southern Poland gave their consent to be tested. The study purposely focused on students from disciplines outside of the humanities to avoid bias that could have been caused by academic and literary expertise.

### 4.3. Materials and procedure

The participants were invited to a 45-minute session at their university. During the session, they watched a video with instructions to retell the plot in such a way that someone who had not seen it could easily imagine it. The video was a 7-minute silent film. It was stressed that the participants should retell the film in writing, rather than write a review of it. The minimum text length was 350 words.

The film's storyline revolves around a traveller who arrives at an abandoned Gothic cathedral in a desert wasteland. The traveller makes his way

towards the building and enters, only to find himself in a nave of towering columns with live faces embedded in them. The faces smile as he passes through the hall and walks towards the cathedral's end. Once there, he discovers the cathedral opens onto a cliff overlooking the universe. He watches the planets move in front of him. When the sun rises, sunlight penetrates the building, inflicting pain on the living faces. It then reaches the man and kills him. The man's remains are captured by stone branches that emerge from the floor and rise towards the sky, forming another living column in the process.

The participants were allowed to watch the video before beginning to write. After completing the task, they were given a few minutes to make minor revisions to the text. The scripts were then collected and digitised.

#### 4.4. Analysis

Because each retelling in the dataset used a third-person narration, the analysis targeted third-person verb forms, which were subsequently analysed according to whether they instantiated events or states. This, in practical terms, means that the focus was on clauses referring to interactions among the cathedral, the protagonist, and the forces controlling them.

Concerning the event/state distinction, the following criteria were used in the process of distinguishing events from states:

- a) In Polish, stative verbs denote physical, mental, intellectual, and emotional states (*spać* 'sleep'; *bać się* 'to be scared'), the characteristics of objects and living organisms, (*ważyć* 'weigh'; *seplenić* 'lisp'), and volition (*chcieć* 'want'). Stative situations are timeless and constant within a specific time frame (*różnić się* 'differ') and do not have a perfective form (Laskowski 1999; Różycka 2017).
- b) Events are dynamic, i.e., involve change, agency, activity, or control, and comprise either a sequence of successive stages or an instantaneous action. At the linguistic level, they are represented by dynamic predicates that answer the question "What happens?" and typically have a full non-stative verb as a head (Smith 1991, cf. Bogusławski 2003). In a narrative, non-stative clauses advance the storyline (Smith 2003). For details, see Section 2.
- c) Situations introduced with a verb of perception and presented as coinciding with it, e.g. *Widzimy jak pielgrzym upada na ziemię* 'We can see the pilgrim falling on the ground', are considered on the basis of their aspecto-temporal content, because in this use, verbs of perception per se do not advance the plot (Bylund 2011).

Searches of the running text of the retellings were performed using Korpusomat.pl, a corpus analysis tool developed by Clarin-PL. To standardise the score for the use of temporal exponents in the retellings, two measures were applied: the absolute frequency (AF), which is the number of times a particular component occurred in the dataset, and the frequency thereof per 100 clauses or words, i.e., the relative frequency (RF). When informative, percentage values, standard deviations, and arithmetic means were provided. Two retellings in the past tense were excluded from the analysis as outliers.

## 5. Results

The collected retellings were amalgamations of two discourse modes: the narrative and descriptive modes. Each followed different principles of temporal progression (Smith 2003). The former was applied to the presentation of the protagonist's journey through the cathedral and his interactions with the dark forces residing in it. The latter focused on the details of the setting. Of possible significance was the fact that the retellings were produced post-viewing since this allowed the narrators to conceptualise the timeline based on hindsight, rather than ongoing perceptions.

### 5.1. Temporal composition of the retellings

Of the 1495 clauses that constitute the dataset, the majority (47%,  $n=700$ ) were timeline event clauses in the present tense. They were imperfective with only 33 percent ( $n=232$ ) featuring the secondary imperfective. The remaining 67 percent ( $n=468$ ) were bare imperfectives. Past tense perfective clauses were rare (3%) and took the form of switches from the present tense or relative clauses denoting anteriority to the main clause. Past tense imperfective relative clauses (1.4%) tended to create a temporal backdrop for the timeline events.

The descriptive passages, in turn, depicted the interior of the cathedral and followed the viewer's (i.e. camera's) gaze from one part of the building to another. Their movement through space was implemented using stative verbs (41%). Some of them were metaphorical extensions of dynamic verbs that acquired a stative reading through referral to the stationary elements of the setting, e.g., *ciemność otacza, spowija, rozpościera się, rozciąga się* 'darkness surrounds, envelops, unfolds, stretches'. Stative verbs hold time constant.

