

The reader-focalizer blend: discourse and cognition in narrative understanding

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Abstract

Milestones in cognitive narratology and cognitive poetics, like possible world theory, deictic shift theory, and research into the language of emotions, share the acknowledgement that narratives require the reader's self to interact with the fictional world in ways only dimly understood. The aim of this research is to explore narrative involvement from the standpoint of the role played by self-schemas and possible selves (Markus, 1977; Markus and Nurius, 1986) in readers' projection and immersion in storyworlds. The study introduces the notion of reader's *storyworld possible self* (SPS) as an application of Markus's possible selves theory to the study of narratives. Storyworld possible selves may help explain certain linguistic phenomena related to mental reference in narrative discourse analysis. They may also contribute to our understanding of the idiosyncratic nature of reader involvement during narrative processing, and illuminate the power of narratives to transform the self.

1 Introduction

Something mystifying about narrative engagement, be it with novels, plays, virtual games, or films, is that it does not work in the same way for any two readers, audience members, or players. Each of us undergoes the narrative experience as a personally relevant enterprise which differs from individual to individual. Why do some readers find certain narratives extraordinarily relevant, while others feel indifferent about them? Why do readers find great pleasure in a narrative which years before they dropped unfinished? Or, conversely, why do people sometimes wonder at the features of a past self who could find pleasure and self-transformation potential in a narrative that their present self cannot feel carried away by at all? These are some of the questions that this research sets out to answer.

Recent contributions of the cognitive sciences to narrative theory, such as possible worlds theory, deictic shift theory, and neuro-psychological research into empathic responses, have paved the way for fresh approaches to the long-pursued issue of reader involvement in the narrative experience. This paper will discuss how, by combining these cognitive milestones with blending theory (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002), it may be possible to move just one step forward in our understanding of the dynamics whereby individual narrative experiencers project themselves into storyworlds, a move necessary for literary appreciation and artistically motivated self-transformation.

Immersion is an intuitively accurate description for what is required in narrative appreciation. The most extensively used metaphors expressing this phenomenon match narrative engagement with being 'transported' or 'carried away'—the READING AS A JOURNEY metaphor—, with being 'gripped' or 'engaged'—the READING AS CONTROL metaphor—, and with 'reward' and 'value satisfaction'—the READING AS INVESTMENT metaphor (Gerrig, 1993; Stockwell, 2011). The use of these embodied metaphors, however, is just an indicator of the

difficulty in explaining what narrative involvement amounts up to. Some controversial issues actually seem to challenge existing theoretical paradigms, and all of them include vague references to crossings of ontological boundaries separating factuality from fictionality.

First I will review some of these controversies. Then I will briefly revise the notions of conceptual blending and of character construction. The psychological notion of the self-concept, with its constituent self-schemas (Markus, 1977) and possible selves (Markus and Nurius, 1986), will also be reviewed, and the notion of *storyworld possible self* will be introduced. The study will discuss the possibility of establishing analogical matching relations between readers' self-schemas and focalizers' character constructs within a blending paradigm yielding storyworld possible selves, or mental projections of readers inside the fictional world, as theoretical constructs intervening both in the disambiguation of discourse reference issues, and in the narratological understanding of attention grabbing, empathic attachment and emotional involvement.

Narratives are here understood in the broad experiential sense advocated in cognitive narratology, according to which narrativity is "the result of cognitive activity rather than as a quality of verbal texts" (Olson, 2011: 15). This view includes multimodal and transgeneric instances like films, drama, songs, or virtual games, and does not restrict the narrative experience to readers alone, extending it to viewers, listeners, or players. Although the discussion will use the notion of focalizers in verbal narratives, storyworld possible selves should not be restricted to readers only, but to narrative experiencers at large.

