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LIKE A BAD DREAM: NAVIGATING NARRATIVE SPACES OF PANDEMIC-THEMED DREAM REPORTS

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Abstract: This article looks into dream narratives about COVID-19 in terms of cognitive narrative theory. Our research aims at modeling the typical narrative space configuration of a dream report. The article identifies explicit linguistic tags and implicit markers of the epistemic status of narrative spaces as real-world or dream-world. The study further explores the linear vs. parallel relationships between the narrative spaces of the main dream-world and auxiliary real-world narration sequences.

Key words: dream narrative, cognitive narrative theory, navigating over narrative spaces, linear/parallel space configuration.

1. Introduction

Global digitalization in all spheres of modern life has conditioned the unprecedented coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic in a variety of digital sources, which range from news articles and scientific papers to popular media and user-generated content. This broad and heterogenous discourse around COVID-19 is demanding scholars' efforts to analyze the perceptions and frames that emerge in various digital genres discussing COVID-19 (see, e.g., Wicke & Bolognesi 2020). In particular, user-generated content such as memes and social media posts have drawn linguists' attention (Panasenko et al. 2020).

The COVID-19 stigmatization in the mind of an English-speaking Internet user entails the necessity to divulge COVID-19 as a product of a human's conscious and sub-conscious cognition. Among the media of the sub-conscious construing COVID-19, dreams look most evocative, and yet hardly subject to linguistic analysis. However, at the same time, dream *narratives* in terms of oneirology, a state-of-the-art field that looks into the nature of dreams (Blechner 2001), shows promise for linguistic research. The synergy of the narrative and cognitive theories are the prerequisites for dream narrative analysis. On the one hand, these theories provide a better insight into the ontology of dream in terms of narratology. On the other, they account for the ways of framing COVID-19. Following the principles of oneirology, a complex of factors that underpin dream narratives about COVID-19 hypothetically condition the specific structure and content of a dream narrative.

Notably, so far, dream reports have been analyzed mainly in the light of the psychological impacts of COVID-19; the risks associated with the disease and the emotional pressure of isolation as major sources of mental suffering (Mota et al. 2020). Apart from dream reports, a vast array of studies address, among other foci, the ways local online newspapers frame the outbreak of COVID-19 (Onwe et al. 2020), cognitive structures for the current health crisis found in far-right groups' content (McNeil-Willson 2020), media narratives on sexuality during the lockdown (Döring 2020), hospitality corporate narratives during the COVID-19 pandemic (Im et al. 2020), conspiracy narratives around the vaccine (Khan 2020), etc.

In terms of the Threat Simulation Theory, dreaming constitutes an adaptive mechanism one of whose functions is to create simulations of real-life threats and risky situations for the cognitive system to "rehearse" the possible reaction (Valli et al. 2005). In this regard, a study by Wang et al. (2021) expounds the fact that in an epidemic-situation sample, the number of threatening events featured in dreams is higher, while the number of references to illness in general are equal to that in a non-epidemic sample.

Pandemic dream reports highlight a considerable number of evaluatively negative words and frame the concepts of contamination and cleanness (Mota et al. 2020). Some studies (Barrett 2020; Iorio et al. 2020) focus on gender differences in the rates of negative emotions, anxiety, and body, health, and death references in pandemic dreams. The pilot study by MacKay and DeCicco (2020) established a correlation between exposure to a disease and dreaming imagery indicative of high anxiety levels.

Studies on dreams during the pandemic have shown qualitative changes towards emotional and health-related content with a higher proportion of negative references indicative of elevated anxiety levels (Nielsen 2020). However, studies on dreams during the COVID-19 pandemic mainly focus on the general selections of dream reports without restricting the content to COVID-19 themes due to the metaphorical nature of dreams, which allows for one concern to be translated into completely different, seemingly unrelated imagery in the dream. This general approach mainly focuses on the emotional content of dreams; in the case of the current pandemic, daily concerns are reflected in an overall more tense dreaming experience (ibid.).

For this qualitative study, to focus our analysis on COVID-19 dream narratives as such, we have opted for a selection of dreams that directly feature COVID-19.

Location changes in dream imagery, however, can also be viewed as the result of cognitive linguistic processes in the narrative, which is in the focus of our study. The study deals with transforming narrative spaces and navigating over them in terms of linguistic means of narrative construction. The **aim** of this study is to identify the means of navigation over dream narrative spaces. The narrator uses these means to mark narrative spaces as dream and reality. We distinguish these means in terms of modeling the sequences of interrelated dream-marked and reality-marked narrative spaces. Hypothetically, these sequences serve for the simultaneous but independent rendering of a dream and a waking experience.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Data

For statistical purposes, to create the corpus for our study, we deployed a well-established method of mining online platforms and social media for user-generated references to the topic of focus (Moens et al. 2014: 47). Currently, this method has proved efficient in linguistics to identify, for example, the ways certain issues are verbalized and framed.

In this research, 96 dream reports focused on the current COVID-19 pandemic were manually culled from two websites: *Dream Journal (DJ)* accessible at dreamjournal.net and *Dream Journal Ultimate (DJU)*, an Android/iOS app, that hosts users' dream journals or reports in open access. The relevant narratives were identified by their hashtags as user-generated annotations in dream journal posts. The hashtags are the following: *#covid-19*, *#covid19*, *#covid*, *#coronavirus*, *#corona*, *#pandemic*, and *#lockdown*.

Thematically, COVID-19 related dreams were found to fall into the following distinct categories: ignoring social distancing (15%, 14 reports out 95), not wearing masks (11%, 12 out of 95), sanitizing hands or surfaces (7%, 7 out of 95), catching the virus (4.75%, 5 out of 95), a loved one having the virus (4.75%, 5 out of 95), and an anxiety of the suspected COVID-19 carrier (3.8%, 4 out of 95). The rest render miscellaneous motives focused on the pandemic or lockdown. Therefore, our thematic analysis reveals the tendency of the dreams to feature surprisingly mundane aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic. They mainly concern poor hygiene during the lockdown rather than immediate illness-related anxiety. The findings related to the thematic distribution of dream scenarios were not the main focus of our study but they provided an insight into the ways the COVID-19-related content is featured in dreams.