Verbs of perception, e.g., *widzimy* 'we can see' or *obserwujemy* 'we observe', which synchronise event and speech times were used minimally (~1%). Passive constructions in the form of the copula *zostać* and a passive

adjectival participle, e.g., *zostaje wyniesiony* ‘gets raised’, conveyed a perfective resultative reading and accounted for 1.2 percent of all dynamic clauses. Table 2 presents the absolute and relative frequencies of the temporal exponents identified in the dataset.

Table 2. Temporal exponents in the retellings

Temporal exponents	AF	RF per 100 clauses
Total number of event clauses	886	59.3
Timeline event clauses: present tense imperfective aspect	700	46.8
Timeline event clauses: present tense secondary imperfective aspect	232	33.1
Timeline event clauses: present tense bare imperfectives	468	66.85
Timeline event clauses: past tense perfective aspect	41	2.7
Background clauses: past tense imperfective aspect	21	1.4
Stative clauses	609	40.7
Total number of clauses	1,495	
Relative clauses: present tense (sequentiality)	49	3.3
Relative clauses: past tense perfective aspect (anteriority)	8	0.5
Temporal adjunct clauses (timeline)	39	2.6
Sequential connectives	63	4.2
Zostaje (copula) + passive adjectival participle (perfective)	18	1.2
Verbs of perception (total):	10	0.7
Widzimy jak, że ‘we can see + NP + V-ing/that’	6	0.4
Widać jak, że ‘it can be seen that’	4	0.3

The dataset also contained a small set of connectives that were infrequent in the narratives (Mean=0.56; SD=0.5). Following Bylund (2011; cf. Grzegorzczkowska 2015), their role in the retellings was twofold: they either explicitly positioned the events on the timeline, as in *po chwili* ‘after a moment’, *następnie* ‘next’, or qualified their nature, e.g. *nagle* ‘suddenly’ indicated the unexpectedness and brevity of a temporal interval, leading to a punctual reading. The sequentialising adverbials performed anaphoric functions, although some of them, i.e., *następnie* ‘next’, *później* ‘later’ and *potem* ‘afterwards’ were general and indeterminate enough to also appear in deictic contexts (Grzegorzczkowska 1975, 2015). The deictic classic *teraz* ‘now’ had an anaphoric function. The connectives are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3. Sequential connectives used in the retellings

Connectives	AF	RF per 100 clauses
Total	63 (4.2%)	
<i>następnie</i> ‘next’	15	1.31
<i>po chwili</i> ‘after a moment’	16	1.4
<i>po czym</i> ‘after this’	3	0.26
<i>po tym</i> + NOUN ‘after the NOUN’	1	0.09
<i>po tym jak</i> ‘after’	2	0.2
<i>potem</i> ‘later’	3	0.26
<i>później</i> ‘later’	3	0.26
<i>w końcu</i> ‘in the end’	4	0.31
<i>w tej chwili</i> ‘at that moment’	1	0.09
<i>w tym momencie</i> ‘at that moment’	11	0.96
<i>wkrótce po tym</i> ‘shortly afterwards’	1	0.09
<i>wtedy</i> ‘then’	3	0.26

## 5.2. Temporal progression in the retellings

In the vast majority of retellings, the opening clause established temporal reference by synchronizing the TU and TT with the ongoing act of visual perception, as in *pierwsza scena ukazuje* ‘the first scene shows’ and the like. The temporal position of the ensuing events was determined in relation to the preceding event on the timeline and followed the order of mention. The ordering was thus anaphoric and instantiated a shift of TT.

From the vantage point of Klein’s (1994) theory, the imperfective expresses a temporal relation between TT and TSit such that TT does not overlap the situation’s final (target) state (TT OVL T-SS and TT NOT OVL T-TS)<sup>7</sup>. Consequently, the final phase of the TSit interval remains underspecified (Klein 2018: 60, cf. Altshuler’s (2016) proposal of enthymematic entailment; Laskowski 1999). Owing to this, the run-time of the imperfective events on the timeline can be understood as approximating the boundary<sup>8</sup>, enabling the narrator to conceptually construe it (Athanaso-

<sup>7</sup> T-SS and T-TS: times of a situation’s source and target states, respectively; OVL: overlap, i.e., share a common interval (Klein 2018).

<sup>8</sup> In a narrative, events take their generic run-time by default and are considered bounded when they have reached the end of their run-time. As a result, the narrator can conceptually envisage their boundaries (Athanasopoulos et al. 2015; Smith 2003). Smith (1999: 492–494) shows that verbs classified by Vendler (1957) as activities (non-stative, atelic, and durative) can also advance time in narratives.



poulos et al. 2015). This is sufficient to provide anaphoric anchorage for the next event and to create a singular reading, based on an interaction between discourse mode, rhetorical relations, Aktionsart, and grammatical aspect (cf. Altshuler 2016; Łaziński 2020). Example (3) demonstrates the referential frame the retellings adopted and the trajectory of the Topic Time shift (cf. Smith 2003).