2 Theory gaps and reader immersion

The feelings of immersion that readers experience can easily be captured by metaphorical language, as shown above, but cannot as easily be constrained within theoretical paradigms. Some of the prickliest issues have to do with a) the ontological structure of narrative discourse and its levels of representation; b) psychological and neuropsychological descriptions of blurrings of the self in interactive simulation environments; c) the metonymic nature of narrative immersion, as it is not the whole entity that is transported, but just a part of it; and d) ambiguous reference tokens in narrative discourse like doubly-deictic *you*. Let us consider each of them in detail.

2.1. Discourse structure, levels of existence, and metalepses

The analysis of narrative discourse as an instance of a communicative situation (Chatman, 1978: 31; Onega and García-Landa, 1999 [1996]: 10; Rimmon-Kenan, 2002 [1983]: 86; Fludernik, 2009: 26) frequently includes several levels of representation, each with its corresponding addressor and addressee, and separated by ontological boundaries which prevent discourse participants at one level of existence—real world writers and readers, narrative situation narrators and narratees, fictional world characters—from interacting with participants at other levels. The rigid ontological boundaries between the real and the fictional world imposed on narrative understanding by this paradigm have recently been

questioned by research into narrative metalepsis (Ryan, 2006: 204-230; Pier, 2008: 303-304; Fludernik, 2009: 100-101). Ryan defines ontological metalepsis in these terms:

“In a narrative work, ontological levels will become entangled when an existent belongs to two or more levels at the same time, or when an existent migrates from one level to the next, causing two separate environments to blend.” (Ryan, 2006: 207)

In Pier’s words (Pier, 2008: 303), “metalepses fold narrative levels back onto the present situation of the narrating act, uprooting the boundary between the world of the telling and that of the told or even, in some cases, effacing the line of demarcation between fiction and reality,” an extreme example found in virtual games in which the real world player is invited to play the role of a fictional world character, which becomes the player’s avatar (Ryan, 2006: 224-225).

2.2. Simulation and immersion in neuroscience and social psychology

Recent research into empathy and emotional engagement in the fields of neuroscience (Lamm et al., 2007; Ames et al., 2008; Djikic et al., 2009) and social psychology (Oatley, 1995; Kuiken et al., 2004; Mar et al., 2008; Mitchell, 2009; Miall, 2011) seems to support the metaphor of ontological crossing. The use of functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) shows that the brain regions preferentially engaged in self-referential thought are sensitive to whether a subject has been invited to consider the emotion-provoking situation from a first or from a third person perspective (Lamm et al., 2007; Ames et al., 2008), with the implication that strong perspectival alignment may result in “a blurring of the distinction between the self and other” (Ames et al., 2008: 643). This blurring seems to be particularly strong in simulation environments. As Mitchell (2009) explains:

“... ‘simulation’ or ‘projection’ accounts suggest that perceivers can use their own mental states as proxies for other minds...., we might imagine experiencing the same constellation of events, predict what we ourselves would subsequently think or feel, and infer that another person would experience roughly those same states.” (Mitchell, 2009: 1310)

Several authors (Oatley, 1995; Mar et al., 2008; Djikic et al., 2009: 25; Miall, 2011) further explore the implications of understanding the reading of fiction as a simulation process, and the ways in which experiencing these simulations may improve our social and empathic abilities, as well as contribute to self-improvement.

2.3. Metonymic immersion

But the “overlap between self and other” (Ames et al., 2008: 642) occurring during the narrative experience cannot be absolute, as readers, viewers, or players do not wholly, but only partially, abandon their real world deictic parameters. Some of these remain latent and backgrounded, anchoring us to the physical discourse situation in which the reading or viewing is taking place. Ryan (2006: 124-125) emphasizes the metonymic nature of “the thrill of immersing oneself in an alternative reality” (Ryan, 2006: 200), reminding us that “we can visit other worlds in imagination, but our bodies tie us to the base of the stack,” that is, to the real world. But it is not just the corporeal self that is left out of narrative projection and immersion, as part of experiencers’ minds—thoughts, plans, recollections about dinner, job, summer

holidays, and so forth—also frequently remain attached to the deictic parameters of the discourse situation. No matter how common sense this assertion may seem, it calls for actual explanations of what determines which aspects of the experiencer's self get projected and intervene in narrative engagement, and which do not; in other words, of how narrative experiencers may become metonymically and metaleptically immersed in storyworlds.