2.2 Methods

This qualitative study focuses on the narrative modeling of dream reports. This modeling aims to divulge basic strategies of dream narrative navigation via linguistic markers of transfers between dream and real-world spaces. Shifting between the dream narrative sequences and real-life references, the narrator may alternate viewpoint configuration agency between their real self and their 'dream self'.

As the study aims to pinpoint dream narrative navigation means accounting for construing dream :: reality mental spaces, its theoretical underpinning is the theory of mental spaces and blending (Fauconnier & Turner 2008; Turner 2003). It is employed to expound narrative configurations of dream reports. In our previous research, we focused on the role of perspectives and focalizers in shaping dream reports' narrative spaces (Ніколаєнко 2020) and their organization into a coherent narrative configuration through blending of perspectives. In this study, we elucidate the procedure of modeling narrative spaces. To model a dream narrative, we relied on the theory of narrative spaces and modeling developed by Dancygier (2008; 2011), an advocate of blending in the narrative research.

Following Dancygier (2008), the term 'narrative space' in cognitive narratology is collateral to a 'mental space' (Fauconnier & Turner 2008). Dancygier identifies narrative space as "a mental construct participating in the emergence of the story, having distinctive topology and narrative status, and linked to other narrative spaces in ways which prompt story construction" (2011: 36). Blending as a framework method to study narratives shows promise in modeling the structure of the dream report. It accounts for the fact that, on the one hand, dream reports render the experience of a specific kind, neither real nor made up on purpose, yet, on the other hand, this is firsthand experience. These facts are the prerequisites for identifying dream reports as a specific narrative genre.

Mental spaces (Dancygier & Sweetser 2005) were propounded as an alternative to possible worlds. Dancygier and Sweetser differentiate them on the following grounds:

"*However, mental spaces represent a more general mechanism than possible worlds, referring not only to very partial cognitive 'world' or 'situation' constructions as well as to more complete ones, but also to a variety of nonworld-like structures which can be connected and mapped onto other cognitive structures*" (ibid., 11).

Moreover, according to Tucan (2013), rich blends emerge in fiction narratives when the characters fantasize, dream, contemplate alternatives, or hypothesize about possible outcomes. This is in full accord with Dancygier's observation that narrative spaces are marked in terms of modality and epistemology (2005: 100). On the other hand, similarly to the mental spaces of news narratives of van Krieken and Sanders (2019), the narrator and reader operate with several major spaces. They are identified as the reality, the news narrative, and the intermediate space. Hypothetically, each may be tagged by the markers of viewpoint transfers.

Apparently, dream narrative modeling also involves two narrative spaces, that of reality and that of the dream, which interpolate and update each other. Like any other type of narration, dream narrative authors depart from their knowledge of the world, that is, their world construal. We refer to the 'world construal' as to "the result of world perception (cognition) conditioned by all sensual and intellectual abilities of the human, a kind of image of the world portrayed and conceptualized by human cognition" (Бондаренко 2017: 68; see also Bondarenko 2019: 295 for more detail). Therefore, when trying to make sense of the dreaming experience and content, the narrators rely on their world construal that conditions both reality-marked information and comments on dream narration. Thus, dream narrative spaces are likely to be tagged as either an alternative waking-world or a dream-world. It is significant, however, that dream narrative mental spaces demonstrate different interaction dynamics. Unlike in fiction and news, it is the emergent *reality-marked* spaces that augment the major *dream* space by referring it to the narrator's experience and hence providing context

and allowing to highlight dream-world differences from/or distortion of reality.

In dream reports, two distinct dimensions of narration correspondingly mark dream-world and waking-world narrative spaces. They deploy linguistic means to navigate over/in the narrative dimensions, i.e., differentiate between real life and unreal events, characters, locations, or scenarios featured in the narrator's dream.

Therefore, our study is designed in terms of three consecutive stages: firstly, we aim to model the narrative configuration of the dream report; secondly, we identify the means of tagging parallel narrative spaces as dream-world or waking-world to allow navigation across two dimensions; and finally, we analyze the nature of linear dynamic shifts between dream-world narrative spaces.

3. Results and discussion

Linguistically, dream reports display features conditioned by the nature of the reported experience. The pivotal feature of dream narratives is the need for the narrator to simultaneously operate two dimensions of experience, the dream world and the waking world. In reporting dreams, it is essential to, firstly, mark the borderline between these realms of knowledge and secondly, use the markers of viewpoint transfers from real or dream-world and reverse. This provides others with devices to follow and construe the meaning in dream narrative by way of construing narrative spaces.

3.1 Dream world vs. waking world construction in narrative spaces

In a dream report, narrative spaces may construe dream or waking worlds, hence the narrator has to operate with a complex narrative configuration. Evidently, a dream report appeals to the knowledge of real world, just like any narrative construal. According to Dancygier, "any text relies on our reality-based knowledge of frames: if we read about someone making a phone call, we understand it because we have an easily accessible frame of devices making communication over long distances possible.

Frames and patterns of frame evocation constitute a reality-based conceptual network which underlies any construal a narrative may come up with" (2011: 201). Yet, given the imaginative nature of dreaming, dream narrative often features either the completely fantastic elements or the altered aspects of a dreamer's real life. This entails the narrator's continuous appealing to the waking world as a vantage point to identify the unusual in the dream. The vantage point allows the reader to integrate the narrator's physical, social, and mental perspectives in the story (Tátrai 2015: 13-14). In terms of the joint attention theory, Tátrai expounds the term 'vantage point' the following way: "The referential interpretation of linguistic symbols employed in a narrative discourse, that is, its epistemic grounding in the intersubjective context of the joint attentional scene, is closely related to orientation in the discourse universe, which in turn depends on the functioning of a narrator's context-dependent vantage point" (ibid., 13). Tátrai also points out that narrators can often make a distinction between their present vantage point, that is the perspective of the communicative situation of narration, and that of their former self acting as an agent in the story (ibid., 27). This consideration is relevant to the conspicuous splits of the narrator's vantage point when they refer to themselves as "my dream self" in dream reports. Thus, following Turner (2003), dream narratives are inherently double-scope stories. In terms of his theory, we view dream narratives as blended stories, i.e., emergent structures of two input stories with cross-mapped elements.

