Semantic foundations for narratology
Workshop proposal for ESSLLI 2024 (Leuven)

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1 Motivation and description

Seminal papers in the semantics of fiction questioned whether language works in the same way in fictional as opposed to non-fictional texts, see (Macdonald 1968)[1]; the status of truth in fiction as opposed to truth *simpliciter* (Lewis 1978); the semantic contribution of fictional names as opposed to real names (Kripke 1973/2013). Since (Walton 1990), things changed. Walton introduced a powerful notion of make-believe, and defended the idea that linguistic fictions (novels, epics, plays, etc.) are games of make-believe. Consequently, at a certain level of abstraction, we can say that novels are props in games of make-believe, just like dolls and toy cars. Within this Waltonian paradigm, the question for linguists becomes: is it possible to single out linguistic fictions from other games of make-believe? In other words: is there a common feature of all fictional texts, construed as props in games of make-believe, which distinguishes them from other non-textual props (viz. toys, paintings, films, etc.)?

The main contender emerging from the literatur is what Everett (2013) calls the "report model", which says that the readers should "treat the fictional text or narrated story essentially as if it were purported factual report" (p. 32). This model aligns with what narratologists, following Genette (1980), call the "fictional contract", which "precisely consists in denying that the fiction is a fiction" (Genette 2004: 23). We, readers, are supposed to imagine that the fictional events are real by pretending, or make-believing, or simulating that the linguistic material we have in front of us is a reliable source of information.[2]

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[1] The problem was later recast within speech-act theory by Searle (1975)

[2] Note that though talking about "report" may suggest that the report is in a *written* form, but that is not the case. The report principle does not say, and it is compatible with oral narration. For a recent, critical discussion of the claim that fictional narration is essentially a simulation of a conversational setting, see (Fludernik 2002).

Consequently, this Waltonian "functionalist turn" (Woodward 2014), (Friend 2016) pushes the semantics of fiction toward narratology. Indeed, if the report model is on the right track, then narration becomes an essential element in explaining how readers distinguishing fictional texts from non-fictional texts, access the fictional content (what is true in the fiction or not), and interpret fictional names. This narrative component can be construed as a mediation device between the real reader and the fictional content. There appears to be a place for a narrator addressing a narratee; a place not necessarily internal to the fiction. This distinction between two layers within fictional discours has been used by narratologist to explain stylistic effects; by philosophers of fiction to solve theoretical puzzles; and also by semanticists to model how fictional discourse works.[3]

More precisely, at the interface between narratology and formal semantics, at least three very active research programs can be identified. First, the modelling of tense in fiction: in a seminal work, Vuillaume (1990) investigates the temporal dimension of the "secondary fiction" relative to the "primary fiction"; more recently dynamic semantics has been used to formalise tense in fiction (see for instance part 2 of the recent (Lee 2020), but also Sebastian Bücking's recent work on "temporal metalepsis from a linguistic perspective"). Second, names in fiction: Predelli (2020) recently applied his distinction between the "fictional periphery" and the storyworld to develop a millian theory of fictional names (a view he calls "radical fictionalism"). Third, some topics in "super-semantics", applying a narratological ideas to non-linguistic material: see e.g. recent works in SDRT by Emar Maier ((Maier 2023) and "Pictorial language and linguistics"; or, more generally, the recent collection (Hübl 2018)).

It is high time semanticists of fiction meet up and discuss these results with narratologists: this will be the main aim of this workshop. Of course, both fields are institutionally distant from each other, and the methods and specific problems from both fields differ. However, Walton's broad functionalist framework can help bridge the gap between the two communities.

In particular, some narratological expertise could prove useful to assess some recent controversial notions, for it might be that these notions are not so controversial from a narratological perspective. Especially those notions having a narratological flavour like, e.g., the "fictional periphery" (or "secondary fiction"), the possibility of "narrator-less" fictions, and the distinction between the

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[3]Walton (1990)'s distinguishes between a "work world" and a "game world", which echoes the influential structuralist model for narration – now standard narratology as for example introduced in (Culler 2011) – which distinguishes between *story* and *discourse*; see also: *histoire* vs. *discours*, *fabula* vs. *sjužet*, narrated vs. narrating, fiction vs. narration, *Erzälte Welt* vs. *Besprochene Welt*, content plane vs. expression plane, ... On all these pairs, see (Prince 2003) for narratological references.

fictional vs. metafictional statements (encoding the in-universe vs. real world perspective). In the other direction, some recent work in narratology explicitly questioning foundational issue can be discussed from a semantic point of view. For instance, Monika Fludernik developed her work on second-person narration (Fludernik 1994) into a challenge to "realist communicative models" of narration (see esp. (Fludernik 2002) and (Fludernik 2009)); another promising point of contact is the study of metanarration and metafictions (Neumann and Nünning 2015), whose relfexive, paradoxical flavour was acknowledged early on to touch upon the key concepts in semantics of fiction, viz. reference and truth; see, e.g., Kripke (1973/2013)'s famous non-discussion of these cases as abnormal, which was followed by virtually every semanticist of fiction since.

2   Call for paper

In line with the above, I welcome submissions on the following (non-exhaustive) list of topics:

- The linguistic interest of the fictional periphery (or secondary fiction): modelling reference, truth and tense in fiction

- Theories of narration across media

- Debates about the possibility and interest of narrator-less fictions

- Theorising about the fictional vs. metafictional distinction

- Second-person narratives and theorising about the narratee

- Linguistic metafictions and their relevance for a general theory of fiction

Anyone interested to present a paper in this workshop is invited to send a 2 pages abstract (12 pt font; 1in or 2.5cm margins) — with an extra page for references of figures — to louis.rouille@uliege.be by April 15 (the object should contain "ESSLLI24").

3   References

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