

University of Groningen

Fiction and common ground

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DOI:
[10.33612/diss.177806543](https://doi.org/10.33612/diss.177806543)

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2021

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):
Semeijn, M. (2021). *Fiction and common ground: a workspace account*. [Thesis fully internal (DIV), University of Groningen]. University of Groningen. <https://doi.org/10.33612/diss.177806543>

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3 Unofficial common grounds

This chapter is a rewritten and significantly expanded version of the first three sections of ‘A Stalnakerian analysis of metafictional statements’ in *Proceedings of 21st Amsterdam Colloquium*. A small part of subsection 3.4.2 is adapted from ‘Revisiting the ‘wrong kind of object’ problem’ which is a co-authored paper with Prof. Dr. Edward N. Zalta in *Organon F*. The most substantial differences between this chapter and the proceedings paper include: First, the inclusion of an introduction to the basic puzzle of fictional discourse as the need to quarantine fictional content (section 3.1). Second, the addition of a formalisation of the unofficial common ground accounts in the DRT formalism and an introduction of DRT (section 3.3.2). Third, the inclusion of a more elaborate discussion of parafictional discourse and different semantic analyses of it.

3.1 Introduction

The current and the next chapter deal with the central puzzle that has kick-started the study of the semantics of fiction: How do we model the difference between fictional and non-fictional talk? In a dynamic semantic framework this boils down to the question of what kind of context updates result from assertions on the one hand and so-called ‘fictional statements’ on the other. Reconsider the example of Tolkien’s assertion about his friend C.S. Lewis (1):

- (1) C.S. Lewis was born in Belfast.

Such non-fictional speech acts have to be distinguished from fictional statements, i.e., statements that are part of a fictional narrative. For instance, Tolkien’s written statement (2) which is a quote from *The Hobbit*:

- (2) In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit.

I would like to thank three anonymous Amsterdam Colloquium 2017 reviewers for valuable input and suggestions.

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Whereas assertions such as (1) are statements about the real world that are actually true or false, fictional statements are usually analysed as neither true nor false. Rather, they are fictional truth-makers; Tolkien's writing of (2) makes it true in the world of *The Lord of the Rings* that a hobbit lived in a hole in the ground.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, in Stalnaker's dynamic framework, assertions are defined as proposals to update the common ground between speaker and hearer. For instance, by asserting (1), Tolkien proposes that it becomes common ground that C.S. Lewis was born in Belfast. Because the common ground framework is modelled after cooperative information exchanges – where people share beliefs through assertions to increase their shared background – it is challenging to model conversations in which people say things they believe to be (strictly) false, such as when people tell a fictional story (e.g., Tolkien does not actually believe that a hobbit lived in a hole in the ground). To illustrate, fictional statements such as (2) cannot be modelled as assertions, i.e., as simple updates of the common ground. On a simple de re belief-based conception of common ground¹ this would entail that, after fictional statement (2), it is common belief between Tolkien a and myself b that in a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit (p), i.e., $\mathbf{B}_a p$, $\mathbf{B}_b p$, $\mathbf{B}_a \mathbf{B}_b p$, $\mathbf{B}_b \mathbf{B}_a p$, etc. Such an analysis quickly runs into difficulties.

First of all, p leads to an inconsistent common ground. Arguably, p implies that hobbits exist (q) and hence this also becomes common ground (i.e., $\mathbf{B}_a q$, $\mathbf{B}_b q$, etc.). However, before engaging with *The Lord of the Rings* it was probably already common ground between Tolkien and myself that there are no such creatures as hobbits (i.e., $\mathbf{B}_a \neg q$, $\mathbf{B}_b \neg q$, etc.). An update that leads to an inconsistent common ground is, in itself, not necessarily problematic if it is clear how to resolve the inconsistency (see section 3.3.1 and chapter 8). However, if we model fictional statements as assertions, inconsistencies *are* problematic because it becomes unclear how to proceed; it is unclear which of the inconsistent propositions should be removed from our common ground to make it consistent again. While it is very unintuitive to remove q from the common ground because it is so obviously true to Tolkien and myself that hobbits do not exist, removing p from the common ground defeats our original purpose of modelling the updates resulting from fictional statements.

¹The same issues that are described below – concerning inconsistency and quarantining – come up on *in sensu composito* or acceptance-based conceptions of common ground.

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Second, even if the proposition expressed by some fictional statement is not inconsistent with our previous common ground in any obvious way (e.g., some of the propositions that are expressed by a ‘realistic’ fictional narrative such as Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* ‘might as well have been true’), we still would not want to admit that this proposition *truly* becomes common ground. At least, this fictional information is not common ground in the same sense as it is common ground between Tolkien and myself that C.S. Lewis was born in Belfast. We do not mix fact and fiction in this way. Rather, fictional content should somehow be ‘quarantined’ from non-fictional content.

