

# Storyworld in text-messages: sequentiality and spatialisation

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## Abstract

In this chapter, I discuss texters' use of specific discursive tools to (re)construct storyworlds and position themselves within a discursively constructed and spatially organised narrative. Communicators create distinct communicative spaces and mental counterparts of themselves or other elements/entities in their reality linked by means of a conceptual connector. Based on the analysis of sequentiality and storyworld construction in text-messages, I establish texting as bearing narrative potential and worthy of further investigation under narrative studies frameworks. This chapter opens a line of inquiry into a ripe yet unexplored field of the text-message narrative.

## 1 Introduction

The focus of narrative studies has greatly expanded over the years following the oft-discussed *narrative turn*, or - as Hyvärinen (2012) argues - a number of narrative turns. Literary texts, which came under scrutiny in classical narratology, are now analysed alongside a wide array of other types of texts – in the Hallidayan understanding of the term (Halliday and Hasan 1985) – in a range of disciplines within the social sciences including anthropology, law, and linguistics (see Czarniawska 2004 for the discussion of the use of narrative in social science research). For example, short forms referred

to as “small stories” (cf. e.g., Bamberg 2006; Georgakopoulou 2007, 2013; Page 2010) and described as open-ended and fluid, occurring “in the small moments of talk” (Page 2012, 426), are being explored as situated tools for identity construction while narrative analysis is used to understand the social context of health and social care (e.g., Stephens 2011).

At the same time, technology development has brought the question of (digital) media into narrative and narrative processing and led to the popularisation of interdisciplinary approaches to narrative analysis. The framework is being applied to a wider range of texts than ever before, e.g., cartoons (Baldry and Thibault 2006), digital audio files (Page 2012), Facebook status updates (Page 2010), opera (Hutcheon and Hutcheon 2010), as well as a range of narrative texts illustrated in this volume, including video games (e.g., Mäyrä, as well as Roine, both in this volume), reality TV (Mäkelä, this volume), and virtual worlds (e.g., Harviainen, this volume). While to the best of my knowledge not yet analysed for its narrative features, a variety of amateur fiction composed and read on mobile phones and resembling text-messages – *keitai shousetsu* (mobile phone novels) – has gained popularity in Japan since 2000 (Coates 2010).

This chapter brings text-messaging (not to be confused with mobile phone novels, whose analysis falls outside the scope of this chapter) - which has often been treated mainly as a carrier of degenerate language (with a few notable exceptions) - to the discussion and establishes it as bearing narrative features and worthy of further analysis in terms of its narrative potential. I discuss texters’ use of specific discursive tools to (re)construct storyworlds and position themselves and the intended recipients of their text-messages within them. In what follows, I draw on deictic shift theory (Duchan, Bruder, and Hewitt 1995), cognitive narratology (Herman 2004, 2010), and semantics (Fauconnier 1985) to theoretically ground the discussion. After providing information about the modality of texting in the context of its narrative potential in the following

section, I proceed to discuss two of the characteristics associated with narrativity in text-messages: sequentiality (understood as a temporal sequence of events) and storyworld construction, and present two case studies to illustrate the applicability of these concepts to texting, before drawing some concluding remarks.

## 2 Narrative potential of texting

Often viewed as communicatively impaired and allowing for only limited expressive possibilities, texting has been analysed as either a (socio)linguistic curiosity (with its abbreviated spelling and cryptic meaning-making) or from a functional perspective, for example, as providing a tool for micro-coordinating during the day. While there is currently a significant number of scholarly studies devoted to texting, this form of communication is yet to be recognised as allowing for expressive possibilities comparable in range with those of oral and literary narratives, poetry, or art (but see Tagg 2013).

The analysis presented here is based on nearly two thousand text messages collected from English and Polish native speakers living in London and Warsaw, respectively. The data collection, the detailed account of which can be found in Lyons (2014), involved the friends-of-friends network approach, where groups of friends were asked to contribute their text-messages to the study and recommend other friends who might be interested in participating. As a result, the data collected include a large percentage of texting interactions in friend-friend dyads, which results in a frequent adoption of a playful texting pattern between interactants. Although this study is not intended as comparative in focus, the use of two samples from comparable groups of users in two different cultural and linguistic environments ensures that the observed phenomena are not language- or culture-specific. It can be expected, however, that the modality employed for communication will impact on the content of messages.

Two of the features often mentioned as characterising texting are portability and constant reachability (e.g., Licoppe 2004, 2012; Baron and Hård af Segerstad 2010). Resulting from these characteristics are the unique properties of texting, including those related to establishing location and drafting a temporal frame in interactions. Texters often comment on an unfolding situation, report “breaking news” (Georgakopoulou 2007, 2013) in their lives, or plan the immediate or near future. Above all, their communication is usually strongly embedded in the interactive context and based on mutual familiarity of the interactants with each other and with the technology used. In this sense, texting may not immediately strike us as bearing narrative potential, but I argue that a closer look at the content of text-messages allows us to place them alongside other narrative-like texts (cf. Page 2012). While not claiming that text-messages should be classified as prototypical Aristotelian narratives, likened to Propp’s Russian folk stories, or Labovian personal experience narratives, I follow Page (2010), who analyses the narrative character of Facebook status updates, in accepting that in the face of the constantly changing character of modern communication, it is more accurate to talk about features of narrativity whose presence makes a text more or less narrative-like. I support Page’s (2010) point that the episodic narrativity found in a variety of everyday stories told using electronic media (Facebook status updates, emails, tweets, etc.) suggests that the traditional understanding of what characterises a prototypical narrative may not be fully representative of the current narrative practice. Consequently, new approaches are being developed to account for less conventional narratives (e.g., unnatural conversational narratives discussed in Mildorf 2013) and evidence of narrative features is provided in media and platforms not traditionally associated with the concept of narrativity and the domain of narrative studies (some examples include video games, Facebook status updates, and cartoons).