The concept of the vantage point accounts for the coherence of narration that consists of differently marked narrative spaces. This stands out as a specifically relevant observation for a study of dream reports as they normally feature transitions between the dream-self vantage point and waking-self narration perspective. According to Dancygier, narrative models feature (i) viewpoint spaces – the vantage point for further building of the narrative spaces and (ii) focus spaces – local mental spaces (2005: 100). However, the configuration of narrative spaces of dream reports appears to have special features in terms of the correlation between narrative spaces and ways of navigating in

them.

The vantage point, or the viewpoint space, hypothetically, tends to remain constant. This is conditioned by the same narrator and the unity of time of all events in the narration. Conversely, the vantage point splits as narration fluctuates between reality and dream and is implemented in opposing spaces. It is significant that these co-dependent spaces function concurrently; they support two consistent narrative vantage points: that of the dream recalled and that of the real situation that corresponds to the events in the dream. Hence, the dream narrative implements a specific configuration of narrative spaces. This configuration conditions a divergence of vantage points in terms of dream-marked and reality-marked mental spaces. However, at the same time, these spaces are blended to provide the narrative coherence. Dancygier approaches "such possibilities of simultaneous viewpoint maintenance and shift in the network by postulating a blending mechanism", which she terms as a 'viewpoint compression' (2005: 120). It accounts for a double-facet cognitive nature of the dream narrative as, on the one hand, narrated in terms of real-life experience and, on the other, comprehensible for others. The unique nature of the dream narrative is its specific kind of evidentiality as the narrator consciously highlights certain aspects of dream experience as unreal or impossible. Therefore, the dream narrative is construed as a result of continuously correlating the dream reality with the real world as a vantage point.

We distinguish explicit and implicit linguistic markers of dream evidentiality employed to tag an element of narration as impossible or unreal, hence signaling the oneiric status of the narrated episode.

Cognitively, dream evidentiality may be modeled in terms of two conflicting narrative spaces, that of the dream and waking worlds. Following the logics of dream narratives,

the conflicting worlds are construed as either a ***linear succession*** or as a ***parallel configuration***.

To feature a ***linear succession***, in Example 1, the parenthetical inclusion of metanarrative comments (*this is real we found this out yesterday*) is a linear strategy to construe waking-world narrative spaces that are independent of dream spaces and are evoked by their own linguistic prompts:

(1) "*I dreamt that somehow, my two best friends came over during this crazy crisis and hung out in my room. I told them that my mom has coronavirus (**this is real we found this out yesterday**) but she got through it*" (DJU).

In the above example, the explicit comment on the real nature of the events recalled leads to the emergence of a counterpart narrative space whose status is marked as real though it doubles the dream space. Its linear nature is accounted for by the separate comment the narrator makes outside the main narrative (provided by the parenthesis) to establish the reality-marked situation specifically tagged as such. The narration hence shifts to reality for a moment, updates the reader on its relation to the dream, and returns to the dream narrative perspective.

Parallel waking-world narrative spaces, on the other hand, emerge from the dream narrative not as specifically tagged ones that follow or precede the counterpart dream situation. They are construed from the context simultaneously with the main dream-marked space and are provided by the same linguistic prompts (2):

(2) "*Corona scenes are still there. I get to know **my brother at Dubai** is infected by Corona and he have been recovered without any causes. We can reach back to home (India) by speedy train*" (DJU).

From the passage above, the reader may assume that the narrator in the real world has a brother who abides in Dubai, while there is little linguistic evidence of this fact. The described scarce, highly contextual linguistic cues boost a narrative configuration modeled in Figure 1.

To model dream narratives (see Fig. 1), we follow Dancygier's method (2011). Here, we identify three spaces: (i) the story viewpoint (SV), which conditions the overall situation, (ii) the main narrative space (MN), where the story of focus generally unfolds, and (iii) local narrative spaces (NS), whose sequence is the moving engine of the narrative:
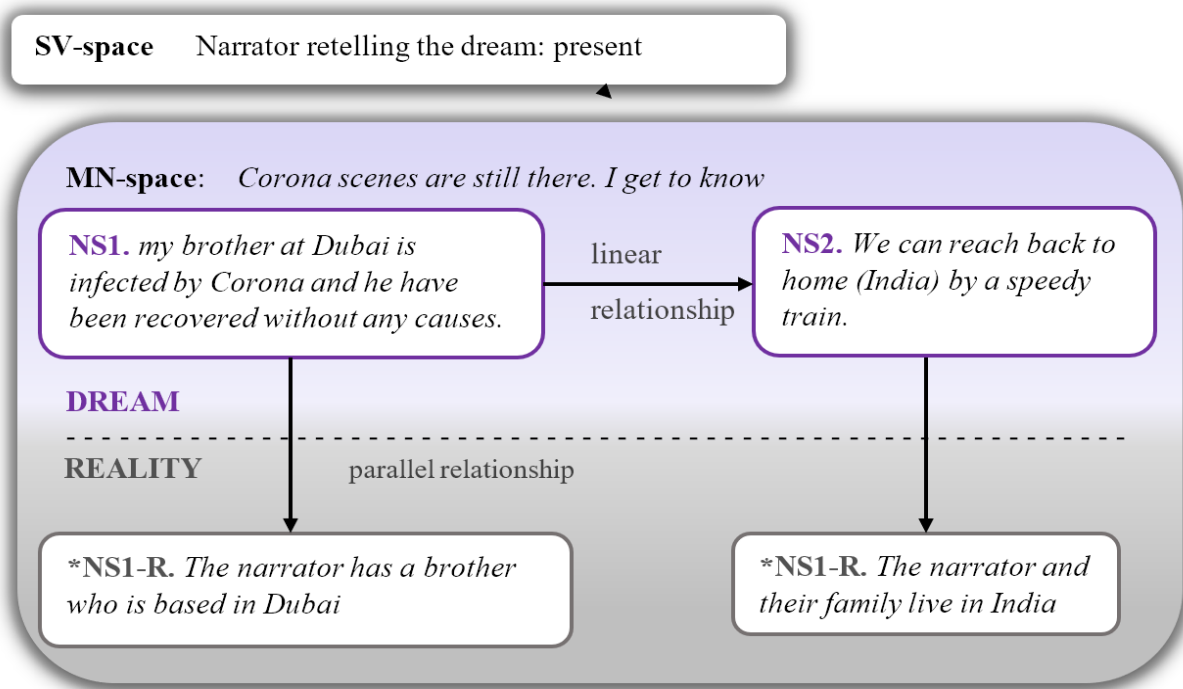
SV – story viewpoint; MN – main narrative; NS – narrative space