2.4. Linguistic organization

2.4.1. Doubly deictic 'you'

The linguistic organization of narrative discourse provides recurrent indications that such explanations are necessary, as it displays linguistic evidence suggesting the existence of a hybrid mental referent including both the real world experiencer and a storyworld perspectivizer. One of these linguistic features is the impersonal second person reference to a hybrid extra- and intra-diagetic entity, referred to by Herman as doubly-deictic *you* (Herman, 2002: 342-345; Fludernik, 2011: 119), and exemplified in (1):

(1) "Whatever hour you woke there was a door shunting. From room to room they went, hand in hand, lifting here, opening there, making sure—a ghostly couple." (Woolf, 2009 [1921]: 5).

As Herman explains, "in double-deictic contexts [...] the audience will find itself more or less subject to conflation with the fictional self addressed by *you*." (Herman, 2002: 345). Fludernik (2011: 105) also refers to the hybrid reference in doubly deictic *you* as a "crossing of deictic boundaries," and appeals to readers' familiarity with the situation depicted as the reason why this type of pronominal use "seems to draw the actual reader into the virtual scenario" (Fludernik, 2011: 119).

2.4.2. Generic 'one'

Although less documented (Asaka, 2010), something similar happens with generic, impersonal pronoun *one* (Brown and Levinson, 1992: 190-206). It is frequent to find indefinite *one* simultaneously referring to an intra-diagetic narrative entity and to an extra-diagetic discourse entity, in ways similar to doubly deictic *you*. In some cases, the double reference involves an omniscient narrator, as in H. G. Wells' example (2). Frequently, though, doubly-deictic *one* is found in focalizers' inner speech, as in example (3), in which a combination of free indirect thought and interior monologue is used to present Denis's mental activity:

(2) "On the village green an inclined string, down which, clinging the while to a pulley-swung handle, one could be hurled violently against a sack at the other end, came in for considerable favour among the adolescent." (Wells, 2008 [1897]: 45).

(3) "They were snorting out of West Bowlby now. It was the next station, thank Heaven. Denis took his chattels off the rack and piled them neatly in the corner opposite his own. A futile proceeding. But one must have something to do." (Huxley, 2009 [1921]: 3).

These cases also suggest a hybrid mental referent dragging the reader across the boundaries of the fictional world.

2.4.3. Implicit SENSER in passive voice mental processes

These are not the only cases in which reference involves a hybrid narrative entity blending extra-diagetic reader and intra-diagetic narrator or focalizer. The use of the passive voice with mental transitivity processes—processes of thinking, feeling, and perceiving (Halliday, 1967; Halliday, 2000 [1985]; Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004)—provides an empty intra-diagetic slot which the reader may feel tempted to occupy. Consider example (4):

(4) One day *one* would get up at six o'clock and pedal away to Kenilworth, or Stratford-on-Avon--anywhere. And within a radius of twenty miles there were always Norman churches and Tudor mansions to be seen in the course of an afternoon's excursion. Somehow they never did get seen, but all the same it was nice to feel that the bicycle was there, and that one fine morning *one* really might get up at six. (Huxley, 2009 [1921]: 4)

Mental processes usually involve the focalizer as SENSER, in this case Denis in Aldous Huxley's *Crome Yellow*, whose presence is further diluted by the use indefinite *one* on two occasions. In the absence of an explicit perceiving entity inside the fictional world, the reader may eventually be dragged in to occupy the slot created by the grammar of the clause.