Concurrent with Page (2012), some forms of narratives, especially the small every-

day narratives transmitted by electronic media, may display only some of the features traditionally identified as characterising narratives of personal experience (Labov and Waletzky 1967). Page argues that, rather than being dismissed as ephemeral and fragmentary, Facebook status updates should be treated as a fertile territory for the analysis of new ways in which temporality and sequence are constructed in everyday small narratives. I propose a further advancement to this approach through the analysis of text-messages as discourse containing narrative features. In what follows, I focus on two of the properties associated with narratives: sequentiality and storyworlds, commenting on the applicability of existing frameworks to the analysis of narrativity in text-messages.

### 3 Sequentiality

In its Labovian understanding, narrative involves retelling past events in such a way that the order of clauses which recount the event are in the same order as the original events and includes at least one temporal juncture (Labov and Waletzky 1967). As observed by Schiffrin (2009a, 2009b) and evident from the recent studies of narratives (e.g., Montoro 2010; Gibbons 2010; Ensslin 2010, and studies in this volume), the scope of narrative analysis has widened in the recent years. Studies have shown that the Labovian mapping of verbal sequences of clauses to the sequence of events (Labov 1972) does not reflect the human experience of time (Mishler 2006). It was proposed that narratives can take a fragmentary form, be co-constructed in interactions (e.g., Bamberg 2004, 2006; Georgakopoulou 2007), and in the social media context take the form of “networked narratives” (Page, Harper, and Frobenius 2013).

It has been proposed also that narrative discourse can be activated in a text on the basis of genre-related considerations, such as those listed by Baldry and Thibault (2006, 14). For example, scenes in cartoons, contrary to appearances, can represent

not a single moment in time, but a sequence of events which can be deduced from the visual information available. Cartoon participants who take part in a sequence of events must maintain their identity from one event to another in the sequence, despite the fact that the transition between events entails a change in event participants. In the following section, I demonstrate that a single text-message can, similarly, imply not only a single event or state, but a whole sequence of events or states. Sequential relationships are established based on lexically and grammatically realised indications of temporal relations between reported actions and states, and – at times – a change in location within a storyworld, similar to those discussed in the case studies presented in this chapter.

### 3.1 Case study 1: Sequentiality through change of location

The text-message discussed in this section (example (1)) was written by a young male at a time of his pre-planned date with the recipient. Due to a misunderstanding, the sender had driven a long way from his house to the recipient's area, where he found the recipient unavailable. At the time of sending the text-message, the sender was physically located in his car, which was parked outside the recipient's house and he had already attempted phoning the recipient twice.

In his text-message, in which the original spelling and grammar are preserved, the sender refers to a sequence of actions involving change of his location. Through the choice of linguistic resources, reference is made to three individual locations within the real world – either explicitly mentioned or implied – and movement (completed and intended) between them.

- (1) Thank You very much. I **have come** all dis way and **u r** no were to be seen or heard. Goodnite babe. **Im gona go** home. Cheer up

The time of sending the message (which I describe as NOW) marks the temporal



text-message its construction is achieved using more varied tense forms. The sender employs the verb COME in present perfect tense to indicate a completed action whose results are evident at the time of texting. Through the use of *I have come* the sender implies that he was at a different location, i.e., NOT HERE, before and subsequently, after having been on the way, is currently at his deictic centre, i.e., HERE. At the same time, the recipient is *no were to be seen or heard* ‘nowhere to be seen or heard’ at the sender’s spatial and temporal deictic centre. The sender indicates a plan to go home, expressed through the use of *Im gona go* ‘I’m going to go’. Although the use of GOING TO marks a current intention, it gives the reader a window into the sender’s future action, which will constitute a further element in this narrative sequence of events. The reconstructed sequence of events entails continuity of participant roles (sender and recipient) throughout the narrative sequence and a change in one of the participants, namely a change in the sender’s location.

An analysis of narrative event structure in example (1) is presented in Table 1. The table shows the particular phases of the narrative event in (1), identifies participants and actions performed by them, and provides linguistic evidence from the analysed example. I employ abbreviated forms to refer to the sender (S), recipient (R), and deictic centre (DC).

