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Fiction and common ground

Semeijn, Merel

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9 Conclusions

The central aim of this dissertation has been to model fictional discourse and related forms of discourse in terms of common ground updates. To this end I have attempted to combine insights from Matravvers' theory of fiction interpretation and Stalnaker's common ground framework. Put very briefly, speaker and hearer first update a temporary workspace that is uniform for fiction and non-fiction and that only exists for the purpose and duration of a particular conversation. Secondly, the stable common ground is updated through either fictive or assertive closure.

When applying this basic framework to other types of discourse, I sometimes found that the initial account needed to be extended. For instance, I argued that in order to fit lies into the framework, the stable common ground could no longer be construed as belief-based. This requires either a moderate psychologistic turn (a departure from Stalnaker) or an acceptance-based stable common ground (a departure from Matravvers since we no longer model discourse updates as leading to belief updates). Another example is metafictional discourse which, although it seems strongly related and in a sense even dependent on fictional discourse, is hard to model in the basic framework. It requires incorporating abstract objects or 'dot-objects' into our theory which complicates the analysis of parafictional discourse and fictive closure. Lastly, in order to model unreliable narration and inconsistent workspace updates we need to incorporate some kind of belief revision tools into the theory. Here we saw that holding on to both complete Matravversian uniformity of our primary engagement with fiction and non-fiction *and* Stalnakerian uniformity of how speaker and hearer engage with a discourse seems untenable because fiction can involve common ground revision whereas non-fiction cannot.

On the other hand, sometimes I found that the basic account provided neat analyses or explanations of certain phenomena that it was not designed to account for. In particular, the parafictional update at fictive closure leads us to an analysis of bald-faced lies as fictional statements. Moreover, it allows for a novel explanation of export of fictional truth (as based on analogical reasoning) that avoids the difficulties with existing accounts that maintain that fictions contain (indirect) assertions.

Looking ahead, it is important to keep in mind that Stalnaker's theoretical focus lies on common ground updates in *conversations*. Likewise, the workspace account focuses on explicit story telling (e.g., campfire stories or novels) as its prime example of fiction practices; its main aim is to explain linguistic behaviour involved

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in engaging with fiction. However, to the extent that one can also analyse nonverbal communication (e.g., music, dance, paintings, pictures, movies) as proposals to update a common ground between 'speaker' and 'hearer', the workspace account should be extendable to nonverbal media.