2.4.4. Facework in focalizers' inner speech

Facework is understood as a sum of interaction strategies aimed at the cooperative management of face. The study of face and facework (Goffman, 1955; 1967) over the past decade has focused on their interactional nature (Haugh, 2006; Arundale, 2010; Haugh, 2010), on their connection to the development of discourse aims (LPRG, 2011), and on the essential role they play in participants' identity construction (Spencer-Oatley, 2007: 648). Inner speech is the term broadly used to refer to the narrative presentation of a character's consciousness (Cohn, 1983; Herman, 2002; Palmer, 2004; Fludernik, 2009; Palmer, 2009; Herman, 2011b). The presence of interactional facework in focalizers' inner speech in verbal narratives is massive, in the form of both connectedness and separateness strategies. Among the former are ellipsis, as in example (5), the use of in-group terminology, question tags, intensifiers, code-switching, repetitions, or agreement tokens, among others (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 103-129. Among the later are hedges, indirectness, giving reasons, impersonalization, and understatements, as in example (6), among others (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 129-209):

(5) "She'd seen it all. *Been there, done that, bought the T-shirt.*
But this one made her shudder.
Interesting." (Lindsay, 2005 [2004]: 18).

(6) "[...] yet he was admirable with her husband; yet *his manners certainly wanted improving*; yet she liked his laugh—thinking this, as she came downstairs, she noticed that she could now see the moon itself through the staircase window." (Woolf, 1996 [1927]: 174).

Interactional facework presupposes two discourse entities at the same ontological level. Strictly speaking, it could not be claimed that the facework found in focalizers' inner speech is addressed at readers, as inner speech is, by default, addressed at oneself. However, readers no doubt 'overhear' (García-Landa, 2004) focalizers' inner speech, and could ultimately feel inclined to metaleptically share the addressee role with the focalizing consciousness.

What these apparent cul-de-sacs suggest is that ontological boundaries do exist, but that there are ways to move across them; that, in the case of the real and the fictional world, these cross-boundary moves do not, obviously, involve the 'whole' reader, not even the whole of the reader's mind, as a substantial part of it remains latently anchored to the contextual situation in which the reading takes place; that some part of the reader's mind does make a move across ontological boundaries; that this mind part has to be in an appropriate format which allows cross-boundary projection and existence within the ontology of the storyworld; and that the cross-boundary reader's move needs a theoretical frame in which to occur, so that existing contradictions may be resolved.

3 Conceptual blending

As can be observed in the previous section, many of the metaphors used to try to capture the nature of narrative immersion seem to involve the concept of *blend*. Conceptual blending theory (Coulson and Oakley, 2000; Fauconnier and Turner, 2002) may thus prove a useful paradigm to approach narrative immersion from the standpoint of its idiosyncratic nature. In Fauconnier and Turner's model, two or more mental spaces are conceptually connected through matching relations of a metaphoric nature. Matching features across two spaces are further projected into a new, emergent mental space, called the emergent structure, or blend. The blend thus contains features from the two input spaces, but the blending process also yields further features which did not previously exist in the any of the input spaces, but which have resulted from the conceptual operation itself, and which may now be projected back into the input spaces and enrich or modify them. Conceptual blending thus ideally accounts for some of the most hidden creative aspects of cognition, and may serve to explain the personal, interactive, and creative experience that narrative engagement is nowadays believed to be.

A conceptual integration operation requires two isomorphic mental spaces across which analogical matches may be established. Since this research is concerned with the aspects of the narrative experiencer's self which are projected into the storyworld, it seems logical that experiencers' self-schemas, or mental representations of themselves, should be one of the input spaces involved in the blend. As the blurring of the experiencer's self is recurrently connected to the fictional world entity—narrator or focalizer—providing perspectival viewpoint, the other mental space should involve the mental representation of one such entities. For the sake of conciseness, the research will focus on the character construct for the focalizer. However, in the case of verbal narratives, further research should explore analogical matches between readers' and narrators' mental constructs, as these are perspectivizers within the narrating situation, and even between readers and characters other than focalizers inside the fictional world.