In the current chapter I will discuss and present formalisations of existing Stalnakerian accounts that model fictional discourse and the quarantining of fictional content: Eckardt’s (2014) and Stokke’s (2013, 2018) ‘unofficial common ground accounts’ (section 3.2). I will critique both accounts on how they deal with two conflicting intuitions concerning fictional content. First, that fictional truths (e.g., that hobbits exist) are only accepted while we engage with the fiction. Second, that we do, somehow, retain information about fictional truths even after engaging with the fiction. This allows us to properly interpret a continuation of the fictional discourse after a break and engage in so-called ‘parafictional discourse’ (section 3.4).

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Eckardt’s (2014) and Stokke’s (2013, 2018) unofficial common ground accounts are Stalnakerian accounts that provide a way to separate fictional content from non-fictional content.² In both Eckardt’s linguistically motivated approach and Stokke’s philosophically motivated approach, a sharp distinction is drawn between fiction interpretation and non-fiction interpretation. This is in line with the traditional and dominant theory of fiction (e.g., Currie (1990); Walton (1990)) according to which fiction interpretation (which involves the cognitive attitude of imagination) is fundamentally different from non-fiction interpretation (which involves belief). Whereas an assertion that expresses a proposition p is a mandate to *believe* p , a fic-

²See Keiser (forthcoming) for a recent critical discussion of Stokke’s account of assertion and the distinction between official and unofficial common grounds. See also Green (2017) who also suggested that modeling fictional discourse requires positing multiple common grounds between interlocutors.

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tional statement that expresses p is a mandate to *imagine* p in the game of make-believe licensed by the fictional narrative.

Likewise, in Stokke's and Eckardt's Stalnakerian frameworks, assertions and fictional statements update the common ground in fundamentally different ways. Assertions are defined as proposals to update, in Stokke's terminology, the 'official common ground'. This is the set of mutually presupposed propositions concerning actual states of affairs. For instance, after assertion (1) the *official* common ground between Tolkien and his addressee is updated with the proposition that C.S. Lewis was born in Belfast. Fictional statements, on the other hand, are defined as proposals to update or create an 'unofficial common ground'³ related to the relevant fictional narrative. This is the set of propositions that are mutually presupposed by the addressee and author of a fictional story while engaging with the fiction, i.e., those that are updated with the propositions expressed by the narrative. For instance, after fictional statement (2), the *unofficial* common ground between Tolkien and his reader that is specifically related to Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* saga is updated with the proposition that there lived a hobbit in a hole in the ground. Because we normally engage in different fictional narratives, a typical 'complete common ground' between two people will contain one official common ground concerning actual states of affairs, and several unofficial common grounds related to different fictions (e.g., the common ground between a friend and myself may consist of one official common ground, a *The Lord of the Rings* unofficial common ground, a *Harry Potter* unofficial common ground, a *Pride and Prejudice* unofficial common ground, etc.).⁴

Unofficial common grounds have to be construed as acceptance-based; Tolkien and I do not actually *believe* but merely *accept* that there is a hobbit called Frodo, believe that the other accepts this, etc. The separation of unofficial common grounds and the official common ground allows us to construe the official common ground (for now)⁵ as belief-based; Tolkien

³In Eckardt's terminology: proposals to update or create STORY_0 .

⁴Alternatively, following the 'fragmented mind' programme (see e.g., David (2015)), one could formulate an account involving *one* compartmentalized common ground. What are unofficial common grounds in Stokke's and Eckardt's accounts, are different compartments related to different fictions in this framework. Beliefs concerning actual states of affairs (part of the official common ground in the unofficial common ground accounts) are also structured in compartments of the same common ground.

⁵See chapter 5.

and I both *believe* that C.S. Lewis was born in Belfast, believe that the other believes this, etc.

3.3 Formalisation

3.3.1 Sets of propositions

We can represent the complete common ground (C) as a n -tuple of one official common ground (C_0), and several numbered unofficial common grounds (C_1, \dots, C_n). Here both the official common ground and unofficial common grounds are defined as sets of possible world propositions (rather than sets of possible worlds):

$$C = \langle C_0, C_1, \dots, C_n \rangle$$

Assertions are defined as proposals to update (*) the official common ground:

$$C +_A p = \langle C_0 * p, C_1, \dots, C_n \rangle$$

To model how fictional statements update unofficial common grounds, we must distinguish between two cases: Either a fictional statement is a proposal to update an already existing unofficial common ground (e.g., when continuing to read *The Lord of the Rings*), or a fictional statement is a proposal to create a new unofficial common ground (C_{BASE}) and update this common ground (e.g., when starting to read a new fictional novel):

$$C +_{Fi} p = \begin{cases} \langle C_0, C_1, \dots, C_{i-1}, C_i * p, C_{i+1}, \dots, C_n \rangle & \text{if } 1 \leq i \leq n, \\ \langle C_0, C_1, \dots, C_n, C_{BASE} * p \rangle, & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases}$$

