

Conducting a Text World Theory Analysis: Some Things to Consider

See Gavins (2007) *Text World Theory: An Introduction* for more detail about the terms and ideas covered in this list. This sheet was compiled by Sara Whiteley in 2019 (sara.whiteley@sheffield.ac.uk)

Discourse-world

The discourse world is the real-life context surrounding a language event.

- What is the context around the production and reception of the text?
- Who are the **discourse-world participants**? (There must be at least two human participants wilfully involved in communication)
- What is the function of the discourse?
- Is the discourse-world split? (i.e. are the discourse participants inhabiting the same spatio-temporal location, or not?)
- What kinds of perceptual, experiential, linguistic and cultural **knowledge** are needed to process the discourse? Which textual elements (or 'headers') activate this knowledge?
- What does it feel like to participate in the discourse? What kinds of **experiential effects** are created?

The vast notion of context is restricted in Text World Theory by the notion of **text-drivenness**: our focus is on the elements of the context involved in processing the text.

Text-worlds

Text-worlds are mental representations formed when processing language. They are formed from the interaction between the language of the text and the discourse participants' knowledge and inferences.

- What **world-building elements** are present in the language of the text? These include markers of time and space and reference to objects and enactors (animate entities) present in the text-world.
- What **function-advancing elements** are present in the language of the text? In narrative texts, these are often verb phrases depicting actions or states in the text-world.
- What kinds of inferences do you make in order to construct your text-worlds?
- Does the space or time shift at all? If so, this creates a **world-switch**. World-switches may be fleeting or more established.
- Movement back and forth between worlds is known as 'togglng'.

Modal-worlds

Modal-worlds are a type of text-world cued by uses of modality to express unrealised situations or attitudes.

- Are there indicators of modality are present in the language of the text? Look for instances of boulomaic, deontic, or epistemic/perception modality. Negation and hypotheticals are also modal-world forming.
- What are the world-building or function-advancing elements of these modalised worlds?
- Consider the ontological status of these modal worlds relative to the other worlds created in the discourse. Are they close or remote? What functions are they performing?

Bringing it all together

- Once you have identified the text-worlds and modal-worlds created in the discourse, can you relate these structures to the meanings or experiential effects of the discourse?
- What impressions do the text-worlds and modal-worlds generate regarding the discourse-world participants or text-world enactors?
- Are there points where readers might have to **repair** or **replace** their text-worlds (in order to make them more coherent, for instance) and what is the significance of this in the experience of the discourse?