Figure 1. The model of parallel narrative spaces in dream vs. reality navigation
(Source: Own processing)

The narrator first sets up the general dream-marked space (*Corona scenes are still there. I get to know*) and then tells the news concerning their brother in the dream (*my brother at Dubai is infected by Corona and he have been recovered without any causes*), which, in its turn, is followed by another possible scenario and narrative space

for the future in the dream (*We can reach back to home (India) by a speedy train.*). The configuration of these spaces is **linear**, since they are construed as the narrative's linguistic representation unfolds. However, we argue that this main dream narrative line also has collaterals that are necessary for navigating in the dream narrative. These collaterals are two **parallel** reality-marked narrative spaces not commented on explicitly in the report. The first is a compact one that introduces a brother based in Dubai in the real world, and the second is a wider one elaborated further where this brother has COVID-19 and recovers from it.

Linear and parallel configurations of narrative spaces entail typological differences in **navigation** across dream and waking narrative spaces. Parallel narrative spaces make the narration more informative as they provide more details. Still, the reader has to clearly distinguish (that is, navigate across) simultaneously construed dream and waking narrative spaces to provide appropriate perception of the narrative. Conversely, linear successions of narrative spaces seem easier to follow as they unfold gradually, and, consequently, navigation between the spaces is not so problematic.

For instance, in Example 3, the narrator makes a parenthetical inclusion to shift to a reality-tagged (*in real life*) narrative space and leaves appropriate comments on the difference:

(3) "*Getting ready to say bye to everyone when my old Neighbour from cedar commons Sweet Cherie was there with Alec (who I saw on fb had Just graduated university **in real life**) **but on the dream**, he was an infant and she said he had a 'lil cough and had covid because he was deathly ill so I said well, ok – I'll be heading out now!*'" (DJU).

The model for a linear succession in navigating narrative spaces is in Figure 2:

SV-space   Narrator retelling the dream: present

MN-space

NS1. *my old Neighbour from cedar commons Sweet Cherie was there with Alec*

NS3. *but on the dream, he was an infant*

DREAM   linear relationship
- -
REALITY

NS2-R. *(who I saw on fb had Just graduated university in real life)*
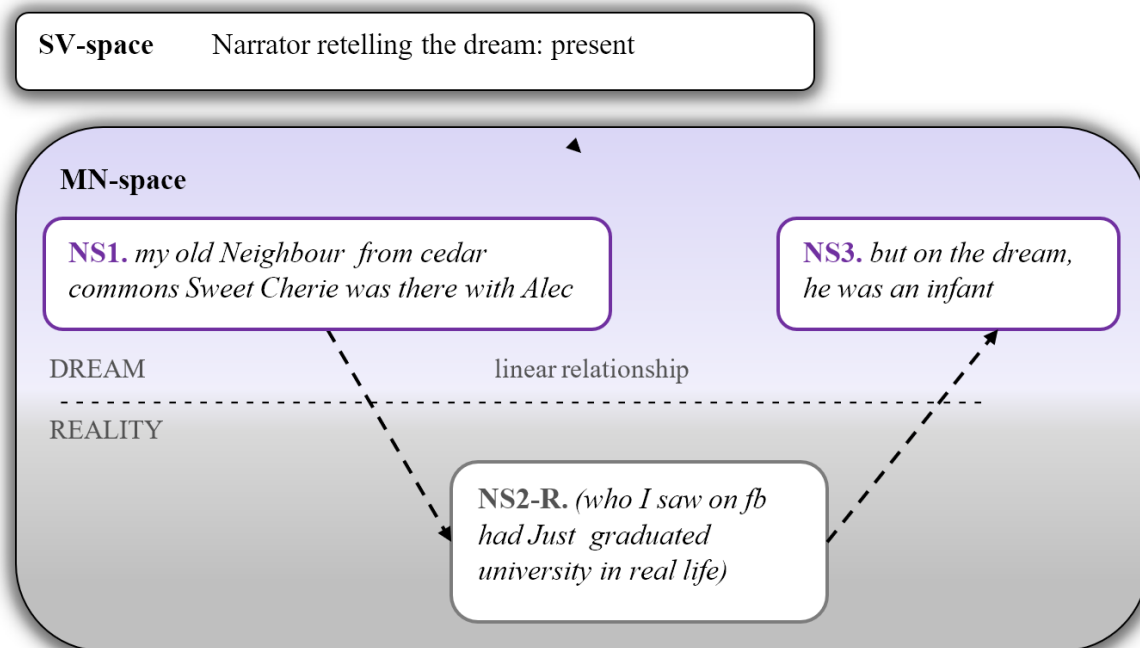
SV – story viewpoint; MN – main narrative; NS – narrative space

Figure 2. The model of linear narrative spaces in dream vs. reality navigation
(Source: Own processing)

In Example 3, the narrator linearly shifts between dream- and real-world descriptions, but this time the dream space and the reality space diverge. In the real world, Alec, the narrator's acquaintance, is a grown man who has just graduated from university, and in the dream, he is an infant (though he still preserves his identity from the narrator's dream perspective). The narrator explicitly refers to the waking world and employs parenthesis as meta-narrative comments.