This formalisation raises two questions: First, what exactly is the content of C_{BASE} ? In other words, what is mutually presupposed by the addressee and author of a fictional story when starting to engage in a new fictional narrative? Is C_{BASE} a copy of the official common ground ($C_{BASE} = C_0$), a tabula rasa ($C_{BASE} = \emptyset$), or something in between (see e.g., [Lewis \(1978\)](#), [Ryan \(1980\)](#) or [Lamarque \(1990\)](#))? In the formalisations presented here I assume that C_{BASE} is a copy of the official common ground between speaker and hearer and hence contains all mutually presupposed propositions concerning actual states of affairs. Assuming that C_{BASE} is a tabula rasa, or

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something in between a tabula rasa and a copy of the official common ground (cf. Eckardt (2014), see also footnote 7), is also compatible with the unofficial common ground accounts but would lead to different formalisations.

Assuming that C_{BASE} is a copy of the official common ground enables us to resolve anaphoric links in the unofficial common ground, so when a novel mentions terrorist attacks in Paris, we already have a ‘discourse referent’ for that city, and all kinds of background information predicated thereof. This is in line with the idea that we’re never interpreting a text in a vacuum, but understand it against a background or importation of factual information about the actual world, as in Lewis’ (1978) counterfactual analyses of truth in fiction, Ryan’s (1980) Principle of Minimal Departure, Walton’s (1990) Reality and Mutual Belief Principles, and especially Friend’s (Friend (2017)) Reality Assumption. In all these theories, fictional worlds are assumed to be as much as possible like (or, in Lewisian terms ‘as close as possible to’) the real world as the story permits.⁶ Assuming that C_{BASE} is a copy of the official common ground not only allows us to import information into unofficial common grounds that we intuitively find true in for instance *The Lord of the Rings* (e.g., that the sun rises in the east) but also information that we may find difficult to accept as true in *The Lord of the Rings* (e.g., that Paris is the capital of France or that Tolkien wrote a book called *The Lord of the Rings*). However, the alternatives (i.e., analysing C_{BASE} as a *tabula rasa* or something in between) are very difficult to make precise. Both options have to involve some kind of accommodation of the information necessary to appropriately interpret the fictional narrative.⁷ The difficulty lies in specifying exactly what information should enter the common ground and what information shouldn’t. For example, in order to appropriately interpret the fictional story that mentions terrorist attacks in Paris, the unofficial common ground will at least have to include the information that Paris is the capital of France. But this information is only comprehensible if it also contains background information about what France is. This background information will then inevitably refer to yet many other things that again need further accom-

⁶See Franzén (forthcoming) for an in depth discussion of the Reality Principle.

⁷In fact, Eckardt opts for an analysis where new unupdated unofficial common grounds are something in between a copy of the official common ground and a tabula rasa; they specify a very unrestricted set of worlds $STORY_0$ (e.g., it is not common ground that frogs cannot speak at the start of a fictional discourse) that is updated with appropriate content as the fictional discourse proceeds.

modation of information. Hence it is unclear where such accommodation processes end.

The second question raised by the formalism is about the $*$ operator. Updating a common ground with some proposition p is usually formalised as $C \cup \{p\}$ rather than $C * p$, when common grounds are defined as sets of propositions ($C \cap p$ when common grounds are defined as sets of possible worlds). However, especially with fictional statements, simply joining sets of propositions can lead to inconsistent common grounds. For instance, given that we assume C_{BASE} to be a copy of the official common ground, C_{BASE} will contain the information that hobbits do not exist.⁸ Thus when we come across (2) when we start to read *The Hobbit*, taking the union of the sets of propositions leads to an inconsistent unofficial common ground. We require an operator that is suitable for such inconsistent updates and tells us how to resolve them (e.g., a belief revision operator, a Lewisian operator or a probability distribution update). Such an operator would in the above case of reading *The Hobbit* have to entail that after an update with (2), it is unofficial common ground that there lived a hobbit in a hole in the ground and *not* unofficial common ground that hobbits do not exist. I will elaborate on one such belief revision update mechanism developed by [Maier and Semeijn](#) (forthcoming) for modelling such fiction updates in chapter 8. For now we may simply assume that $*$ denotes the kind of operator described.