Table 1: Narrative structure in (1)

	<b>Phase</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Evidence</b>
<b>1</b>	[implicit/past] S is at an unspecified distant location.	S R (absent)	S stationary, located AT NOT HERE	<i>all dis way...</i> quantifier <i>all</i> for a large amount or quantity

2	[implicit/past] S is on his way to the venue of meeting with R. He is travelling a long distance.	S	S in motion, directional vector towards DC, implying arrival; R at DC (sender's mental space)	<i>I have come all dis way...</i> Present Perfect of COME for recently completed action with evident consequences; proximity to DC through <i>dis</i>
3	Having arrived, S is located at DC. R is absent, which makes S upset and leads him to the inten- tion to go home.; R not at DC	S R (absent)	S stationary at DC; R at NOT HERE	<i>...u r no were to be seen or heard.</i> <i>Thank You very much.</i> correctly spelt sentence with capitalised <i>You</i> for marked pronunciation with emphasis on the personal pronoun
4	[intended/future] S S is on his way home.	S	S (intended) in motion	<i>Im gona go home.</i> GOING TO for inten- tions; GO directional vector away from DC and towards <i>home</i> , not implying arrival

It is clear from the above example that the choice of verbs in the analysed text-message has an added communicative aspect. Not only do the tenses and the change-of-location verbs signal a sequence of events, but they also indicate the direction of

movement of the sender (COME and GO), with other discursive means additionally signalling the distance travelled (*all dis way*), which - in turn - implies the existence of a spatialised storyworld within which the characters move. Motion is inseparable from and dependent on the existence of a world within which it occurs. It can be the physical world around texters who micro-coordinate, or a mentally created world, e.g., in the context of creating joint communicative space between remotely located participants. Similar to those occurring in literary and oral narratives, storyworlds in texting are represented as “having a specific spatial structure” (Herman 2004, 264). Events in a story tend to occur within a mental model constructed by the reader from the text as it is encountered at the active space-time location to which the reader has been directed by the syntax and semantics of the text. The space in which this narrative unfolds has to have dimensionality and identifiable landmarks with reference to which the sender orients him- or herself and the recipient.

The following section looks at the spatial aspect of a discursively constructed storyworld, a feature discussed in earlier studies of both literary and oral narratives (e.g., Herman 2001, 2004, 2010), but unexplored in the context of texting. As suggested at the beginning of this chapter, with its remotely located interactants and the on-the-go character of communication, texting offers a rich field for the investigation of space and location in the context of storyworld construction, an aspect which the following section aims to explore in some detail.

## 4 Space and storyworld

Apart from a clear temporal and sequential focus, narratives can also be comprehended as constituting “verbal and visual cues prompting their readers to *spatialize* storyworlds into evolving configurations of participants, objects, and places” (Herman 2004, 263). The question of spatial mapping of unfolding narratives in text-

messaging is particularly interesting due to the portable character of mobile phone devices and the ensuing complexity of deictic reference in communication between remotely located interactants. A similar situation occurs in other forms of text-only mobile interactions, for example those made possible by mobile phone applications for instant messaging such as WhatsApp.

When placing themselves in a situation, interactants adopt a certain spatial, temporal, and psychological point from which they experience it (Zwaan 1999). Similarly, readers of literary narratives and listeners of oral narratives adopt a certain vantage point which conditions their comprehension of the story (see, for example, the discussion of focalization in Katherine Mansfield's story "Bliss" and the applicability of the term to conversational narratives in Mildorf 2006). It is assumed that comprehenders (i.e., readers, hearers, or viewers, depending on the type of narrative) place themselves, to some extent, within the narrated situation and from that vantage point construct a *situation model*: a mental representation of, among other things, locations, objects, characters, and events in the story (Zwaan 1999). The story in a fictional narrative is, like all mental representations, partially a construction of the comprehender (reader or listener) but also based on text of the author/speaker. In contrast, the storyworld is mostly a mental construct of the reader/listener. In their interpretations, comprehenders can import knowledge of the everyday world and of other possible worlds into the current storyworld; this provides the listener/reader with the illusion of mentally inhabiting a fully specified and coherent world. Consequently, they become active participants (Busselle and Bilandzic 2008) and "writer[s] of [their] own version of the story" (Oatley 2002, 43). In accordance with the Deictic Shift model, which I discuss in the following section, fictional narration results in readers imagining deictic fields as lifted from their physical locations and shifted into storyworlds, which are created and experienced according to the linguistic make-up of texts, creating a world that fits the words used to describe it, following a world-to-word *direction of fit* (Searle

1983). As the following section demonstrates, similar shift can take place also in text-messages, which serves as another indication of their narrative potential.

## 4.1 Deictic shift

As a cognitive structure, the deictic centre lends coherence to a text and allows the reader to correctly localise events and other aspects of the story when they are not explicitly indicated in the text. In order to correctly interpret and experience the text, comprehenders need to refer to their general knowledge, logical and pragmatic constraints, and special stances towards it (Segal 1995, 16). Readers or listeners use the available semiotic cues to construct more or less detailed representations of the worlds to which they deictically shift in the process of interpreting narratives. From their adopted vantage point, they (re)construct the space-time configuration of narrated events, entities forming part of the narrated worlds, and relations between them (Herman 2010, 80). In the case of oral narratives in which authors build the context of the story from their own perspective (see e.g., Herman 2010), it is possible to interpret a given narrative from the perspective of a deictic centre located at the author's physical location (Zubin and Hewitt 1995). In literary narratives, on the other hand, authors usually distance themselves from the storyworld presented in their fiction and it is understandable (particularly in third-person narratives) that the author and the speaker are not equivalent. In the case of both literary and oral narratives, reacting to available cues, readers/listeners build associations with the story characters and are transferred into the storyworld, which they view in the same way as they would be viewing the here and now of their physical environment. Such an interpretation is possible based on their knowledge of the world and prior experiences with deixis in real life and such shift is made possible by transferring the linguistic reference of deixis from the speech situation, and shifting it to the locations and characters of the storyworld (Zubin and Hewitt 1995).

