
Fictional import

Daniel Gutzmann¹ & Katharina Turgay²

¹*Ruhr-Universität Bochum*, ²*Universität Landau*

daniel.gutzmann@rub.de, turgay@uni-landau.de

One approach to the analysis of fiction is to assume that the propositions that make up a work of fiction are accepted into an “unofficial” common ground in which the fictional propositions are accepted. In this talk, we will outline the shortcomings of this approach which all are based on the observation that the common ground of fictional work and the ordinary, reality-based common ground can import propositions from each other. We will discuss four kinds of imports and sketch a formal modelling by using multiple common grounds and indexed propositions.

1) Reality to fiction: Fictional work is not built completely from the propositions that are expressed and implied by the sentences that make up that work, but imports propositions from the ordinary common ground. For instance, that one cannot travel faster than light or that vampires do not exist. Similarly, if there is reference to places or persons that also exist in the real world, many properties of these entities are imported into the fictional common ground as well.

2) Fiction to fiction: Fiction does not build just on reality; it can also import propositions from other fictional common grounds. For instance, if a fictional work mentions vampires, we can import many propositions from other fictional work (that they are undead or that they need blood).

3) Fiction to reality: We can also import content from fiction into the reality-based common ground. That is, for instance, necessary, if we want to talk about the impact of fictional objects on objects in the real world. For instance, when we say: “The vampires in movie A scare me; I don't even want to think about them”.

4) Enacting fiction: This interaction has, to our knowledge, not been discussed before. In fiction that is created by acting (especially in movies, but also in audio plays), many properties by the “enacting object” are imported as properties of the “enacted object”. For instance, many properties of the actor Harrison Ford are imported as properties of the character Han Solo into the fictional common ground (for instance, how tall he is or what kind of eyes or nose he has).

Theoretical modeling: We will model importing propositions by splitting the notion of common ground into multiple common grounds (an official common ground and unofficial common grounds for each work of fiction). Propositions can be imported from one common ground to another, constrained by pragmatic rules about inferences between them. Crucially, imported propositions must be indexed for its source, because imported propositions can be deleted from a common ground if conflicting propositions are added to the fictional common ground (e.g. if the proposition is added that vampires feed from broccoli instead of blood).