3.3.2 Discourse representation structures

In most of this dissertation I will use the box notation of Discourse Representation Theory (DRT) developed by [Kamp \(1981\)](#) to represent common grounds. In this subsection I will first briefly introduce the basics of the DRT formalism⁹ and then use it to represent the unofficial common ground accounts.

⁸In case the reader finds it unintuitive that this is common ground (and hence that Tolkien also accepted this) at the start of the fictional discourse, see the discussion in section 8.2.

⁹For a more elaborate introduction to basic DRT syntax and semantics see [Geurts et al. \(2016\)](#); [Kamp and Reyle \(1993\)](#).

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Introducing DRT

DRT offers a formalism to model dynamic context updates of (multi-sentence) discourse.¹⁰ This context is represented as a structured entity in so-called Discourse Representation Structures (DRS's). Mirroring the debate in dynamic semantics over what a conversational context exactly is, DRS's have been used to represent the context interpreted as a Stalnakerian common ground (e.g., Heim (1982); Groenendijk and Stokhof (1991); van der Sandt (1992)) and have been used to represent the context interpreted as an agent's individual mental state (e.g., Geurts (1999); Kamp (2015); Maier (2017)). As the present aim is to define speech acts in terms of common ground updates, here DRS's represent Stalnakerian common grounds.¹¹

To illustrate DRT's box notation, consider assertion (1) in a straightforward cooperative information exchange. In DRT, noun phrases or 'NP's' (e.g., the proper name 'C.S. Lewis') in a discourse are mapped to 'discourse referents' placed under several conditions. A common ground updated with the proposition that C.S. Lewis was born in Belfast is represented as follows:

(12)

x
Lewis(x) born.in.Belfast(x)

The top part of the DRS introduces a discourse referent. We may think of this as akin to existential quantification. Box (12) thus contains the information that there is an x . The bottom part of the DRS introduces conditions that specify properties of and relations between discourse referents. Hence, (12) also contains the information that x is named C.S. Lewis and that x was born in Belfast.

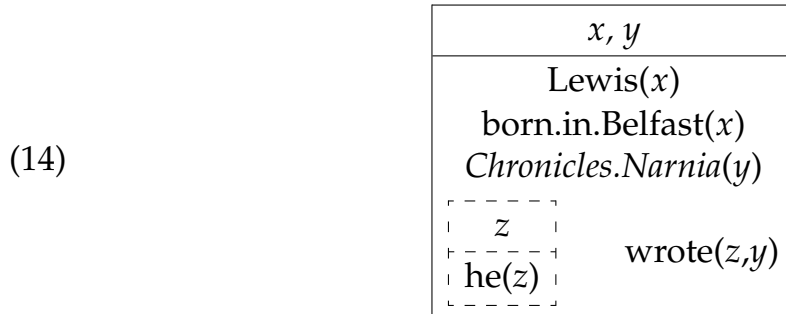
Subsequent assertions will update DRS (12) by adding more discourse referents and conditions as the discourse unfolds. For instance, suppose Tolkien continued his discourse with (13):

(13) He wrote *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

¹⁰A similar theory has been developed by Heim (1982) independently.

¹¹Later in this dissertation, when I focus on situations where the hearer's and the speaker's conceptions of what is common belief diverge (e.g., successful deceptive lies (chapter 5) or cases of unreliable narration (chapter 8)), I will suggest that it is more interesting to model part of the hearer's beliefs, i.e., what they consider to be common ground.

The DRT formalism allows us (amongst other things) to model how and when anaphoric references in an ongoing discourse work. First, we update the DRS with the information expressed in (13) interpreted ‘on its own’:

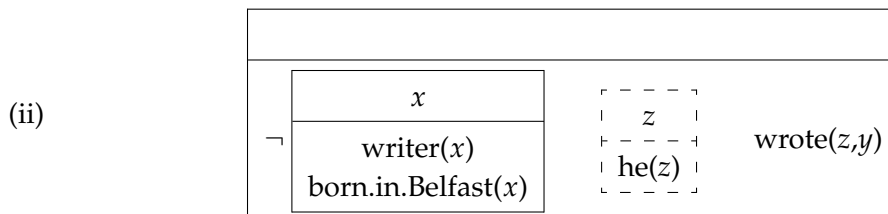


As (14) shows, a new discourse referent is added for the new NP introduced in the discourse (i.e., ‘*The Chronicles of Narnia*’). Moreover, the pronoun ‘he’ in (13) triggers the presupposition that there is a masculine entity (denoted by the dashed box) (cf. van der Sandt (1992)) and we update the DRS with the information that this masculine entity wrote y . Anaphora resolution in DRT involves equating discourse referents introduced by anaphora with appropriate and accessible¹² discourse referents in a way that leads to a maximally coherent final output DRS. For instance, we resolve the presupposition in (14) by replacing all occurrences of z with x :



¹²Intuitively, a discourse referent is accessible if it is equally or less deeply embedded in the DRS (see Geurts et al. (2016) for specifics). For instance, x would not be accessible to y if (13) followed a statement such as (i) because x would be embedded under a negation:

- (i) No writer was born in Belfast.