According to deictic shift theory (DST), readers/listeners and authors shift their deictic centre from the real-world situation to an image of themselves at a location within the storyworld, i.e., a world as constructed through a narrative. Such a shift from an actual situation to a described situation has been termed *deictic shift* (Duchan, Bruder, and Hewitt 1995). It results in people and objects in a particular narrative being more accessible to the comprehender and, in consequence, to potential *transportation*, defined as a phenomenological experience in which a reader's (or recipient's, more generally) mental processes are fully focused on the events occurring in the narrative<sup>1</sup> (Green and Brock 2002), and the loss of self-awareness. Green and Brock's Transportation-Imagery Model can be applied to any kind of text that evokes measurable images, i.e., mental contents that possess sensory qualities (Dadds, Bovbjerg, Redd, and Cutmore 1997). Transportation, then, represents the extent to which a reader becomes absorbed in constructing mental models, both situation models and storyworld models.

Readers are able to experience transportation into and move within the unfolding narrative storyworld thanks to such linguistic elements as, e.g., deictic pronouns and verbs (including tenses and aspects). In fact, they are motivated to perform deictic shifts because it is only from the deictic centre within the storyworld that deictic words make sense (Galbraith 1995). To allow for such transportation, it is also not unimportant for readers to maintain a certain mindset, which has been described in earlier research as "willingness to suspend disbelief". It assumes natural human scepticism when dealing with mediated content. It is difficult to say whether disbelief in such situations needs to be suspended and whether such suspension is a conscious decision. It is possible that no such (semi-)conscious suspension is necessary and, especially as societies become more digitalised and digitally literate, that *disbelief* is not the default approach to mediated input. Franks (2013, pers. comm.) prefers to

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<sup>1</sup>Concepts similar to transportation include *flow* (Csikszentmihalyi 1990), *absorption* (Tellegen and Atkinson 1974), and *experiential mode* (Epstein 2003).

refer to the “willingness to believe” instead.

Deictic shift into and within a storyworld in texting, while demonstrably possible (see example (1)), is characterised by certain differences when compared with the deictic shift seen in literary narratives. Firstly, the latter type of a storyworld is assumed to be distinct from that of the speaker/writer’s reality. Text-messages are sent between two easily identifiable interactants who usually know each other, which makes them more similar to the situation encountered in oral narratives. There is thus no automatic assumption that the world presented in text-messages is fictional and that it is likely to evoke imagery required for transportation (Green and Brock 2002). Another major difference consists in the number of possible locations of deictic centres in communication by means of texting and in literary narratives, with text-based mobile communication allowing for a wider range of possible reference frames and deictic centres. Taking into account modality affordances and established conventions within electronically mediated communication, it can be expected that the discursive tools employed by texters to construct representations of storyworlds may differ from those found in conventional literary and oral narratives. The case study discussed in the next section extends the discussion of sequentiality in texting to involve cases where deictic shift into a virtually created communicative location is discursively performed using accepted modality conventions. In the discussion, I draw on the concept of *mental spaces* (Fauconnier 1985) and the Identification Principle (Nunberg 1978) to further theorise construction and spatialisation of a texting storyworld.

## **4.2 Case study 2: Deictic shift through texting conventions**

The text-message to be analysed in this section was sent by a female graduate student to her friend, who was supposed to join the sender and her other friend at their hairdresser’s that evening. The recipient was unable to make it but had not let the other two girls know. At the time of sending the text-message, the sender and her

other friend were already at the hairdresser's and were waiting to be seen. Both the sender of the text-message and the recipient were frequent texters and a large part of their communication throughout the day was conducted in this way. They had a number of things in common, studying at the same university and being involved in a number of projects together. They also shared familiarity with digital communication and both used the Polish instant messenger Gadu-Gadu.

In example (2), there is no mention of change of location or motion, in which it differs from example (1), but there is a clear reference to a number of locations, both having their equivalents in the real world and constructed solely in the virtual domain.

- (2) Słyszałam że miałas byc u naszego fryzjera a  
 I've heard that you were supposed to be at our hairdresser's and  
 jakos Cie tu nie widzimy! Gdzies jest babo?!  
 somehow you here not we see! Where in the world are you hag?!  
 <wali patelnia po fryzurze> ;)  
 <hit-3.SG with frying pan over hairstyle> ;)

'I heard that you were supposed to be at our hairdresser's but we can't see you here somehow! Where are you, woman?! <hits the hairstyle with a frying pan> ;)'

Here again, a series of sequentially organised events can be identified and, just like in example (1), participants maintain their identity throughout the text. The complexity of the storyworld in example (2) is related to the presence of additional participants and of a particular case of deictic shift.

The sequence of events in (2) is represented in Figure 2.