4 Character constructs

The construal of a mental model for the focalizer is subject to the same processes intervening in character construction at large, which Emmott describes in the following terms:

“As we read, we collect information from the text about each character [...]. We build an ‘image’ in our mind and with every subsequent mention of the individual we not only add to this MENTAL REPRESENTATION, but utilize it.” (Emmott, 1992: 222)

This information comes in varied forms (Margolin, 2008: 56), from descriptive material to other characters’ comments and evaluations, and one of its main sources is the intramental presentation of the character’s consciousness in the form of inner speech. The mental image of a character that Emmott refers to is constructed in ways similar to those in which mental representations of real world individuals are built. In fact, as Herman (2011a) points out, the mental modeling of fictional characters is grounded on socio-cultural categorization processes similar to those employed in the categorization of actual human beings:

“When I categorize a being as a person, I ipso facto assume that he or she instantiates a constellation of mental and material predicates--predicates that are linked together in patterns specified by models of persons circulating in my culture or subculture. In turn, characters in novels can be viewed as model persons.” (Herman, 2011a: 2).

In his research into fictional minds, Palmer (2004; 2009) insists on their similarities with real minds, as explained in this quote:

“Any challenge to this approach that argues that fictional minds are semiotic constructs and therefore utterly and unabridgeably different from real minds does not, in my view, work. They are certainly semiotic constructs, but many of the semiotic operations that are necessary to recover meaning from them involve those aspects of fictional minds that are similar to real minds.” (Palmer, 2009: 86).

These approaches to character construction suggest that character constructs, as mental spaces, should be considered isomorphic with our mental spaces for real people, in the sense that their constitutive features and internal structure will allow cross-space analogical matches if the appropriate matching relations hold.

5 The self concept

While character constructs are solidly accounted for in narrative theory, this is not the case with readers’ mental representations of themselves. But, luckily, social psychology has a long tradition in the study of the individual’s *self-concept*. The self-concept is a complex mental structure of the self containing episodic, semantic, and procedural knowledge, built from our interaction with the physical and the social world, and consisting of two main types of interrelated modules: self-schemas and possible selves. These notions have been successfully applied in the social sciences in areas as varied as medical therapy and behaviour (Linville, 1987; Young, 2003), political discourse (Duncan, 2005), education (Alexander, 1997), business (Jameson, 2007), advertising (Edson-Escalas, 2004; Wheeler et al., 2005), intercultural communication (Bochner, 1994), and the study of interactional face (Spencer-Oatey, 2007), but they have not so far been applied in the areas of narratology and narrative discourse analysis. However, as mental representations of the self, their potential for the analysis of narrative immersion and interaction should not be underestimated.

5.1. Self-schemas

The view that the self can be understood as a network of interrelated schemas is traced back to the work of Markus (1977), who emphasizes the social component of this cognitive structure, stressing that the building blocks that constitute the self, and which she terms *self-schemata*, are construed on the basis of the individual's exposure to and interaction with the social environment. This is how Markus defines self-schemata:

“Self-schemata are cognitive generalizations about the self, derived from past experience, that organize and guide the processing of the self-related information contained in individuals' social experience.” (Markus, 1977: 63)

Self-schemas, as they are commonly referred to, “integrate and summarize a person's thoughts, feelings, and experience about the self in a specific behavioural domain” (Stein, 1994), and function as self-perceived category memberships for oneself, based on self- and other-evaluations, which include physical characteristics, personality traits, social and professional roles, gender, ethnicity, ideology, skills, or particular interests and hobbies. Individuals may entertain a variety of complex, co-existing self-schemas about their interactional roles, such as the self as parent, friend, romantic partner, professional member, colleague, boss, subordinate, sportsperson, cinema-goer, conservative, or animal-lover.