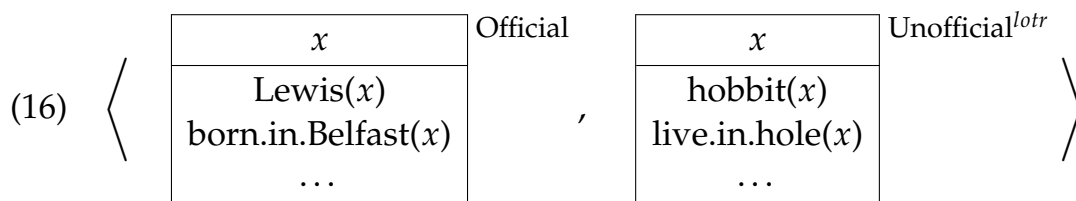
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The information expressed by the entire discourse is thus that there is an entity x that is called Lewis, there is an entity y that is called *The Chronicles of Narnia*, x was born in Belfast and x wrote y .

DRS's are thus representations of the information expressed in a particular discourse as it unfolds. Hence DRT includes a 'middle level' between language and the world; discourse determines certain DRS structures and these in turn can be true about or 'verified by' the world. DRS's are verified in a model M by an 'embedding function' f from discourse referents to individuals. For instance, DRS (15) is verified by f in M iff the domain of f includes at least x and y and according to M , $f(x)$ is called Lewis and was born in Belfast, $f(y)$ is called *The Chronicles of Narnia* and $f(x)$ wrote $f(y)$.

Unofficial common grounds in DRT

Complete common grounds, containing an official common ground and (several) unofficial common grounds, can also be represented with DRS's. For instance, the complete common ground between Tolkien and myself updated with Tolkien's assertion (1) and fictional statement (2) from *The Lord of the Rings (lotr)* is represented as follows:



Here I assume that the official common ground between Tolkien and his reader already contained all sorts of background information before the discourse started (e.g., that water is H_2O and that Paris is the capital of France) represented by the '...'. Because a new unofficial common ground is a copy of the current official common ground, this information is also included in the unofficial common ground for *The Lord of the Rings*.

3.4 Two conflicting intuitions

Now that I have presented the basic motivations for and formalisations of the unofficial common ground accounts, I will turn to criticizing the accounts in this section. I will argue that the accounts fail to account for two

prima facie conflicting intuitions concerning the temporary acceptance of fictional truths.

3.4.1 Permanent or temporary unofficial common grounds

To grasp the following discussion, it is important to keep in mind a crucial difference between Stokke's (2013; 2018) and Eckardt's (2014) frameworks. In Stokke's account, unofficial common grounds are essentially temporary and are contrasted with "more permanent, 'official', common grounds" (Stokke, 2013, p.53). Unofficial common grounds exist only for the purpose and duration of the fictional discourse. Because we engage with many different fictions over the course of our lives, a typical complete common ground will thus consist of one permanent official common ground and several temporary unofficial common grounds that last as long as the relevant fictional discourse lasts.

On the other hand, Eckardt does not discuss whether unofficial common grounds are temporary or permanent. On the simplest construal of Eckardt's theory, which I will assume in what follows, unofficial common grounds are just as permanent as the 'normal' official common ground, i.e., once created, unofficial common grounds continue to exist alongside the official common ground and interlocutors can continue to switch between official and unofficial common grounds in subsequent discourse. Usually, a complete common ground will thus consist of one official common ground and an ever-growing number of coexisting unofficial common grounds that continue to be accessible.

3.4.2 Fictional and parafictional discourse

Analysing unofficial common grounds as essentially temporary allows Stokke to account for the intuition that the acceptance of fictional truths is temporary. Intuitively, I for example only *momentarily* accept that hobbits exist for the purpose of reading *The Lord of the Rings*. Once I stop engaging with the fictional discourse, I no longer accept this. However, there is another, prima facie conflicting, intuition that we want to account for when modelling our engagement with fiction: There is a strong sense in which I *do* retain some information about fictional content *after* engaging with the narrative. This is what allows me to continue properly interpreting fictional discourse even after a break. For instance, even after taking a break

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in reading *The Lord of the Rings*, I am able to correctly interpret (17) when I pick up the novel again:

(17) Gollum [...] held aloft the ring.