Similar to the previous case study, the time of sending the text-message marks the temporal deictic centre (NOW) and the use of past tense helps identify past events. There is also, however, a clearly specified spatial deictic centre (TU 'here') and it is possible to spatially place other locations with reference to it. Before discussing mental spaces in the analysed text-message (see Figure 2), I provide a closer account

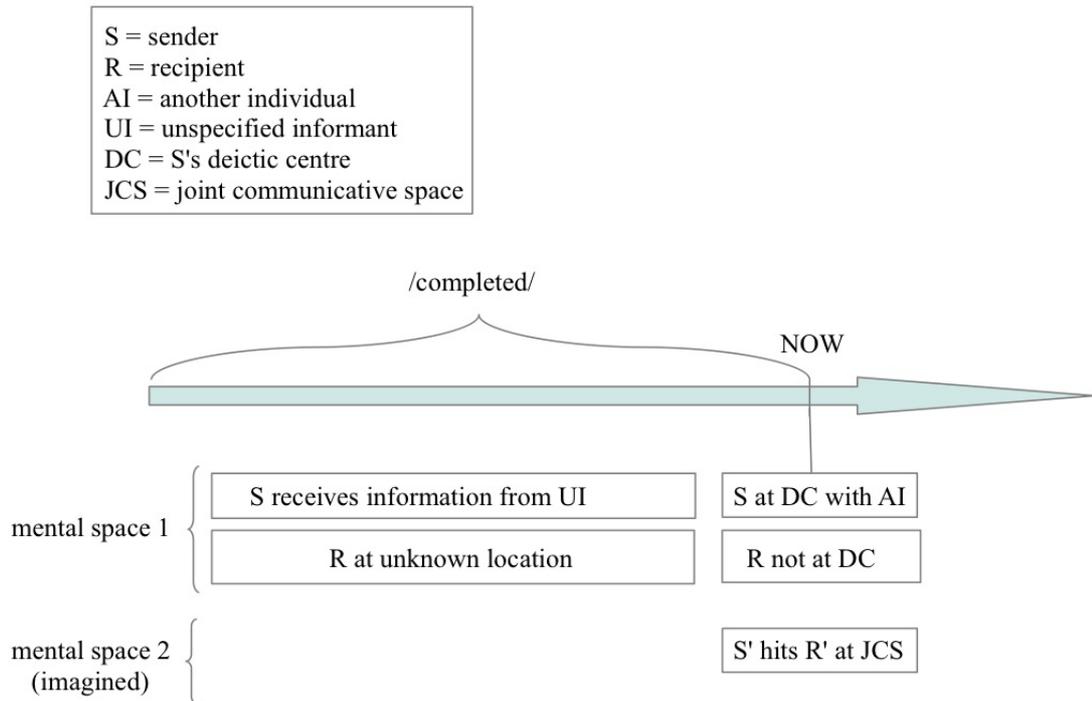


Figure 2: Event sequence in (2)

of the narrative sequence in (2) in Table 2. In addition to the abbreviations used in Table 1, reference is made to another individual (AI), who is different from the recipient and who accompanies the sender at the hairdresser's. Reference is also made to an unspecified informant (UI), who can but does not have to be the recipient (R) or the individual who is physically co-located with the sender (AI). The table includes information about the narrative phases represented in the text-message in question, participants, and actions taken by them. Discursive evidence from the analysed text-message is provided.

Table 2: Narrative structure in (2)

	Phase	Participants	Action	Evidence
<b>1</b>	[implicit/past] S receives information from an unspecified informant (possibly R) that R will be at S's hairdresser's later.	S UI	S receives information from UI	<i>Slyszalam ze mialas byc u naszego fryzjera</i> 'I've heard you were supposed to be at our hairdresser's.' perfective form of the verb SŁYSZEĆ for accomplished actions
<b>2</b>	S is at her hairdresser's (DC) with an unspecified person (not R). R is not at the S's hairdresser's, which makes S dissatisfied.	S AI	S with AI stationary at HERE, R at NOT HERE in motion, directional vector towards DC, implying arrival; R at DC (sender's mental space)	<i>...mialas byc... a jakos Cie tu nie widzimy.</i> 'You were supposed to be... and we can't see you here somehow.' content expressing the difference between the expected ('you were supposed to be') and the factual ('we can't see you'); indicator of confusion and annoyance ('somehow')

3	[enacted discursively/present] S is hitting R with a frying pan.	S' R'	S stationary at DC; R at NOT HERE	< <i>wali patelnia po fryzurze</i> > ‘<hits the hairstyle with a frying pan>’ angle brackets for a de- ictic shift to another (virtual) mental space; present tense for actions happening at the moment
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Similar to example (1), this text-message carries information about the existence of narrative events in a sequential order. The sender refers to having been given information which, verified at the time of composing the message, does not prove correct. Rather than stated explicitly, the event which constitutes the first phase is implied in the content of the text-message. The context suggests that the sender had received information about the recipient’s plan to join her (the sender) at the hairdresser’s. The second phase is temporarily anchored in the sender’s temporal deictic centre, i.e., the time when the text-message was sent. It is clear that the recipient is not present at the physical location where the sender expected them to be (her hairdresser’s). The final phase is more difficult to temporally locate in the unfolding narrative. As linear, the text-message has a clear reading path, which follows the order of words in the text (Kress 2003). If to take Labov’s sequential narrative structure as a model, it would follow that the order of words determines the reading of the text and meaning-making with reference to the sequential order of events. Following on from this, the final phase of the narrative in (2) would be

seen as taking place in a sequential order after the preceding one. The employment of angle brackets to delimit the third narrative phase (cf. Nunberg 1990; Lyons 2014) and the grammatical shift from first-person narration to third-person narration lead to the need to consider other possibilities in the temporal and spatial interpretation of text-message (2).