It is significant that even on condition that the waking-world narrative space is not construed, the narrators usually update the status of the narration and tag the narrative space as that of the dream:

(4) "*I can't quite remember, but think it had to do with the fact that (**in the dream**) the whole pandemic had been fabricated by the United States government in an attempt to nudge us closer to war with China, who the government wanted to go to war with **for some reason in the dream**"* (DJU).

As a dream narrative aims to render a string of events in a dream, it inherently conditions marking exclusively waking-world narrative spaces as such. At the same time, dream world narrative spaces may stay unmarked by default. Therefore, reality narrative spaces tend to play auxiliary roles only to navigate in dream narrative spaces and tag them as unreal. This allows the reader to identify the epistemological (dream/reality) status of the narrated events.

Linguistic markers of narrative spaces split into explicit and implicit ones. Explicit markers primarily feature the following phrases: *in the dream*, *I had a dream that*, *I dreamt*, *my dream self*, *in the waking life*, *in real life*, *in reality*, and *dream/waking*. Implicit, or context-dependent, markers include some contrast and concession **conjunctions** and **adverbs** (*but*, *though*, *however*) as well as **grammatical tenses** and **adjectives** that render the difference of the object, character, or scenario from a real one.

(5) "*I recall the virus is in America, but **my dream self** has no recall it exists in Australia, despite seeing daily news about Victoria's problems (**in waking life**) for the last few weeks. (**However**, we live in a region in Queensland where there have been hardly any cases.)*" (DJ).

In Example 5, the narrator uses an explicit vantage point marker, *my dream self*, to identify the knowledge they have in the dream as different from that in the waking world. The narrator also uses an explicit tag, *in waking life*, to mark the narrative space where they follow news. The marker *however* in the parenthesis also indicates that the waking world is juxtaposed with the dream.

Dream reports also demonstrate a profuse number of details that are not normally mentioned and hence are naturally identified as markers of incongruence between the dream and waking worlds. As an example, the phrase *I was a male* allows assuming

that the narrator is actually a woman. Such comments, irrelevant in everyday discourses, also simultaneously evoke double mental spaces – one of the narrator's being a man in the dream and the implied waking counterpart of theirs as a woman.

Another linguistic marker of a dream narrative is a bulk of *expressive adjectives* that render some exceptional quality of an object or an action, for example, *disproportionate*, *giant*, *enormous*, *huge*, *untypical*, *strange*, *weird*, etc. and corresponding adverbs. They pinpoint the difference of these phenomena or scenarios from their analogues in the waking world. We consider these means as navigation tools that draw a borderline between the dream world and the waking world. However, pointing to the dream status of the narration, these concise lexical means, however, do not entail the emergence of parallel narrative spaces. These means remain regular attributes in reality-oriented discourses as people do refer to things as giant, unexpected, etc. outside the descriptions of their dream experience. As an example, unusual features of the dream items that tag the space as dream in Example 6 yet do not condition the emergence of new reality-marked narrative spaces:

(6) "*So I was at this grocery store or something in the parking lot/just outside the store with my family and there were all these **giant** delivery trucks were there, **like much larger than normal** and there were lots of people walking across the roads and around the trucks stuff*" (DJU).

As some linguistic markers, like in Example 6, do not provide sufficient grounds for construing a parallel reality-marked narrative space, a relevant criterion is to be developed. In other words, we have to pinpoint the factor that conditions the potential of the markers of the reality world to construe a separate reality space. In these terms, as a criterion, we relied on the explicit or implied proposition in references to reality. In Example 7, there is the following preamble to the main part of the dream:
(7) "*I had this dream few night back, didn't know when**. I was a male**. Enjoy*" (DJU).

In Example 7, a parallel counterfactual narrative space emerges from the comment *I was a male* that may be developed in the following proposition: *The narrator is a woman in real life*, which accounts for construing a reality narrative space.

Therefore, not all unusual elements in dream reports condition construing double narrative spaces of the same degree of elaboration. In Example 8, there is an indication of a certain discrepancy between reality (*Jeremy's regular backyard porch*) and the narrator's dream:

(8) "*I was on Jeremy's backyard porch **and the porch was very long and wooden** and we had to walk down to get there*" (DJ).

Here, the conventional way of an object description does not account for construing an additional parallel real space, where the porch is shorter.

This observation supports our supposition that dream spaces and locations are ambiguous as they are often distorted and, therefore, manifest rather a blend of some conventional structures or locations. Enescu et al. (2015: 224) hold that such distortions mainly reside in the [concepts of] places being mixed (i.e., combining distinct features of different places), condensed (i.e., similar to mixed places but also embedding different personal experiences and thoughts), distorted (i.e., demonstrating unusual spatial proportions), uncertain, or totally invented. As a consequence, these false representations of real phenomena or locations that are typical of dreams may not account for construing parallel mental spaces. Finally, as the analysis of our corpus confirms, in dream reports, grammatical means such as ***verb tense forms*** serve as linguistic means for tagging narrative spaces as dream vs. reality:

(9) "*My sister **has** covid **in the waking world**. My roommate and I **were** at her place*

*(not her **actual** place) and she **was doing** much better. All these people coming over. I **was** not okay with it (she's very anxious about all the covid stuff)*" (DJU).

In this example, the Present Simple verb form *has* along with the explicit tag *in the waking world* are markers of the waking-world narrative space. The shift to the past tenses (*My roommate and I **were** at her place*) indicates that this new narrative space is set in the dream as well as the following ones (*she **was doing** much better… I **was***). At the end of this fragment, the narration snaps back to the Present Simple in the parentheses (*she's very anxious about all the covid stuff*), which by the logic of tense opposition, suggests the waking-world situation. Therefore, in this example, the verb forms are navigation marks between dream and real narrative spaces (past tenses vs. present tenses).