Logically, not everybody has all types of schemas. People may be *schematic* or *aschematic* in a domain (Markus, 1977), depending on whether they have self-schemas for category membership in that domain or not. Being schematic in a domain involves possessing cognitive generalizations about domain-specific aspects of oneself derived from past experience, which influence current behaviour and project domain-specific expectations on future imagings of the self. On the contrary, people who are aschematic on a particular dimension do not invest time or mental activity on related attributes, events, or situations. These properties of self-schemas may be easily recognized as priming effects (Smith, 1998: 410), in the sense that they influence attention and prompt faster processing of related information, also containing procedural scripts for schema related behaviour.

Although self-schemas may be modified, this is undergone with resistance, as they are perceived as core representations of the self. However, exposure to and interaction with a variety of social situations requiring new roles and strategies not only increases and enriches the complexity of the network, but may also introduce changes in the *working self-concept*, or currently activated self-schema containing the subset of semantic, episodic, and procedural knowledge which is contextually activated and thus accessible at a particular moment (Baldwin, 1997: 326). In this sense, the simulation environment provided by narratives may be ideal for trying out new roles and strategies without the risks to the self in real life situations.

5.2. Possible selves

The most malleable parts of the self-concept are the individual's possible selves. Markus and Nurius (1986) introduce the concept in these terms:

“Possible selves represent individuals' ideas of what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming, and thus provide a conceptual link between

cognition and motivation. [...] they function as incentives for future behaviour (i.e., they are selves to be approached or avoided), and [...] they provide an evaluative and interpretive context for the current view of self.” (Markus and Nurius, 1986: 954)

As opposed to self-schemas, possible selves have not been confirmed by social experience, but this does not in the least diminish their power. To the contrary, by acting as expected, feared, or desired ideal reference frameworks, they strongly intervene in self-evaluation and self-perception, and act as powerful behaviour guidelines determining approach or withdrawal strategies regarding the desired or the feared self. Experimental studies (Markus and Nurius, 1986: 954) have revealed repertoires of individuals’ possible selves, including desired possible selves like the loved and admired self, or the self you ought to be, and dreaded possible selves like the lonely self, the incompetent self, or the unemployed self.

Possible selves account for the dynamic nature of the self-concept and for its potential for growth and change. Markus and Nurius (1986: 957) argue that research into self and identity is doomed to failure if it focuses just on what people think they are, without accounting for what they wish or fear to become, because it is the permanent adjustment and interaction of a person’s self-schemas and possible selves that determines perception, emotion and motivation, yields behavioural patterns and strategies, and provides “direction and impetus for action, change, and development” (Markus and Nurius, 1986: 960) . The immediate effects of this interaction are on the working self-concept, but may eventually reach the more permanent, core self-schemas. This suggests the relevance of the self-concept for an understanding of narrative engagement, not only on the grounds of the dynamic nature of its interrelated network of self-schemas and possible selves, but also because of its mental representation format, which allows for a specification of internal features liable to be matched to relevant features in readers’ mental representations of fictional characters.

6 Storyworld Possible Selves

6.1 Defining SPSs

Readers’ storyworld possible selves (SPSs) can be preliminarily defined as blends resulting from matching features across a particular reader’s self-concept and a focalizer’s character construct. These matches are triggered by cues in the narrative discourse which activate a subset of relevant self-schemas and possible selves in the reader’s self-concept network. The reader’s storyworld possible self will be projected if, and only if, at least one of the reader’s self-schemas or possible selves is activated by narrative cues, that is to say, if the reader is schematic in one or more of the domains in the narration. This may account for readers’ partial leap from the real to the fictional world, as it is not the complete self-concept which is involved in deictic shifts, but just one or a few of the reader’s possible selves and/or self-schemas. A reader may, for instance, feel strongly interested in an adventure story because it contains primers that activate the adventurer possible self, leaving the mother/wife/teacher self-schemas dormant. Or maybe it is the mother self-schema which is primed by narrative cues, so that readers can use the storyworld as a safe simulation environment in which to experience schema related behaviours and strategies.

