



Sharing as rescripting: Place manipulations on YouTube between narrative and social media affordances



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ABSTRACT

Drawing on sociolinguistic studies of language and place and on small stories insights and methods, I put forth *rescripting* as a social media-enabled practice of sharing that systematically exploits visual and/or verbal manipulations of the taleworld place of already circulated stories, so as to present the new tales as parody or satire of the originals. YouTube videos such as spoofs, memes, remixes, and mashups, form typical instances of rescripting, but other verbal activities should also be recognized as part of this practice, e.g. circulars of jokes about an incident on online blogs. Using as a case study a critical moment incident related to the Greek crisis that was repeatedly shared in social media, I examine rescripting as it occurs in the intersections between story making and social media affordances, arguing that it can productively open up the current sociolinguistic focus on resemiotizations of circulated activities. I show how changes in the place of the taleworld ultimately lead to changes in emplotment on the basis of the spatial semiotic repertoires associated with the new settings. Participation frameworks are decisively shaped by these changes, as commenters mainly engage with the current tale and telling, going along with the ostensibly 'fictional' scenarios and engaging in active storytelling, that is, creating further plots on their basis. I discuss the implications of rescripting place for the study of sharing practices and vernacular participation as well as for the study of place as constitutive of narrative plots.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Place, (small) stories and social media

The last decade has witnessed the development of a critical mass within sociolinguistics on the importance of place as a constitutive part of the local and historically shaped context of communicative activities (e.g. Blommaert et al., 2005; Georgakopoulou 2003; Scollon and Scollon, 2003). More than a setting, places have thus been documented as normative social arenas that systematically enable or constrain specific social actions, including language choices. This research has provided a counter-point to a longstanding emphasis on time, particularly in certain genres (e.g. narrative) by amply documenting the ways in which space as place, i.e. as lived experience and practised localities (De Certeau, 1984) can shape speakers' choice of semiotic resources. Pennycook and Otsuji (2015) have captured this profound influence of specific sites of engagement on communication with the concept of spatial repertoires, which emerge out of the interconnections of linguistic resources, activities and places.

In the study of everyday life storytelling, the shift of focus to place as a narrative resource has come after a traditional privileging of time and temporality as an organizing principle of a story's plot. The area has thus moved decisively away from backdrop toward constitutive accounts of space (Baynham, 2015), where time and/or place, are viewed as pivotal in the storytelling event, at the level of both taleworld and telling. To be specific, the interlocutors' shared socio-symbolic associations of lived places have been found to be invoked in the taleworld of conversational stories, so as to create possibilities for certain plots and not others, for assessing characters in specific ways and not others (Georgakopoulou, 2003). These associations in turn connect with the 'here and now' of a storytelling event, joining in the host of resources through which tellers signal relationships between the taleworld and the telling situation (Baynham, 2015). To put this differently, the study of place has become part of a two-tier analysis of affordances, constraints and norms, both within the taleworld (the narrated) and on the occasion of telling (the act of narrating). This analysis has become part of the exploration of how tellers present themselves through stories.

This fruitful line of inquiry, which enhances a contextualized understanding of semiotic choices in stories, is scarce in stories that develop as part of social media communication. Its insights, however, into the role of place in stories can be productively

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drawn upon. In doing so in this article, I view *every space as place*: as an experienced, lived, and practised social arena by social actors. Whether it refers to the taleworld or to where stories are actually produced, place is an integral part of socioculturally informed everyday life practices, shaping communication, including stories, and being constituted by it, through the participants' interactional dynamics. On this basis, I opt for the term *place* over a notion of *space* as an abstract entity or a physical location devoid of social action. I also employ the term *place* and *site (of engagement)* as interchangeable, in line with the use of 'site' in previous work of mine (Georgakopoulou 2007) and in practice-based approaches to language (Scollon and Scollon, 2003). I take it that *social media sites* are also practised as *places* that come with affordances and normativities about which and how stories are produced. It can also be assumed that the ways in which places will be invoked and narrated in a story's taleworld will interrelate with what is done in the acts of narrating on a social media platform, e.g. a story's local functions, uptake, circulation, etc.