However, tenses alone do not appear to be a reliable narrative space tag when they are regarded separately from other tags. In Example 9, the present tense indicates reality spaces, that is the narrator's vantage point when the narrative is produced. The past tense is conditioned by the deictic properties of narrating the past experience inherent in the dream. This contrast of tenses is mainly intuitive and appears quite logical. Nonetheless, the narrator augments it both by explicit tags, like in Example 9: *in the waking world*, *her actual place*, and by parenthesis to signal a shift of the narration towards reality.

Similarly, in Example 10, the context seems to provide complete information for the reader to distinguish between dream and reality:

(10) "*They **gave** us these little pamphlets to talk about our surgeries and **told** us that we **would have to be quarantined** for month because of the virus ... After that my grandpa **came** in to take me into surgery. He **doesn't work in hospital in real life** so I **thought** it **was** weird, and while they **were prepping** me for surgery ...*" (DJU).

Here, the narration is mainly in the past as it renders a recollection of dream events. Reality-related information *he doesn't work in hospital in real life* is an inclusion featuring Present Simple verb form. However, to signal the switch of the narrative dimension towards reality, the narrator does not rely exclusively on the tense shift and opts for an explicit tag *in real life.*

(11) "*I dreamt that somehow, my two best friends **came over** during this crazy crisis and hung out in my room. I **told them** that my mom **has coronavirus** (**this is real we found this out yesterday**) but **she got** through it. Her **fever went down** and everything **she's just quarantined** because **her doc doesn't know** how long she, and by proxy I (as a carrier. **I haven't been tested but I've been in this house with her for the last weeks while she was sick**) will be contagious for. Obviously them coming over **is weird**, and idk why the hell I'd tell them that. They both **looked at me** with this weird disappointment but didn't say anything. then woke up*" (DJU).

Example 11 illustrates a not infrequent though characteristic confusion of tenses that stems from the nature of dream accounts. Here, first, the narrator logically uses the past to tag dream narration (*came over*, *told*), then the present for reality narration (*this is real*). Yet, in the following passage that is apparently related to the dream, the narrator continues in the present only to snap back to the past (*looked at me*) at the end. Thus, as such mixture of narrative tenses is rather untypical of the narrative (Fludernik 2003), we hypothesize that in dream accounts, the confusion of tenses is rooted in the very nature of the dream, when the real and the seeming are hard to differentiate for the narrator.

Similar confusion arises in dream accounts when the Past Perfect is used, as the vantage point that it tags does not allow to determine sufficient external context. In other words, it is not clear if, using the Past Perfect, the narrator renders a succession of dream events

or if there is a reference to real events that preceded this dream. For example:

(12) "*I get the idea to go to a park, seemingly associated with a holiday such as the fourth of July (that they do not celebrate in Australia). I look in a drawer **with a vague recall that Dennis** (half-brother on my mother's side) **had left items with me**"* (DJ).

In Example 12, alternating reality and dream spaces provides the context to identify the status of the last rendered event. The passage itself ***with a vague recall that Dennis** (half-brother on my mother's side) **had left items with me*** does not provide enough context to explicate if the narrator has a vague recall of real events or deals with their dream memory. Yet, the narrator interrupts the report with a parenthetic inclusion that apparently renders reality. This is a cue to interpret the event that follows the reality-marked inclusion as a part of the dream due to the position of its description beyond the parenthesis.

(13) "***The trip my housemate and I had planned to India*** *was, surprisingly, still going ahead. once on the plane I realised [I]'d not told anyone I was still going my annual leave from work had been cancelled and I didn't restart it, didn't hand over clients to colleagues or anything*" (DJU).

To illustrate the confusing nature of using the perfect verb forms as tags of reality vs. dream, as in Example 13, the narrator uses the Past Perfect twice (*I had planned*, *[I]'d not told*). As the context is insufficient, it still stays indefinite whether the narrator and her friend really planned a trip to India or this is just a dream fragment.

There is another example of the usage of the Past Perfect Continuous verb form that causes confusion in dream vs. reality navigation:

(14) "*My hip **had been hurting for years**, so my husband and some other guy decided to do an Xray*" (DJ).

From Example 14, it is not clear if this opening statement of the dream account relates to the narrator's dream (their dream memory) or their real condition. Hypothetically, the distinction here is not pivotal, as the narrator's dream self and their perspective at the moment of producing the narrative blend together. In other words, the deictic properties and verbalized dream self of the narrator coincide at this moment.

However, at the same time, narrators often mark the "false memory" they have in dreams to tag the space as a dream-related one, like in Example 15:

(15) "*Once inside I was directed to the Slytherin dorms so I could set up my own room with my stuff. **I 'remembered' getting a private test at home in the form of a letter that predicted the house of anyone touching it**" (DJ).*

Here, the narrator directly indicates their false memory via the appropriate phrase in inverted commas: *I **"remembered"***.

In the following Example 16, the narrator talks of the *assumption* they had in the dream (*the fact that (in the dream) the whole pandemic had been fabricated by the United States government*).

(16) "*I remember there was some secret, something huge, something bordering on horrific or creepy, that we somehow had caught onto. It was something to do with the pandemic. I can't quite remember, but think it had to do with the fact that **(in the dream) the whole pandemic had been fabricated** by the United States government in an attempt to nudge us closer to war with China, who the government wanted to go to war with for some reason **in the dream**" (DJU).*

This assumption results in the construction of a dream-tagged narrative space that renders events preceding other events within a dream, thus building 'a dream in a dream'. This is in full accord with Fludernik's surmise that narrative temporality is grounded in experientiality and not in the rigid story as a sequence or rendering events precisely (2003: 120). Thus, a dream report departs from the narrator's experiential reality that does not make simple sequences of events.

