

Fictional Names and Truth

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ABSTRACT: By addressing fictional names head on, we risk going back to familiar, ordinary names intuitions and missing what is specific about them. I propose a different strategy. My view is grounded on fictional name sentence utterances and on indexed tokens of such sentences, where an index contains the fictional narrator and the time and location of the token. Using the framework of pluri-propositionalism (Perry 2012), I argue that the semantic relation of reference – ‘x’ refers to y - where ‘x’ is a name, rather than the notion of an object, is central to the debate on fictional names. I also contend that fictional names do not enter into that relation. Tokens of fictional names are individuated with the fictional index of the sentence they originate from. This allows for dispensing with a referent. Indexed fictional name sentence tokens have semantically determined truth conditions, yet they are not truth assessed given facts. In this respect, they have cognitive significance only, and no official or referential content. Indexed fictional name token of sentences are accepted as true, but they are not true.

KEYWORDS: Cognitive significance – fiction – names – reference – truth.

1. Semantics and fictional names

There is an important distinction to be made between ordinary proper names (‘Barack Obama,’ ‘Angelina Jolie’), which designate objects located

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in space and time, and fictional names ('Sherlock Holmes,' 'Superman'), which, by design, do not designate space-and-time-located objects. Sherlock Holmes and Superman are creatures of fiction. They do not exist in space and time, nor do they causally interact with real objects, including speakers. If one finds data suggesting that Sherlock Holmes did exist, the name would simply be removed from the list of fictional names. According to a common, intuitive assumption, fictional names have a semantic referent. In more sophisticated versions of that view, they are said to either simply lack a referent (Braun 2005; Everett 2013) or to connect to fictional objects (Thomasson 1999; Kripke 2013). We are strongly inclined to see fictional names as ordinary names, and to think that there are objects designated by them. Such an inclination might be appropriate for fiction reading, but it gives a misleading perspective on fictional names and it should be resisted in semantics. I contend that such names have neither a referring relation to objects, nor referent. I suggest that they play a cognitive role only. If I am right, we are not in relation with fictional characters by way of reference with fictional names. Fictional names differ from ordinary names, and I will argue that that difference is echoed in the way that they are individuated.

Fictional name sentences have truth conditions and, according to common sense intuitions, some are true. Yet, such sentences raise issues because their truth is not supported by facts: there is no object referred to by 'Superman', and no facts supporting the truth of 'Superman flies,' for instance. If fictional name sentences are true, their truth does not depend on facts. That leaves the semantics of fictional names, and the truth of fictional name sentences, in need of an explanation. A view on such names should dovetail with intuitions on truth of fictional name sentences, and vice-versa.² This article aims to articulate some of the important elements of such an explanation.

The usual procedure begins with fictional name and then moves to sentences or fictional name sentence utterances. Addressing fictional names head on, however, we risk going back to familiar, ordinary names intuitions and miss what is specific about them. I propose a different strategy. My

² In that respect, my perspective differs from Sainsbury's, for whom 'semantics will recognize no special category of fictional sentences or fictional names. Everything will proceed just as for nonfictional regions of language.' See Sainsbury (2005, 202).

view is grounded on fictional name sentence utterances, not on fictional names. The article will be structured as such: Firstly, I will offer brief indications on the semantics of proper names. I will then focus on the truth of fictional name sentences. Secondly, I will propose a view on fictional names and utterances of fictional name sentences that is consistent with common intuition about truth. Finally I will offer some remarks on the identity of such names. It is important to know, before I move on, that my suggestion rely on the token-utterance distinction. And this distinction deserves a short explanation here. An utterance is a particular event, namely the use of a sentence by a speaker, occurring at a moment of time in a specific location. If one of these parameters is changed, a different utterance obtains. In contrast, a token of a sentence is not an event and it is not individuated by indices. There are different tokens of the sentence ‘London is a nice city’ when the latter is written on different post-its at different moment of time by the same speaker, or by different speakers on different post-its at the same moments of time. However, tokens of sentences are neither individuated by speakers, time and location, nor do they keep track of these indices.

2. Proper names

The Millian approach to names, according to which the only semantic value of a proper name is its bearer, is now dominant in the field. Following Kripke’s paradigm (Kripke 1980), ordinary proper names are generic names, or newly created names, assigned to specific objects located in space and time by speakers also located in space and time. The assignment procedure invoked by Kripke is vague and can remain so without any impact on the commonly accepted semantic core of names: names refer directly to the objects they are assigned to. Assigning a name to an individual establishes a convention allowing us to designate that individual with that name. Names have no reference fixing linguistic meaning, and carry no descriptive content exploiting features of the objects to which they refer. They are designators.³ A definite description can fix the referent of a name, but it cannot determine its meaning.

³ I assume, but I will not defend, the direct reference theory of names.