I can correctly interpret (17) because I know what Ring Tolkien is referring to and who Gollum is. Somehow, this information is still common ground between (and hence accessible to) the people that engaged with the novel. Moreover, it allows me to engage in a discussion of what is true in a particular fiction I have engaged in. For instance, even after reading *The Lord of the Rings*, I do remember that Bilbo is Frodo's cousin and would correct someone who stated otherwise. For instance, I could end up in the following discussion:

(18) Anne: Did you know that Frodo from *The Lord of the Rings* was adopted by his uncle?

Merel: What? That's not true. Bilbo is Frodo's cousin.

So, after reading *The Lord of the Rings*, although I no longer accept or imagine the content that I entertained while engaging with the fictional statements of the narrative, I do not forget it. Hence I can engage in, in Recanati's (2018) terminology, 'parafictional discourse' that is based on what I have read.¹³ It is important to clearly distinguish parafictional statements from fictional statements, i.e., statements that are part of a fictional narrative. Both fictional and parafictional statements can provide us with information about what is true in some fiction. But whereas fictional statements *determine* what is true in the fiction (e.g., the fact that (2) is part of *The Hobbit* makes it true in *The Hobbit* that a hobbit lived in a hole in the ground), parafictional statements *report* on what is true in the fiction; they are statements about what is true in or according to some fiction that are *not* a part of the original fictional story, but rather feature in communication about the content of a particular fictional work.

Parafictional discourse can be 'implicit' or 'explicit' depending on whether the statements include a fiction operator such as 'In story *s*,' or 'According

¹³Theorists employ several different (sometimes conflicting) terminologies for these and related statements. For instance, fictional statements have also been called 'fictive statements' (Currie (1990)), 'textual statements' (Zucchi (2001)) and 'authorial diktats' (Ninan (2017)). Parafictional statements have also been dubbed 'metafictive statements' (Currie (1990)) (not to be confused with 'metafictional statements', see chapter 6), 'paratextual statements' (Zucchi (2001)) and 'contensive statements' (Ross (2012)).

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to story s' .¹⁴ For instance, my answer in (18) is an implicit parafictional statement:

(19) Bilbo is Frodo's cousin.

Alternatively, I could have responded to the question in (18) with explicit parafictional statement (20) or (21):

(20) In *The Lord of the Rings*, Bilbo is Frodo's cousin.

(21) According to *The Lord of the Rings*, Bilbo is Frodo's cousin.

Intuitively, parafictional statements – unlike fictional statements – are not just fictionally true but *really* true or false depending on actual states of affairs, i.e., the content of the relevant fictional stories. The fact that Tolkien's novel *The Lord of the Rings* was written in a certain way makes my statements (19), (20) and (21)¹⁵ actually true and makes a statement like (22) actually false:

(22) In *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo is Bilbo's grandmother.

Importantly, a sentence like (2) that is found in *The Lord of the Rings*, could also function as an implicit parafictional statement if it were used in a discussion on the content of *The Lord of the Rings*. This shows that whether a utterance is a fictional statement or an implicit parafictional statement is largely a matter of context; the same sentence can function as a fictional statement (when found in a fictional work) or as an implicit parafictional statement (when found in a discussion on the content of the fictional work). Arguably, there is even a sense in which one can construe sentences that are not a *verbatim* part of a fictional narrative, but that *are* part of what is relevantly entailed by the story and entertained by the reader *while* engaging with a narrative, as an (implicit) continuation of the fictional discourse (see [Semeijn and Zalta \(2021\)](#)). For instance, I may think (and maybe even mutter)

¹⁴As [Sainsbury \(2014\)](#) notes, parafictional discourse can also feature other fiction operators such as 'partial fiction operators' like 'In/According to the first three chapters of s' ' or fiction operators such as 'It is argued in/clear by s that'. Following [Voltolini \(2019\)](#), I take these to be derivative of the 'In story s' ' or 'According to story s' '-operators.

¹⁵In fact, in chapter 7 I will argue – contra consensus – that the 'In story s' ' and 'According to story s' ' operators require separate semantic analyses. The proposed analyses imply that whereas a parafictional statement such as (20) is really true, a parafictional statement such as (21) is strictly speaking false. Until chapter 7 I will largely ignore this discussion and focus mostly on parafictional statements with 'In story s' '-operators since I take these to be the primary fiction operators.

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something of the form (19) *while reading *The Lord of the Rings**, even though (19) is never explicitly stated in the novel. Arguably, such a ‘statement’ can be construed as part of the fictional discourse since it takes place within the initial pretence of the novel.