As established earlier, the sender and the recipient were not co-present in the same physical space at the time the text-message was sent. It is therefore unlikely that the first two phases discussed in Table 2 and the action of hitting in the third phase constitute a sequence of events in the same unfolding narrative. It is logically impossible for the interactants to be explicitly not co-present (*jakos Cie tu nie widzimy*) and physically co-present to allow for the act of hitting (*wali* ‘hit-3.SG’), which requires physical proximity. Consequently, a shift into another conceptual location has to be performed to make sense of the event sequence in (2). The notion of *mental spaces* and reference to the current discussions in the field of unnatural narratology are helpful in explaining this phenomenon.

#### 4.2.1 Mental spaces

Mental space is a theoretical construct which contains an idealised cognitive model of reality (rather than its faithful representation). Fauconnier (1985, 16) describes mental spaces as “constructs distinct from linguistic structures but built up in any discourse according to guidelines provided by the linguistic expressions”. Mental spaces function as entirely distinct from each other and can be established by *space-builders*, i.e., certain linguistic expressions, such as prepositional phrases (e.g., *in John’s mind*), adverbs (e.g., *probably*), connectives (*if...then...*), or subject-verb combinations (*Mary hopes...*). He notes that space-builders will always establish mental spaces as included in their *parent spaces*, although this inclusion does not have to be expressed explic-

itly<sup>2</sup>. Mental spaces, created by space-builders, must be connected to their parent spaces by means of connectors that link *triggers* and *targets* in these spaces.

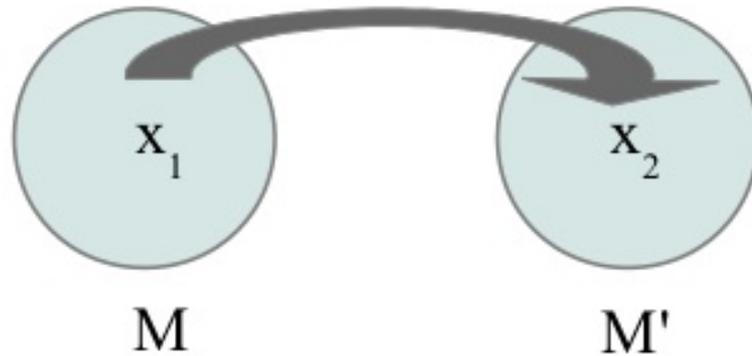


Figure 3: Connectors and counterparts in mental spaces

In this scenario element  $x_1$  belonging to mental space  $M$  has its counterpart  $x_2$  in mental space  $M'$  and mental space  $M$  is a parent space of mental space  $M'$ .

$$x_1 \in M$$

$$x_2 \in M'$$

$$M' \subset M$$

Conceptual separation of an entity ( $x_1$ ) and its counterpart ( $x_2$ ) and the existence of multiple mental spaces may occur also in electronically mediated communication, with its use of increasingly complex technologies and, as in the case of texting, remotely located participants. In example (1), for instance, the sender's home is assumed to exist in reality (mental space  $M$ ), but in the text-message itself, it constitutes only a textual representation of the image the sender has of his home. The complexity does not end there. Since meaning-making is a two-stage process which involves encoding

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<sup>2</sup>Some examples of explicit and implicit embedding can be found in Fauconnier (1985).

and decoding, the meaning of *home* that the recipient constructs is likely to differ from that of the sender. Hence the use of the word *home* can trigger at least two different representations in two separate mental spaces constructed at two distinct temporal and spatial deictic centres.

Representation can be realised here in one of two main ways: visual and textual. The visual dimension of representations (which falls outside the direct scope of this chapter and therefore will not be analysed in detail) includes, e.g., 2D- or 3D-avatars in computer games and virtual environments and icons in internet forums (see discussion in other chapters in this volume and, for a discussion of the employment of autonomous avatars in electronic communication and their expressiveness, see, e.g., Cassell and Vilhjálmsón 1999). The textual dimension, which this chapter focuses on, involves representations of storyworld elements by means of discursive tools, which serve as links through which correspondence between entities in separate mental spaces is achieved.