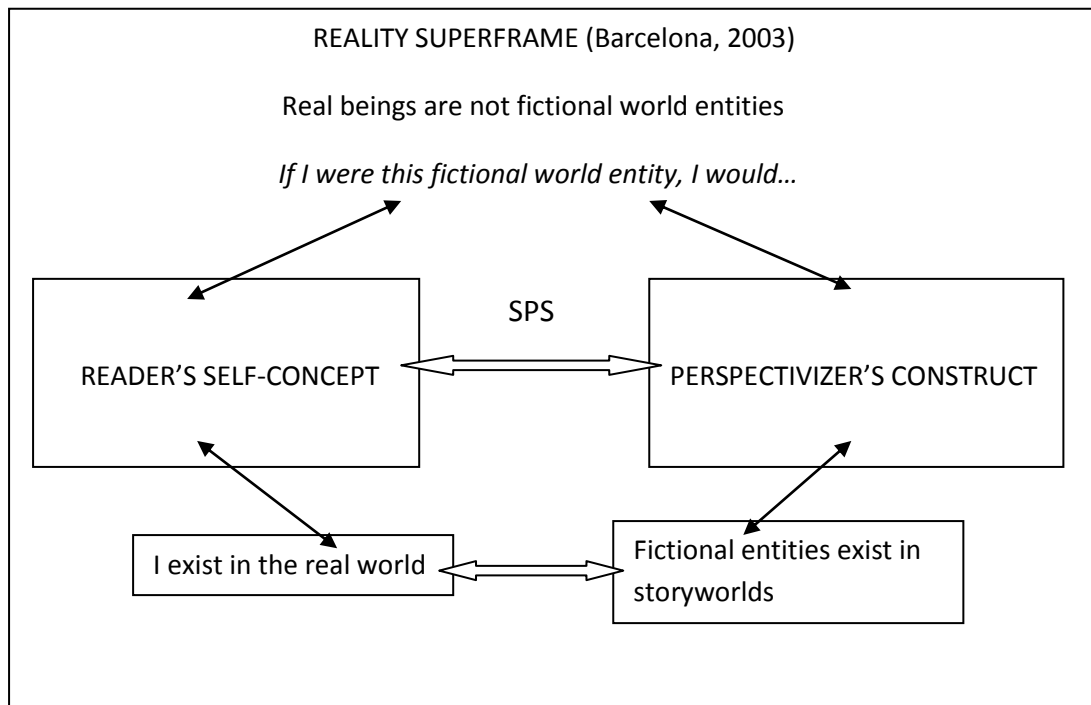


Fig. 1. Counterfactual nature of storyworld possible selves projection

As noted above, people lack schemas for particular domains; some readers, for instance, may lack a parent, environmentally active, skiing, or romantic self-schema, being, thus, unable to project matches with relevant storyworld characters and their environmental events and situations, and consequently finding the narrative uninteresting and personally irrelevant in terms of self-transformation. The result would be a drop in empathic engagement probably making the narrative experiencer drop the book or turn off the TV, that is, opt out of a self-irrelevant narrative experience.

However, as the self-concept is not totally fixed, but subject to changes derived from both social experiences and self-reflection, a narrative in which the reader has previously failed to be immersed may, a few months or years later, suddenly seem personally relevant and useful. This would mean that changes in the reader's self-concept, whether in its possible selves or in its self-schemas, have determined the presence of features which were, simply, not previously there, and which now allow cross-domain mappings with the perspectivizing entity. Conversely, changes in the self-concept may make us feel unmoved by a narrative which seemed profoundly engaging on a previous occasion, but with which the modified self no longer finds relevant matches.