Moreover, according to Kripke, proper names refer to the same object in worlds where that object exists. They are rigid designators. The name 'Barack Obama' has been assigned to a person who became the President of the USA. It designates the same person in counterfactual situations in which he does not become President of the USA. Were the designata of the name determined by a definite description only, the name would not rigidly refer to an object. Different people can have the name 'Barack Obama.' We then say that they have different names, written or pronounced in the same way, because they are connected to different people. Alternatively, one can say that they have the same name, but that the latter is then connected to different people.⁴

Fictional names are, knowingly, introduced by authors for fictional, non-existent characters. Such names are not intended to refer to real objects, and they are not assigned any. Being fictional is not a contingent feature of such names, and neither is their lack of a referent (Kripke 2013). Fictional names differ from – even if they are not always distinguished from – empty names. They contrast with 'Vulcan' and 'Zeus,' which were not intended to be fictional names. The former was used to designate an object predicted, wrongly, to exist. The latter was used to designate a god, which, as it happens, does not exist. Most importantly, fictional names have no designata or referent. As they lack real designated referents, they cannot be individuated with them.⁵ This being so, is there a difference between the name 'Sherlock Holmes' found in Doyle's books and the name 'Sherlock Holmes' used in a 21st century television series about a 21st century character? Are these two different names? If so, why are they different? Is it the same name? If so, why is it the same? If fictional names have no referents, these questions have no easy, intuitive answers.

⁴ This is a controversial issue. Cf. Kaplan (1990).

⁵ Fictitious objects, which lack dimensions, could be invoked here. I set them aside. I focus on fictional names rather than ontology.

3. Fictional names and truth

Consider

- (1) Sherlock Holmes is a detective.

If proper-name sentences or utterances determine singular propositions, that is, propositions containing the object referred to by the name, and if fictional names do not designate objects, then fictional-name sentences or utterances do not determine complete truth conditions or propositions. If Sherlock Holmes is a fictional, non-existent character, and if the name has no referent, then (1) determines a proposition containing an empty slot, $\langle _, \text{being-detective} \rangle$, and it is neither true nor false.⁶ If ‘Emma Bovary’ is a fictional name, then

- (2) Emma Bovary is a detective

determines the same empty-slot proposition. However, (1) and (2) are *prima facie* respectively true and false. The negation of (1) and (2), ‘it is false that Sherlock Holmes is a detective’ and ‘it is false that Emma Bovary is a detective,’ also determine gappy propositions, and they are neither true nor false. Nonetheless, the first one is intuitively false, and the second one is intuitively true. Finally, a speaker’s motivations for using (1) differ from their motivations for using (2) and vice-versa. The speaker of (1) wants to talk about Sherlock Holmes, and not about Emma Bovary; the speaker of (2) wants to talk about Emma Bovary, and not about Sherlock Holmes. Speakers do not choose randomly between (1) and (2) before making utterances. A view on fictional names should account for differences between (1) and (2).

If fictional names lack referents, then the sentence

- (3) According to Conan Doyle’s stories, Sherlock Holmes is a detective

⁶ For a classic presentation of these problems, see Braun (1993; 2005).

determines a gappy proposition and it is not true, although most speakers feel that it is true. If ‘Emma Bovary’ is a fictional name, then (3) and (4) determine the same gappy proposition

- (4) According to Conan Doyle’s stories, Emma Bovary is a detective.

Most speakers take (3) and (4) to have different truth conditions, and take (3) to be true and (4) to be false. Fictional-name sentences question the common view that affirmative sentences express, or determine, complete true or false contents.⁷ The truth and falsity of fictional name sentences thus deserve our attention.⁸ Fictional names belong to the category of referring terms, that is to say: expressions introducing an element into the truth conditions of a sentence or an utterance. However, by design such names lack referents and do not introduce objects into truth conditions of sentences or utterances. A view on fictional names should account for their belonging to that category *and* for their lack of referent.

Following Braun (1993, 2005), ‘Sherlock Holmes’ has no referent, and a sentence like (1) expresses a gappy proposition, ⟨ , being a detective) (see also Everett 2013). He also contends that such propositions are false. Furthermore, their negation turns a false sentence into a true sentence. However, fiction sentences, or the propositions they express, are intuitively true: Sherlock Holmes is a detective (see Taylor 2000). Finally, if Braun is right, (1) and (2) express the same gappy proposition. That does not sound right.⁹

‘Sherlock Holmes’ is not transparent about its referent or having a referent, and it does not carry bells and whistles indicating whether it is an ordinary or a fictional name.¹⁰ Not knowing much about the UK and 19th century literature, I think that Sherlock Holmes is a historical figure. You

⁷ According to strict Millianism, singular propositions contain objects, not abstract or fictitious entities. Salmon (1998) introduces abstract objects and Predelli (2002), fictitious entities.