Language, among other means, is used to construct an image that corresponds to its real-life referent. Pragmatic function (Nunberg 1978) serves to establish a link between a referent and a referee, and the use of language, including names, definite descriptions, and pronouns, facilitates shifts between these corresponding entities. Reference applies not only to the link between real-life objects, like in the case of personal pronouns directly referring to people, but also to mental images, the latter being of interest here. Following on from this, a concrete entity (e.g., person, object, etc.) will differ from its corresponding mental representation, as in the case of *home* in example (1) and interactants' counterparts in example (2), which I discuss below. Correspondence between a concrete entity and its equivalent is established based on the *Identification Principle* (Nunberg 1978), according to which if two objects (A and B) are linked by a pragmatic function (F), a description of one of them, the trigger (A) can be used to identify its counterpart, the target (B), i.e.,

$$B = F(A)$$

The Identification Principle allows the target to be identified through the description of the trigger by means of a connector that maps the image onto reality. The links between these representations therefore become links between two (or more) distinct mental representations located in two or more distinct mental spaces. The mental space delimited by angle brackets in example (2) (*<wali patelnia po fryzurze>* ‘hit-3.SG the hairstyle with a frying pan’) contains an imagined, discursively constructed, or virtual reality, in which the sender’s and the recipient’s counterparts are physically co-present and the sender’s counterpart is hitting the recipient’s counterpart.

Despite the fact that the interactants are not located in each other’s immediate vicinity, the final part of the message suggests that a physical action of hitting is taking place in real time and space. The action of hitting must therefore be conducted in a space distinct from reality (M), in a separate mental space (M’). It is performed not by the sender (S) and the recipient (R) themselves, but by their counterparts (S’ and R’, respectively) which are constructed in that mental space (M’) (see Figure 4). Therefore, the following ensues:

$$M' \subset M$$

$$S, R \in M$$

$$S', R' \in M'$$

The deictic shift into this space is marked in two ways. First, there is a change in narration style: the first-person narration in the first two phases (*slyszalam* ‘I’ve heard’) is replaced by third-person narration in the final part (*wali* ‘hit-3.SG’), indicating also a change in positioning within the narrative. Second, the sender employs conventions accepted in texting and other forms of electronically mediated communication to signal this shift.

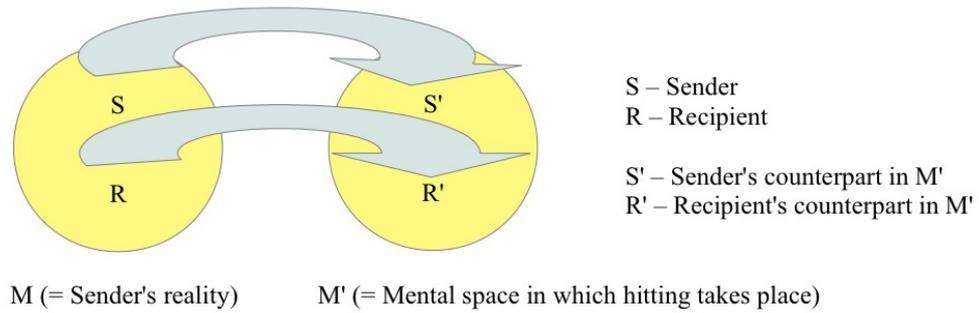


Figure 4: Mental spaces in example (2)

Following Fauconnier (1985)'s transcription conventions, the action in example (2) will be represented as:

*wali* (S', R')

where the action (*wali* - 'hit-3.SG') is performed by the sender's alter persona (S') on the recipient's alter persona (R'), which is being reported as close to the interactants' perceptions of their communicative partners. The sender of (2) reported she had in her mind the image of herself playfully hitting the recipient who was trying to avoid repeated blows while smiling. The text-message, she claimed, worked based on the assumption that the recipient, like the sender herself, adopted the play frame in reading the message.

Here, the interactants' familiarity with the conventions employed in electronically mediated communication proves vital. The convention of using angle brackets in the analysed text-message comes from the Polish instant messenger Gadu-Gadu, with which both the sender and the recipient were familiar. Enclosing certain (usually single) words in third person singular (e.g., *wali* 'hits') in angle brackets results in the occurrence of an animated icon in the conversation window in Gadu-Gadu. The sender creatively appropriated this convention in her texting – a text-only form of communication where animated icons do not appear – and thus referred to the sender's

and recipient's common ground. She confirmed in a later interview that the reason for the employment of this strategy was to evoke in the recipient associations with Gadu-Gadu conventions. As a result, it was hoped, the action of hitting would be imagined.

This type of content resembles stage directions, i.e., implicit voices of authors of plays which provide cues to the theatrical and dramatic effects of the scenes they control and are an important vehicle of meaning in early theatre (McJannet 1999; Dessen 2009). The convention for stage directions in plays is to print them in italics, which would not be possible in text-messages. Instead, conventions used in text-only forms of electronically mediated communication include the use of certain grammatical forms as well as *text-category indicators* (Nunberg 1990; Lyons 2014), i.e., sets of printable characters which are employed to represent enactment, for example, hugs can be represented in chatrooms by means of parentheses around a user's screen name (del Teso-Craviotto 2004). Another convention commonly found in virtual worlds, chatrooms, and IRC involves the use of verbal glosses of gestures and movements characteristic of face-to-face communication. The convention here is to enclose a given action in asterisks (Werry 1996) or angle brackets (del Teso-Craviotto 2004; Crystal 2006). In IRC, which he analyses, Werry (1996, p.60) finds textual representations, or symbolic enactment, of “[h]ugs, kisses, offers of coffee, yawns, shaking hands, and the popping of champagne.” Similarly, Crystal (2006, p.42) mentions the use of such kinesic effects as <smirk> and <laugh>.