- (3) *Pielgrzymowi odpada<sup>SI</sup> ręka* (TT1 NOT OVL T-TS1<sup>9</sup>)  
 ‘The pilgrim’s hand falls off’  
*i wraz z laską rozsypuje<sup>SI</sup> się w pył.* (TT2 NOT OVL T-TS2 AND TT2 AFTER TSIT1)  
 ‘And together with the stick crumbles into dust.’  
*Z wnętrza pielgrzyma wystrzeliwiają<sup>SI</sup> gałęzie* (TT3 NOT OVL T-TS3 AND TT3 AFTER TSIT2)  
 ‘Some kind of branches shoot out from inside the pilgrim’  
*i łączą<sup>I</sup> się z resztą konstrukcji.* (TT4 NOT OVL T-TS4 AND TT4 AFTER TSIT3).  
 ‘And join with the rest of the structure.’

The construction of the timeline was supported syntactically through the use of clause coordination and subordination. In the case of the former, it was the paratactic sequence of event clauses that induced the TT shift, e.g., *mężczyzna pochyla<sup>I</sup> się* (bend.down-IPFV-PRS-3SG-REFL) *i dotyka<sup>I</sup>* (touch-IPFV-PRS-3SG) *wysuszonego gruntu...* ‘the man bends down and touches the dry ground...’. In clause subordination, it was also the order of mention, rather than the temporal frame of the main clause, that determined temporal progression. This is evidenced by attributive relative clauses, introduced mainly with the pronouns *który* and *jaki* ‘which’. If the relative clause was dynamic and temporally congruent with the main clause, i.e., both featured the same tense, the clause continued the story. Stative relative clauses and relative clauses featuring the past tense did not contribute to the timeline. Examples (4–6) illustrate these principles.

- (4) *Mężczyzna kłęka<sup>I</sup> bierze<sup>I</sup> do ręki trochę piasku*  
 man kneel-IPFV-PRS-3SG scoop-IPFV-PRS-3SG in hand some sand  
 ‘The man kneels [EVENT 1] and scoops in his hand some sand’ [EVENT 2],  
*który zamienia<sup>SI</sup> się w małą gałązkę*  
 which turn-IPFV-PRS-3SG-REFL into small twig  
 ‘which turns into a small twig’ [EVENT 3].
- (5) *Jego laska ów kij który trzyma<sup>I</sup> zapala<sup>SI</sup> się.*  
 His staff the stick which hold-IPFV-PRS-3SG come.alight-IPFV-PRS-3SG-REFL  
 ‘His staff, the stick he is holding [STATE], comes alight’ [EVENT].

<sup>9</sup> For clarity of presentation, the segment referring to the source state has been removed from the gloss as it bears little relevance to the analysis.

- (6) *Postać która weszła<sup>P</sup> do katedry dochodzi<sup>I</sup> do urwiska*  
 character who enter-PFV-PST-3SG to cathedral-GEN come-IPFV-PRS-3SG to cliff.  
 ‘The character, who entered the cathedral [EVENT], comes to a cliff’ [EVENT].

Relative clauses featuring the past tense performed two functions: perfective past clauses expressed anteriority (Example (7)). By contrast, imperfective past clauses created a temporal backdrop for the main clause and did not affect the timeline (Example (8)).

- (7) *w miejscu gdzie upadły<sup>P</sup> ziarenka wyrastają<sup>SI</sup> kłocza*  
 in place where fall-PFV-PST-3PL seeds grow-IPFV-PRS-3PL vines  
 ‘vines grow out of the spot where the seeds fell.’

- (8) *kij który trzymał<sup>I</sup> rozpada<sup>SI</sup> się*  
 wand Which hold-IPFV-PST-3SG fall.apart-IPFV-PRS-3SG-REFL  
 ‘the wand, which he was holding, falls apart.’

Overall, past-tense subordinate clauses served a backgrounding function. The retellings contained a few past perfective clauses in the foreground. Being matrix clauses in a temporal sequence, they advanced the story in the same way that present tense clauses did. This is demonstrated in Example (9), which shows hardly any sign of temporal incongruity.

- (9) *Postać zaczyna<sup>I</sup> się kulić, pada<sup>I</sup> na ziemię. Jej ręka przyrosła<sup>P</sup> do niesionego kija, po czym wraz z nim rozsypuje<sup>SI</sup> się w proch. Mężczyzna klęka<sup>I</sup> na splekanej powierzchni, zaczynają<sup>I</sup> go tłamsić i oplatać korzenie...*  
 ‘The figure begins to cower and falls to the ground. His hand grew to the stick being carried, and with it, it crumbles to dust. The man kneels down on the cracked surface, and roots begin to suffocate him and entwine him ...’