Semantic analysis

One of the central objectives of a semantics of fiction is to provide a semantic analysis of parafictional statements that takes into account the different functions of fictional versus parafictional discourse and that can explain why parafictional statements such as (19), (20) and (21) ring true, whereas a statement such as (22) rings false. There is no consensus on what the appropriate semantic analysis of parafictional discourse is. Much of the current debate centers around the question of whether parafictional discourse is ‘internal’ or ‘external’ to the fiction. Discourse is internal when we describe the fictional world from a perspective within the fiction (e.g., talking about Frodo’s quest to destroy the Ring as if it really took place). Discourse is external if we describe the fictional world from a perspective outside of the fiction (e.g., talking about Frodo’s quest to destroy the Ring as part of the fictional events described in a fictional story). In other words, the debate is on whether parafictional statements constitute an unofficial extension of *fictional discourse* (and the pretence involved in this discourse), or whether parafictional statements are essentially a kind of non-fictional discourse, i.e., modalized assertions about the content of a fictional narrative.

According to theorists such as Everett (2013), implicit parafictional statements such as (19) constitute an (unofficial) extension of the original pretence initiated by Tolkien. Anne and myself talk about Frodo and Bilbo as if they really existed. However, if I had responded to Anne’s question in (18) with the explicit parafictional statement (20), I would have adopted an external perspective to talk about *The Lord of the Rings* and hence made a type of assertion. Thus implicit parafictional discourse receives an essentially different semantic analysis from explicit parafictional discourse.

Most theorists, however, treat implicit and explicit parafictional statements on a par. There is no relevant semantic difference between answering Anne’s question in (18) with either an implicit or an explicit parafictional statement: (19) is simply an abbreviation of (20).¹⁶ These authors can be

¹⁶Admittedly, the terminology used in this dissertation is biased towards this analysis.

subdivided into two main camps: First, authors such as Recanati (2018) and Evans (1982) consider parafictional discourse in general to constitute an extension of the original fictional discourse. Both (19) and (20) are truth-valueless continuations of the *The Lord of the Rings*-pretence and hence constitute internal discourse.¹⁷ By contrast, authors such as Currie (1990), Zucchi (2017) and Ninan (2017) claim that, whereas engaging in fictional discourse requires an internal perspective and involves pretence, neither implicit nor explicit parafictional statements involve pretence. Parafictional statements in general are simply modalized or hedged assertions about actual states of affairs in the world (i.e., statements about the content of a particular work of fiction).¹⁸

3.4.3 Parafictional updates on unofficial common grounds

I take both an Eckardt-style and Stokke's unofficial common ground accounts to treat parafictional discourse on a par with fictional discourse, i.e., as operating on unofficial common grounds. For instance, both (19) and (20) are analysed as proposals to update the *The Lord of the Rings* unofficial common ground. Eckardt does not explicitly discuss parafictional discourse but does describe unofficial common grounds as representations of the content of the fictional stories. Moreover, an Eckardt-style type of unofficial common ground account – where unofficial common grounds are non-temporary – is ideally suited to model the possibility of parafictional discourse: The *The Lord of the Rings* unofficial common ground does not evaporate but remains available for updating even after reading *The Lord of the Rings* precisely because we retain information about what is true in some fiction (and can discuss this) even after our engagement with it. Stokke explicitly discusses a mini-discourse that is most naturally analysed as implicit parafictional discourse.¹⁹ He discusses the statement

¹⁷Although, for Recanati, parafictional discourse does contain an irreducible external component.

¹⁸As Zucchi (2017) points out, this is not to say that a sentence such as (19) could never be used in a game of pretence (e.g., I could write a fan-fiction story that is parasitic on Tolkien's narrative and that features (19)). It's just that when (19) features in a discussion on the content of *The Lord of the Rings* – when there is a clear sense that it is a true statement somehow and when it can be replaced by the explicit parafictional statement (20) – then it is an assertion.

¹⁹Interestingly, Stokke suggests in a footnote (Stokke, 2018, p.74) that his account of fictional statements updating unofficial common grounds is compatible with Lewis' (1978)

3 Unofficial common grounds

(23) Hobbits have hairy feet. (Stokke, 2013, p.55)

in answer to the question "Who has hairy feet?" and analyses it as a proposal to update the unofficial common ground related to *The Lord of the Rings*. This statement can be interpreted as an implicit parafictional statement (i.e., as part of a discussion on *The Lord of the Rings*) because there is a clear sense in which it is a true statement that could felicitously be replaced by the explicit parafictional statement:

(24) In *The Lord of the Rings*, hobbits have hairy feet.

Moreover, on either an implicit or explicit variant of the discourse it would be perfectly reasonable to reply: "Okay, true... But let's not talk about *The Lord of the Rings* right now."