⁸ For an examination of these issues, see Everett (2003).

⁹ My criticism of Braun’s view on fictional names and gappy propositions is not intended as a criticism of Braun’s entire, complex view on such names.

¹⁰ See also Kripke (2013, 30).

know that ‘Sherlock Holmes’ is a fictional name. We have a discussion and both of us talk about Holmes. At one point, you realize that I am misinformed or naive, and you tell me that ‘Sherlock Holmes’ is a fictional name. I then learn something important about that name. Still, I believe that my utterance of (1) is true and that your utterance of the same sentence is also true. *Prima facie*, intuitions on the truth of (1) or utterances of (1) do not depend on the existence of Holmes. What grounds these intuitions? You and I believe that we are talking about the same thing. Fictional names having no referent, ‘Sherlock Holmes’ in my mouth and in your mouth cannot ‘corefer’. What makes us think that we were talking about the same thing when using ‘Sherlock Holmes’?¹¹ Using ‘Sherlock Holmes,’ we were both assuming to be talking about the same character and had very similar ‘Holmes’ directed beliefs. At the same time, we had very different cognitive lives. I would have asked people if Holmes once met the Queen of England. You would not. Objects here seem to be irrelevant to our shared understanding of utterances of fiction sentences like (2). A semantic theory should explain and make sense of this.

4. Pluri-propositionalism

I advocate a pluri-propositionalist framework in semantics (Perry 2012; Korta & Perry 2011). Following that perspective, utterances rather than tokens or sentences as type are in the foreground. Expressions as type have linguistic meaning, which is a rule determining content constituent for utterances of linguistic expressions. Linguistic meaning fixes the semantically determined content or the truth conditions of utterances.¹² Consider for example Brad Pitt’s utterance of

- (5) Angelina Jolie is an actress.

¹¹ Everett (2000) raises these questions concerning talking and thinking about the same thing when using fictional names. Friend (2014) examines them and suggests a solution that I will not explore here.

¹² For simplification, I do not make a difference between spoken and written utterances of a sentence or a name.

This utterance, **u**, is individuated by the speaker, Brad Pitt, the time, say April 27 2016, and the location, Los Angeles. ‘Angelina Jolie’ is an ordinary proper name. Following the now paradigmatic view on names, it has no linguistic meaning and a referent only. The name is conventionally associated with that referent. Being linguistically competent and relying on your knowledge of language only, including your knowledge of what a proper name is, you know that

Given that (5) is an English sentence, the utterance **u** of (5) is true if and only if the individual¹³ that the convention exploited by **u** allows us to designate by ‘Angelina Jolie’ is an actress.

Call the content giving the semantically determined truth conditions of the utterance, without considering facts, the cognitive significance of the utterance (Perry 2012). A person accepting as true an utterance¹⁴ of (5) will believe the cognitive significance of the utterance (Perry 1988). If the cognitive significance classifies a thinking episode, we can take the latter to be in the speaker’s head. That content contains the utterance **u** itself as a constituent and is, hence, reflexive with regards to the utterance. Notice also that the name itself is mentioned in the cognitive significance of the utterance. What follows ‘if and only if’, and precedes ‘is an actress’, captures an important aspect of the reference or designation relation. Yet, what you then understand does not call for the referent of the utterance of the name. The name is associated with a convention tying it to **ANGELINA JOLIE** herself. So, after taking into account facts required for fixing the designation of the indexical terms, including names,

Given that (5) is an English sentence, the utterance **u** of (5) is true if and only if **ANGELINA JOLIE** is an actress.

‘**ANGELINA JOLIE** *is an actress*’ is the designational content of the utterance, giving the conditions under which the utterance is true. The designational content of the utterance of (5) does not contain the utterance of

¹³ An individual is whatever is designated by a proper name.

¹⁴ Accepting as true an utterance is an attitude, and it does not imply that the utterance is true.

that sentence. The designated individual has that feature, being an actress, or not, whether or not there is an utterance, and whether or not that name has been assigned to that person. All utterances of (5) with that specific name associated with the same convention have the same designational content.

5. A suggestion

Suppose now that Conan Doyle makes an utterance of (1). His utterance is an event individuated by the speaker, Doyle, the time of the utterance, say, October 15, 1890, and its location, London. The sentence is in English, and all the examples are in the next pages. Thanks to linguistic competence only, including knowledge of proper names, when hearing or reading Doyle's utterance of (1), you understand that

The utterance **u** of (1) is true if and only if the individual that the convention exploited by **u** allows us to designate as 'Sherlock Holmes' is a detective.