To illustrate the statement above, in Example 17, the verb tense is used with neither an explicit indication of dream vs. reality nor a "false" dream memory. Thus, the reader can make assumptions about the status of this information exclusively from the context:

(17) "*I got to a point where a long queue was waiting to exit the building and nobody was socially distancing. I got to the front door and looked back to see a familiar face. It looked like my old boss who we called Mr T, but in fact it was Edna. I got all emotional **because I remembered she had died 5 or so years ago**" (DJ).

Therefore, in dream narrative, tense markers are not effective as epistemic status indicators of the narrative spaces. This may be expounded by the fact that the vantage point of the narrator fluctuates as, hypothetically, the act of narration and the perception of their dream self-coincide in the narrator's mind.

3.2 Transitions between dream-world narrative spaces
Navigation across narrative spaces of a dream report may also be problematic due to shifts between the narrative spaces that amount to the same dream world. In the story, they provide for the linear narrative construction of the sequence of events. We differentiate the shifts between dream spaces as natural or extended transitions vs. concise and dynamic ones.

(18) "*I walked closer to see that they weren't just holes. They were graves. There a funeral was taking place for those who lost their lives during the Coronavirus. Two of those people being myself and my husband. I shouted to the vicar to tell him he had made a mistake, but he couldn't hear me. No mistake had been made. We were dead*" (DJU).

In Example 18, the rendered narrator's dream content allows for a gradual, natural shift of narrative spaces. The narrator traces her physical movement in her dream space (*I walked closer to see*) that generates another narrative space when she sees the graves and realizes what is happening (*They were graves. There a funeral was taking place*), gradually assuming that she and her husband have died of COVID-19.

As a rule, irrespective of the content, narratives tend to feature natural shifts between narrative spaces that extrapolate to each other.

Conversely, dream narratives may feature abrupt, illogical transitions between the scenes of the dream:

(19) "*Apparently I realized she also has the virus and is able to transform into an animal so she did out of panic. Problem? She has claws and scratched my back and it bled but I continue to swim, wondering what animal she is. After we arrive in America, I looked and saw that she was a tiger. Then I was suddenly in New York where one of my friend who did not have powers and did not go to North Korea*" (DJU).

Such markers as *to transform into*, *I looked and saw that*, *then I was suddenly* point to abrupt shifts between the dream scenes that we scheme in Figure 3:
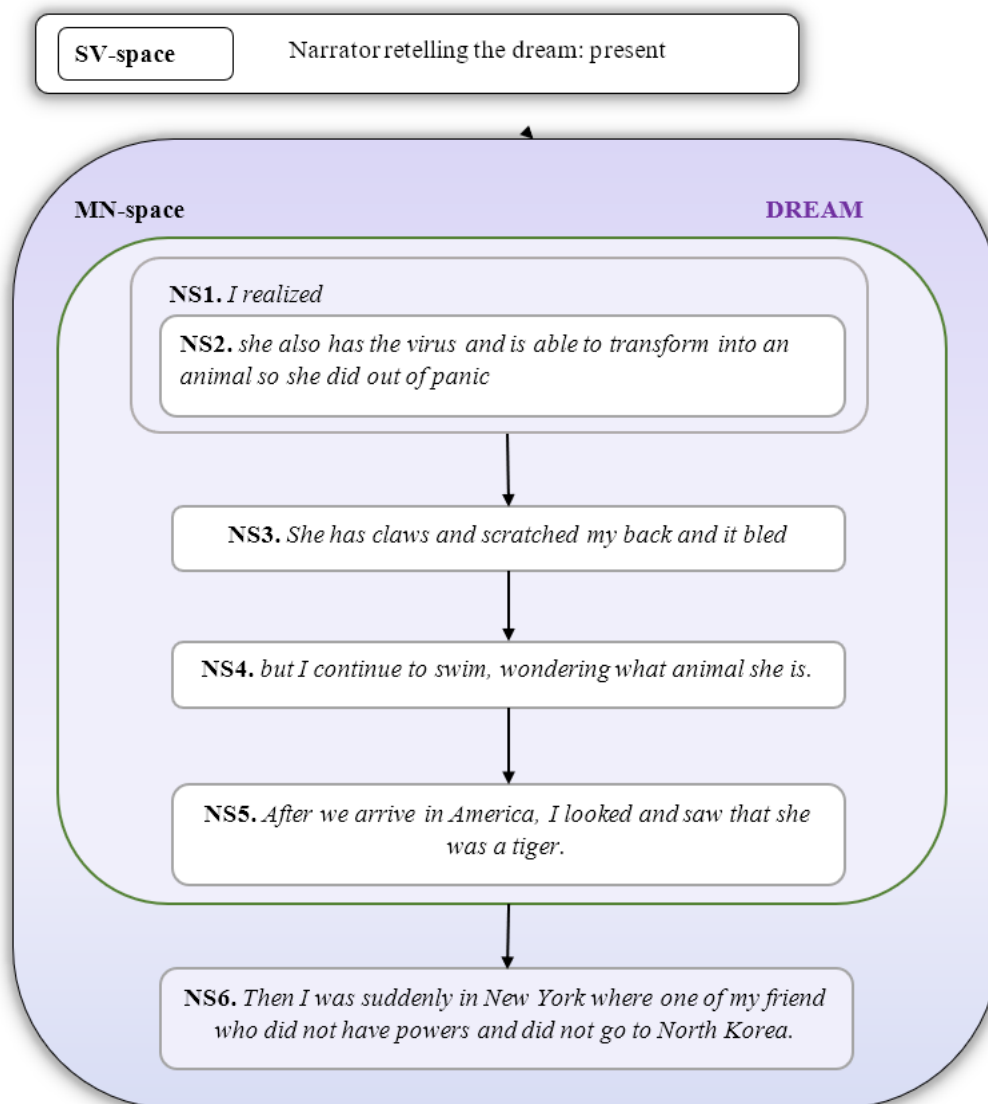
SV – story viewpoint; MN – main narrative; NS – narrative space

Figure 3. The model of linear dream narrative spaces navigation (Source: Own processing)

In the model, there are no real spaces construed since the reader just follows the homogenous, dream-related events with no references to reality as the SV-space indicates. However, the dynamic scene shifts in the dream narrative result in tense, irregular and sporadic construing narrative spaces (NS1-6) in terms of the main narrative (MN-space). Such scene shifts are quite typical of dream reports. They break space and time continuity between construed narrative spaces, the narrator remaining a stable element. Hence here the narrative unfolds following a rather untypical scheme. Narrative spaces demonstrate broken continuity, which is also inherent in dream reports as a specific narrative genre.