Empirical work is a long way off a full charting of the above. Notable exceptions include studies of Facebook that have begun to show how spatial arrangements on social media platforms can effectively shape the ways in which contributions are organized and how users can respond to previous posts and establish coherence amongst them (e.g. Frobenius and Harper, 2015; also, see Locher et al on Second Life, this SI). In addition, it has been shown that specific language and visual choices on YouTube videos can invoke specific places and ideologies of localism, thus signaling aspects of the producer's identities (Mendoza-Denton, 2015). The above studies are, however, not pitched to narrative and so there is still much scope for scrutinizing the narrative constitutions of place on the one hand and the in situ production of stories on the other. My starting point is that the intersection of narrative and social media affordances will play a key role in constitutions of place, be it in the taleworld or the occasion of telling. This should not be viewed as a deterministic perspective but as a productive engagement with previous insights into the role of stories in context. A volume of research in everyday stories, be they big or small, in face-to-face or interview contexts, has documented the role of narrative in enabling specific communicative affordances. These include the imaginative and affective presentation of self as grounded in specific spatiotemporal realities and the ability to invoke other worlds, real or possible, to bear on the here-and-now of the narrating act, but also to position self over time and across places (see De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2012): chs 1 and 5). Establishing more or less meaningful connections between people, place, time and events lies at the heart of interweaving narrative plots. Sociolinguistic studies of story-telling have also demonstrated how these connections are always done in context and in interaction with participants (idem: chs 3 and 4). These insights should be tested out vis-à-vis the multi-semioticity, multi-authorship, and wide distribution of communicative activities that social media platforms have been found to enable (Boyd, 2010). The two-tier conceptualization of place between tale and telling, for instance, can be expected to be part of multiple arrangements that involve the multi-sited transposition of a single story beyond a single communicative event. The place in which each 'new' telling occurs can also be expected to interact with the place of the taleworld, creating multi-layered relationships between places of taleworlds and places of tellings. In this way, the study of place in stories on social media promises fruitful avenues of inquiry as well as posing challenges to longstanding dichotomies between the here and now vs. there and then in the conceptualization of stories.

In previous work, I have begun to respond to such challenges by showing how stories on social media call for a rethinking of the mainstay analytical vocabulary for narrative research. The need for

this is increasingly recognized: in fact, the extent and ways in which narrative dimensions are being transformed on social media have recently become a cutting edge narrative inquiry focus (e.g. see Page, (2012, 2015)). To take one example, I have shown (Georgakopoulou, 2013a) in the case of breaking news, a prevalent genre of story making on social media platforms (e.g. Facebook, Twitter), that the often used distinction between temporality in the tale and the telling does not work: the recency and ongoingness of events at the same time as the telling occasion produce moments of what I have called *narrative stancetaking*, where the teller is in a position to announce that something has just happened and to tell more and update if necessary. I have argued that this incipient temporalization of a story (e.g. *this has just happened; this is happening now*) works on the intersection between narrative and social media affordances as a rhetorical resource, a 'display' communication act that licenses the announcement of the mundane and the trivial, and that links tellability with the ability to tell now. I have also shown how acts of teller positioning through this kind of temporality have implications for modes of audience engagement (Georgakopoulou, 2015).

I have undertaken this work within small stories research (Georgakopoulou, 2007), a paradigm for narrative and identities analysis, developed so as to account conceptually and analytically for a range of narrative activities that had not been sufficiently studied in conversational contexts nor had their importance for the interlocutors' identity work been recognized. These mainly involved stories that present fragmentation and open-endedness of tellings, exceeding the confines of a single speech event and resisting a neat categorization of beginning-middle-end. They were invariably heavily co-constructed, rendering the sole teller's story ownership problematic. They reported mundane, ordinary and in some cases, trivial events from the teller's everyday life, rather than big complications or disruptions. In this way, small stories research prefigured the current situation when social media affordances have made stories with such features much more widely available and visible in public arenas of communication, through circulation (see Georgakopoulou (2013a)).

1.2. Rescripting place and resemiotization

Drawing on previous studies of place in conversational stories and on small stories methods of analysis, in this article, I argue that a specific social media sharing practice involves what I call *rescripting*, a media-enabled practice that involves visually and/or verbally manipulating previously circulated stories so as to create alternative stories, that are offered and taken up as humorous, satirical takes on the original story. I will show that this creative manipulation mainly involves changing the place of the original tale on its own or along with other aspects of the plot, including the characters, so that a 'new' tale emerges with 'new' characters, 'new' narrator, 'new' audiences, etc.¹ YouTube videos such as spoofs, memes, remixes, and mashups, form a main site of rescripting but, as I will show, other (less visual) activities of social media circulation should also be recognized as part of this practice, e.g. circulars of jokes formulated out of a specific incident on online blogs.

I will show how manipulations of place within the taleworld, as a key aspect of rescripting, interconnect with what kinds of stories are produced and taken up and how. By altering the place in which events occur and by locating characters in other places, users

¹ In this key-aspect of changes to plot lies my rationale for 'coining' the term *rescripting* over available terms such as 'retelling' and 'resemiotization' (see discussion below). The term *script* and *scripting* have been often employed in (narrative) psychological approaches but here I draw on *script* in its lay meanings: films and plays come with scripts. Social media visual and auditory 'productions', I argue, often alter the 'scripts' of already circulated incidents.

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