Complex sentences with the temporal adjunct *when*-clauses ‘kiedy’ and ‘gdy’, delivered a sequential interpretation through a relation of anteriority between the adjunct and the main clause (Example (10)). The sense of anteriority was strengthened by the fronting of the adjunct.

- (10) *gdy Jego palce dotykają<sup>I</sup> podłoża*  
 when His fingers touch-IPFV-PRS-3PL ground  
 ‘when his fingers touch the ground’  
*Między palcami powstają<sup>I</sup> pnącza*  
 Between fingers rise.up-IPFV-PRS-3PL vines.  
 ‘small vines rise up between them.’

## 6. Discussion and concluding remarks

Although the present paper was inspired by research exploring discursual differences that were motivated by compositional contrasts, it does not aim to contribute directly to typological disputes, especially those concerned with the aspectual status of Polish vis-à-vis other Slavic languages. As explained in Section 4, the study's focus is on the extent to which Polish retellings fit the patterns established for the languages examined under the framework, and on whether the patterns arise from the aspectual setup of the Polish language and are thus accountable in terms of the GAH.

The research reveals that narrative sequences in Polish film retellings are composed of dynamic predicates that employ the present tense and the imperfective aspect. Of the latter, secondary imperfectives form a distinct minority. Temporal adverbials are also scarce and perform sequentialising functions most of the time. Many of these adverbials may also be used in deictic contexts. The study identified infrequent divergences from this pattern, mainly relating to past perfective verbs, which, when used in matrix clauses, advance the timeline in ways akin to present-tense imperfectives. Past verbs in subordinate clauses are relegated to the background, where, depending on their aspectual value, they express either anteriority or simultaneity to the events on the timeline.

The interaction of this setup with discourse mode relations and verb dynamicity determines the narrative flow, which is achieved through an alignment of non-stative predicates and rhetorical inter-predicate relationships inherent in the narrative mode. The relationships are anaphoric and construe textual order as temporal order. They also override aspectual distinctions in that imperfective verbs take on the meaning of singular culminated events, while their chronology is relativised by being established relative to the preceding events on the timeline. This is why the TT shift remains undisrupted despite (infrequent) changes in tense and aspect. Overall, the dataset confirms that rhetorical relations and discourse mode dynamics play an overarching organizing role in Polish narratives, a role that is supported rather than enforced by grammaticalised aspectual markers. It is the discourse mode that subjugates structural resources to its functions.

The characteristic dearth of connectives that is a hallmark of the deictic referential frame induces an observer-anchored pattern of perspectivation. It presents the timeline as a sequence of independent events happening one at a time and shifting forward like images in a slide show. Compared to studies of Swedish, German, and Dutch (see Section 1), Polish, with a connective usage rate of 4.2% of timeline clauses, seems to follow the deictic pattern found in [+aspect] languages. However, this is only an impression, created

by referentially indeterminate connectives and by an alignment of imperfective dynamic verbs, which, contrary to their morphology, convey meanings of (near) culmination, and, in so doing, generate a sequential reading. These measures have a stylistic effect and have been used to enliven the narratives and give them an aura of presentness. A further relevant comment is that this pattern is followed consistently throughout the sample, allaying concerns over the possible consequences of aspectual idiosyncrasy in Polish (see Section 3).

This study does not provide evidence to support the hypothesis of a causal relationship between the use of grammaticalised imperfective markers, on the one hand, and the scarcity of connectives in off-line retellings, on the other. On the contrary, given the relatively low usage numbers of secondary imperfectives in the dataset, there is enough evidence to disconfirm it. An alternative hypothesis to consider is that there may be a causal relationship between a task format and discourse mode, meaning that a retelling produced online is likely to create a different type of discourse and with it, a different referential frame and usage patterns for connectives. A juxtaposition of timelines created under different temporal conditions should help clarify the contribution of verbal composition and its relationship to discursal factors. What also needs researching is the tendency to encode endpoints, especially in directed motion scenarios. To determine how Polish compares with other languages in this respect it would be necessary to collect data using similar, if not identical, stimuli and methodologies to those applied in the original research studies, i.e. the canonical contexts described in Section 1. Gathering usage data would undoubtedly help set an objective benchmark for cross-linguistic comparisons, and for now, it remains an open possibility.

To conclude, the study provides a data-based account of the structure of film retellings in the Polish language, which additionally serves as a test-bed for the GAH. This is useful because Polish, being an aspectual maverick, has received little attention from researchers working within the framework. Another potentially beneficial outcome is that the findings discussed here, although limited in scope, may inspire more targeted research and open up new lines of inquiry for cross-linguistic analyses.

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