Dream reports feature various levels of continuity. As its extreme representation, in Example 20, the scenes do not have anything in common but the narrator. The abrupt shifts build a new narrative space without updating the previous one. As a navigation marker, the narrator monotonously uses the phrase *next scene*:

(20) "*I was hanging out with this group of people in this small front garden ... **Next scene;** I had to sit an exam in this big hall ... I got up from my desk and left feeling bad that had just failed my maths exam. **Next scene;** I had picked my mum up from this old people's home (she doesn't live in one in real life) but before had reached her room, she was walking out with her neighbour friends ... **Next scene;** I was now a 14-year old bey who had a lisp and lived in very poor country ... **Next scene;** I was on this family holiday. staying in this wooden cabin ... **Next scene;** I was at the supermarket. Covid 19 rules were in full swing and we all had to stand metres apart ...*" (DJU).

Some narrations, however, feature more elaborate transitions between scenes, making the reports easier to follow:

(21) "*... but **then I suddenly switched to a random girl's pov**. **this looks like an imagination** when I was telling story to Taka. [T]he girl seems to be a professor, and she was quite the genius. but then an accident occurred in her lab and most of the professors got in touch with the virus (mind you, covid was happening) so she ran away. the virus was so nasty that it chased her and ate everything on the way be it any kind of living beings. she chased her to the subway, she ran for her life. ran and ran and ran*" (DJU).

In Example 21, the narrator introduces the shift of the narrative space with an explicit indication of what it was like (*but then I suddenly switched to a random girl's pov*) and highlights what the scene shift felt like (*this looks like an imagination*).

To sum up, rendering one's dream experience with the use of verbal tools is significant in terms of narrative building. Dancygier states that "fragmented and ostensibly incoherent stories are indeed ultimate exercises in language use, because they stretch the cognitive abilities of 'making sense' to their limits" (2011: 11). In a dream experience, natural causal relations are distorted, which entails identifying the epistemic status of the narrative space as that of reality or dream. Besides this, scene shifting in dreams is a common practice. These factors account for abrupt scene shifts as a genre-specific feature of dream narratives that entails dynamic construction of narrative spaces as cognitive construal.

4. Conclusions

Modeling narrative configurations of dream reports as sequences of narrative spaces allows us to distinguish the patterns of navigation in dream- and reality-marked narrative spaces. We have established that narrative spaces in the dream report are distinguished as either dream or reality-related, since the narrator has to deploy linguistic means to tag the epistemic status of the information.

We have also pinpointed the means underlying the shifts between these narrative dimensions, that is dream and reality. The navigation means of tagging of the narrative space as either that of the dream-world or waking-world include explicit and implicit ones. Explicit means include the direct dream or reality tags that introduce the narrative space. Implicit means are contextual indications, such as contrast and concession conjunctions and adverbs, grammatical tenses, and adjectives that suggest the difference of the object, character, or scenario from the real one.

As for the relation between the dream-world and waking-world narratives, they are construed as concurrent and mutually updating spaces. Yet, their dynamic correlation results in two formally separate storylines. We propose to distinguish the ways of their correlation as either linear or parallel. At the same time, dream-world narrative spaces

stand out as primary, while waking-world-tagged narration is an auxiliary means that suggests the vantage point of the narrator.

For the linear configuration, the inclusion of metanarrative comments is provided in the parenthesis with an explicit indication of the space status, which is usually inherent in construing a waking-world narrative space. A linear waking-world narrative space is evoked by specific linguistic markers.

Parallel waking-world narrative spaces are not tagged specifically and are concurrent with the counterpart dream situation. Parallel narrative spaces in dream reports are marked by contextual means that juxtapose the narrated dream events and the narrator's real life. These parallel spaces are distinguished only on condition that the inferred contextual clue is possible to develop into a proposition.

List of abbreviations
DJ – Dream journal
DJU – Dream journal ultimate

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Résumé

The article focuses on the COVID-19 dream narrative in terms of cognitive narratology. The objective of the study is to characterize the relationship of dream and

reality narrative spaces as well as to pinpoint the means of navigation over them. The article is a case study of about 100 online dream reports that feature COVID-19 themes. The COVID-19 pandemic has overtaken the agenda in media discourse; moreover, dream reports reveal unconscious perceptions of the pandemic, which accounts for the relevance of the present research. Its basic method is narrative space modeling, which combines mental spaces and blending theories as its basis. The research divulges the typical narrative configuration of the dream report. It features two parallel dimensions of narrative spaces, that is the dream content and the auxiliary real-life context that serves as the vantage point of the narrative. The narrative spaces of the dream report manifest their inherent epistemic status as either dream-world or reality-world ones. The navigation means that signal the epistemic status of the narrative spaces split into explicit tags and contextual markers. Contextual markers include contrast and concession conjunctions and adverbs, grammatical tenses, and adjectives. Narrative space modeling allows for identifying two types of relationships between narrative spaces. In terms of space configuration, a real-world narrative space and dream-world narrative spaces may be either linear or parallel. In the linear configuration, a real-world narrative space may either precede/follow a meta-narrative comment or be inferred from linguistic prompts. Otherwise, a real-world narrative space may be concurrent or parallel with a dream space. In this case it conditions inference via contextual proposition.

Key words: dream narrative, cognitive narrative theory, navigating over narrative spaces, linear/parallel space configuration.