In example (2), interaction taking place in an alternative mental space (M') is enclosed in angle brackets, which clearly mark the beginning and end of interaction through the sender's and recipient's counterparts (S' and R' in space M'). As such, this exchange is separate from interactions taking place in the sender's reality (M), but maintains a link with this reality through specific connectors. Thanks to such shifts between mental spaces texters (or narrators) are able to construct storyworlds which appear

incoherent, impossible, or illogical.

This brings to mind unnatural narratives, the study of which focuses on the ways in which projected storyworlds are different from those which can be explained by our knowledge of the real world (Alber, Iversen, Nielsen, and Richardson 2010). For example, experimental or hallucinatory narratives (see Kakko’s chapter in this volume) cross the boundaries of the natural in constructing storyworlds that are characterised by logical impossibilities in their represented spatial and temporal organisation (Alber, Iversen, Nielsen, and Richardson 2010). The analysis presented in this chapter makes it evident, yet again, that conventional approaches to narratives – be it literary or oral – with their orderly temporal sequence and anthropomorphic narrator, account for a large part, but not all possible spatiotemporal combinations. At the same time, text-messages – although often portrayed as small and purely transactional – offer rich expressive possibilities both in terms of the logically coherent and the impossible. Playful shifts from one mental space to another, be it to hit the recipient with a frying pan, as was the case in case study (2) or to create the feeling of intimacy, as is the case in sexting<sup>3</sup>, are a spontaneous creation of regular mobile phone users, rather than the careful work of writers or artists.

Since the human mind is bound by its cognitive possibilities, interpreting the unnatural has to be done through reference to and manipulation of existing frames and scripts to create “new cognitive parameters that transcend our real-world knowledge” (Alber, Iversen, Nielsen, and Richardson 2012, 376). The question of interpreting and making sense of the “unnatural” in a texting narrative involves not only reshuffling familiar frames in narrative processing, but also taking into account the modality of texting, its affordances, and constraints, which ties in with the importance of genre awareness in processing post-classical narratives. Familiarity with the accepted con-

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<sup>3</sup>The term *sexting* refers to the act of sending sexually explicit messages by mobile devices. It has been found to evoke the feeling of transportation or *being there* (Ijsselsteijn and Riva 2003) among texters.

ventions of electronically mediated communication and with one's texting partner (cf. the notion of *audience design* proposed and developed by Bell 1984, to which Mildorf refers in her chapter in this volume) helps draw conclusions as to the most plausible interpretation of both natural and unnatural texting storyworlds.

## 5 Conclusions: Narrativity in text-messages

Instances discussed in this chapter clearly demonstrate that there is a need for a new approach to the analysis of texting that would recognise phenomena beyond the surface linguistic curiosities of abbreviated spelling and atypical punctuation on the one hand, and the functional application of texting for maintaining contact throughout the day and purely transactional uses on the other. I have argued that reading and analysing text-messages should not differ from reading and analysing other texts, such as literary or oral narratives, for which we have a wealth of past research.

The case studies discussed in this chapter have shown that texters construct imagined locations and joint communicative spaces which facilitate more vivid exchanges. Texters may to some extent "lose themselves" in their texting interactions, smile to their mobile phone screens, and/or even report the feeling of arousal (as in the case of sexting) as a result of communicating with their remotely located partner. It can be concluded that texters experience a certain level of *situatedness*, defined as "the predicament of being in a world" (Rank and Petta 2005), in the discourse-based realm of a text-message storyworld, which they create through the choice of verbs of motion, deictic words, and other linguistic devices (see also Schiffrin 2009a, who shows that narratives can evoke the nexus of place, time, and identity, rather than just experience in time). In these worlds, communicators exist as discursive counterparts of their physical real-life selves and move from place to place, their direction reflected in the choice of verbs of motion. In this constant flow (Breslow 2013), texters adopt

different deictic centres and reference frames through their choice of discourse which enables deictic shift similar to that described in literary and conversational narratives. Based on the analysis of sequentiality and storyworld construction, I have shown that narrativity in texting is a productive and yet unexplored field for investigation. The features of texting, particularly its limited buffer size, portable character, and intimate character of communication, mean that existing frameworks for narrative analysis may have to be revisited to account for the range of parameters that need to be considered in the analysis of texting storyworld construction. The portable character of texting adds an on-the-go aspect to space construction, significant when considered against the distinction between exophoric and endophoric storytelling. Endophorically evoked worlds, as when tellers direct recipients to shift from the temporal deictic centre to other spatiotemporal coordinates, need to be explored in terms of deictic reference and deictic shift and compared to those evoked exophorically, where reference to the features of the current context is made through the use of deixis. An analysis of texting interactions can also shed some light on unnatural storyworld co-construction in unfolding narratives during communicative exchanges by means of text-messages. Additionally, there emerges a need to explore the question of narrative positioning in texting interactions and negotiation of self- and other-positioning within a storyworld. As has become clear, there is a need to adopt an interdisciplinary approach to the study of texting in order to fully grasp its expressive power. Narratology, cognitive linguistics, and communication studies, as well as interactional sociolinguistics and multimodal discourse analysis, can help understand how storyworlds are constructed in everyday digital lives. While this chapter focused on a very limited range of narrative-related questions, I have indicated a need for further exploration and opened a line of inquiry to be pursued in future studies.

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