6.2. SPSs and discourse participation, self-transformation, and emotional involvement

From a linguistic point of view, SPSs may function as mental referents for those cases in which both the grammar of the clause and discourse organization suggest the need for the reader to share a grammatical slot with the perspectivizing entity inside the storyworld. In this sense, SPSs, or reader/focalizer blends, can syntactically function as mental referents for doubly deictic *you* and generic *one*, for elliptic SENSER participants in passive voice mental processes involving the reader's cognitive activity inside a fictional world, and as implicit hybrid

addressees of inner speech facework, actually allowing the overhearing reader to occupy a discourse role within the ontological boundaries of the fictional world.

From a narrative immersion point of view, the explanatory power of SPSs seems equally promising. Blending operations function as networks, so that, once a blend is established, features in the blend may be projected back into the source spaces, altering their internal structure. This backwards projecting property of blends may explain the transforming power of narratives, by accounting for the fact that minor changes brought about by a narrative in the reader's possible selves may reach the furthestmost recesses of the self-concept. Similarly, SPSs features may be projected back into the mental model of the focalizer, intervening in idiosyncratic perceptions of characters by different readers.

The feeling of wasted reading time can also be connected to SPSs backward feature projection into the self-concept. A reader may incorporate into an adventurer possible self scripts for physical survival which were not originally there. These, in turn, being now a part of the working self-concept, may be moved further back into the network, affecting other possible selves, everyday life self-schemas, and even episodic memories and past possible selves. Aschematic readers, however, will be disinterested when aware of limited opportunities for self-transformation, and will perceive reading time as wasted time.

But there are other ways in which SPSs may be connected to emotional responses. According to self-schema researchers, changes in core self-schemas and in the self-concept tend to be strongly resisted, and are accompanied by feelings of fear and anxiety. As Markus and Nurius (1986: 964) explain, "When a self-conception is challenged, there is likely to be a sudden and powerful flood of bad feeling." Negative feelings also accompany the perceived approach of a self-schema to a negative possible self, while approximating a self-schema to a desired possible self may be accompanied by positive emotional reactions, even if anxiety-tinged. SPSs may, in this way, serve to account for emotional involvement and feelings of self-transformation during narrative processing, so that emotional involvement would not be derived exclusively from empathic concern with the focalizer, but also from dynamic processes of self-schema modification.

7 Conclusion

This study has tried to provide evidence for the fact that narrative involvement requires the projection into the fictional world of, at least, one of the self-schemas or possible selves constituting the reader's self-concept. I have used the term *storyworld possible selves* (SPSs) to refer to the blend resulting from conceptual matches across the selectively projected part of the reader's self-concept and features in the focalizer's construct. Storyworld possible selves are liable to increase our understanding of certain narrative phenomena. Syntactically, they may act as mental referents for generic *you* and *one*, inclusive of real world reader and fictional world focalizer. They may also function as referents for hidden SENSERS in transitivity mental processes. Pragmatically, they may function as interactional counterparts for the linguistic facework found in focalizers' inner speech. SPSs may also provide a better understanding of the metonymic nature of deictic shifts into storyworlds, and may help explain

how emotional engagement occurs. Additionally, they may account for the fact that different readers are differently moved by the same narrative, or even the fact that the same reader may be affected in different ways by a narrative at different points in his or her life.

Interacting with narratives, independently from the genre or mode in which they achieve formal realization, is one of humankind's most pervasive and cherished social practices. Storyworld possible selves, as this study has tried to show, should play an essential role in narrative understanding, as the richness of experience that they purport to the self-concept in the context of the safe simulation environment provided by the storyworld must be a constant source for the reshaping of the self-evaluative mechanisms which intervene in the transformation of the self. Further research would be needed to investigate cross-domain mappings with narrators' constructs. Further studies should also address the internal structure of SPSs and their applicability to the analysis of individual narratives, and the nature of the semiotic cues which intervene in SPSs projection into storyworlds.

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