In other words, the unofficial common ground accounts seem to fit the Recanati/Evans analysis of parafictional discourse: Both fictional and parafictional statements update unofficial common grounds and are hence treated on a par.²⁰ This is problematic for a number of reasons. First, there are independent reasons to prefer the Currie/Zucchi/Ninan analysis, related to

analysis of fictional statements as being covertly prefixed by fiction operators of the form 'In *s*',. Here we thus have further evidence that Stokke sees no relevant difference between fictional and parafictional discourse. However, as will become clear in section 4.2.2, Lewis' semantic analysis only applies to parafictional statements. Extending it to fictional statements would have the unintuitive consequence of predicting that all sentences in *The Lord of the Rings* are true.

²⁰Because Stokke only discusses implicit parafictional statements, an analysis where explicit parafictional statements operate on the official common ground as assertions (cf. Everett (2013)) is also possible in his account. In fact, yet another construal of Stokke's account is possible. In the present discussion I take Stokke's example sentence (23) to be an example of a true implicit parafictional statement. However, the example is not completely univocal; we can imagine the same discourse being placed in a context where (23) is part of a pretend conversation parasitic on *The Lord of the Rings*. Then (23) is a fictional statement, we *cannot* unproblematically replace it by (24), and we would expect a response such as "That's right! I saw one the other day". If we adopt this reading of (23), the option to analyse parafictional statements as modalized updated of the official common ground is still open to Stokke. (Strictly speaking this option is also open to Eckardt who does not explicitly discuss parafictional discourse). However, on such a version of Stokke's unofficial common ground account we still run into issues with temporality described below: whether (23) is analysed as an implicit parafictional or a (parasitic) fictional statement, both types of discourse can occur decades after engaging with a fiction and hence Stokke still requires unofficial common grounds to be continuously accessible.

3.4 Two conflicting intuitions

the behaviour of indexicals (see [Zucchi \(2017\)](#)). More importantly, the Recanati/Evans view does not allow us to ascribe truth values to parafictional statements: They are, like fictional statements, not really true or false but rather fictionally true or false. However, as for instance [Currie \(1990\)](#) and [Zucchi \(2017\)](#) argue, we intuitively *do* want to maintain that (19) and (20) are true statements.

Aside from these independent theoretical reasons to not adopt the Recanati/Evans analysis, this particular analysis leads to additional issues in the unofficial common ground accounts. Both an Eckardt-style view and Stokke's account run into difficulties in accounting for the prima facie conflicting intuitions of the temporary acceptance of fictional truth on the one hand, and the fact that we do somehow retain fictional content after engaging with fictional narratives (and can hence engage in parafictional discourse) on the other hand. On the Eckardt-style view, unofficial common grounds are non-temporary (i.e., they continue to be accessible after engaging with the fictional narrative) and hence (although we can account for the possibility of parafictional discourse) we cannot account for the first intuition that fictional truths are only accepted temporarily. In Stokke's framework, unofficial common grounds are essentially temporary. However, to account for the occurrence of parafictional discourse such as (23), Stokke qualifies this by saying that "an unofficial common ground need not be temporary in the sense of lasting a short time. There are arguably common grounds that we all make use of from time to time, which are unofficial in the sense that we all know that the information they contain is fictional, or the like, but which nevertheless continue to be operative for a very long time." ([Stokke, 2013](#), p.55). In other words, in order to account for parafictional discourse (as operating on unofficial common grounds), Stokke has to admit that unofficial common grounds remain operative long after engaging with the fictional narrative. But in what sense are such unofficial common grounds still temporary if they remain accessible after engaging with a fictional narrative (as in an Eckardt-style theory)? Hence Stokke runs into difficulties trying to account for both intuitions described above, ending up with unofficial common grounds that are both essentially temporary and continuously operative.

3.5 Conclusions and next steps

This chapter has introduced Eckardt's and Stokke's unofficial common ground accounts that distinguish an official common ground that is updated by assertions from unofficial common grounds that are updated by fictional statements. I have argued that both versions of the account run into difficulties concerning the temporariness of unofficial common grounds. Part of the difficulty is that both accounts seem to assume an analysis of parafictional statements as akin to fictional statements (i.e., as proposals to update or create an unofficial common ground). This leads to an incentive to construe unofficial common grounds as temporary and an incentive to construe them as non-temporary.

An obvious strategy to improve the unofficial common ground accounts would be to adopt the Currie/Zucchi/Ninan analysis of parafictional discourse and analyse parafictional statements as proposals to update the official common ground with hedged propositions of the form 'In/According to story s , ϕ '. If we combine this with a story of how interlocutors can derive previous unofficial common grounds based on hedged parafictional information in the official common ground (and thus continue with interrupted fictional discourse), we would be able to construe unofficial common grounds as truly temporary, i.e., only existing for the purpose and duration of the fictional discourse. As will become clear in the next chapter, the workspace account resembles this proposed improved version of the unofficial common ground accounts.