You understand (1) using the same resources you used to understand Brad Pitt's utterance, even though Doyle is actually writing fiction. Utterances are particular events, which do not last and cannot be reproduced. They cannot be found in Doyle's books. As it goes, readers are not really interested in Doyle's utterance. Doyle's utterance left a token of a sentence on the page he was writing on. What he left on the piece of paper has been reproduced thousands of times. Readers are interested in the sentences he left on the paper he was writing on. Doyle's utterance is not a relevant event when considering fiction. It is rather the token that the utterance left that should be considered.¹⁵ Call it the token **t**. To dispense with utterances, it can be argued that

¹⁵ One can argue that reading a token creates an utterance. Still, the speaker of the utterance is not then the narrator. Such a view also relies on a non-standard notion of utterance.

The token **t** of (1) is true if and only if the individual that the convention exploited by **t** allows us to designate as ‘Sherlock Holmes’ is a detective.

There are different tokens of (1) in different copies of the book. Tokens, however, are not enough to account for fiction because they do not keep track of their source. Doyle, or any speaker, could have produced the relevant token. Readers know better, and they would disagree with the idea that Doyle is the speaker. Fiction sentences are arguably used by narrators telling stories, where the narrator is a fictive creature different from the author (Currie 1990; Kania 2005). The narrator of *Planet of the Apes* is not the author, Pierre Boulle, but except for the main part of the book, a creature whose nature is unknown (an ape?); the narrator of *The Name of the Rose* is not the author, Umberto Eco, but Adso of Melk. Doyle introduces Watson, and no one else, as the fictional narrator, or narrator for short, of (1) and the producer of the token. It is quite common to understand tokens in fiction as belonging to stories told by narrators, not authors, at a location and moment in time. We also want to have figures of speech (irony, for instance) and conversational implicatures (Grice 1989) in fiction, something tokens do not allow. The narrator can make irony and conversationally implicate something in producing a token. Fiction readers follow the fictive narrator and his or her use of sentences in fiction.

Let us say that in writing fiction, authors are making utterances leaving indexed tokens of sentences. An indexed token of a sentence is individuated by the sentence itself and an index containing the narrator, the time, and the location of the token. For example, ‘Sherlock Holmes is a detective’ (narrator of **t**, time of **t** and location of **t**). I call such an index a fictional index. The indices relied on capture what is specific to that fictional token, and they are the minimum needed to individuate the indexed sentence token. The indices are also echoed in the truth conditions of the fictional token. The idea of a fictional index generalises to any sentence token in fiction, including those not containing a fictional name, and it specifies a feature that is characteristic of fiction: the presence of a narrator. It is not required to mention the name of the author. Time can cover a short or a long period. Location can be big or small. No decision on that point has to be made here. We then have, for (1),

The indexed token **t** of (1) is true if and only if the individual that the convention exploited by **t** allows us to designate by ‘Sherlock Holmes’ is a detective.

The narrator of **t**, the time of **t** and the location of **t** index the relevant token **t**. These truth conditions are token reflexive, since **t** is mentioned in them. With that in mind, let us focus on fictional names like ‘Sherlock Holmes’.

Ordinary names, like ‘London’, are used by fictional narrators and can also be found in fiction. These names then have their regular, associated conventions and the referent that comes with it. Fictional names are different. They are used by fictional narrators and have their source in fiction only. Such names also lack both meaning and associated conventions tying it to a space-time located referent. Nonetheless, readers individuate them, and can see a difference between ‘Sherlock Holmes,’ the name of the famous detective, and ‘Sherlock Holmes,’ the name of a British civil servant. I suggest that fictional names are individuated by a sequence of letters or phonemes and the fictional index of the sentence they originate from, composed of the fictional narrator, time and location of the token: ‘Sherlock Holmes’ (narrator of **t**, time of **t**, location of **t**).¹⁶ A fictional narrator introduces a fictional name, at the location and time of the writing. Of course, such individuating indices are not part of the name token or an utterance of that name. I call ‘Sherlock Holmes’ (narrator of **t**, time of **t**, location of **t**) the indexed token of the fictional name. All fictional names have a fictional index. If a name does not, it is assumed to refer directly to its designata by default. Knowing that a name is fictional means knowing that it has a fictional index, and vice-versa. The contribution of an ordinary name to the cognitive significance of an utterance differs from the contribution of a fictional name to the cognitive significance of a fictional sentence: the former is utterance bound and it is not indexed, while the latter is token bound and it is indexed.

Different fictional sentences and names, having token reflexive indexes, can have different fictional indexes, where the narrator of **t**, location of **t** and time of **t**, is the narrator of **t'**, location of **t'** and time of **t'**. The

¹⁶ Different sequences of letters and phonemes should be considered because in different languages (Russian, Japanese, French, and so on) names are written and pronounced in different ways. I put aside this issue.

narrator of each indexed token in *Remembrance of things past* is the same, as is its location in space and in time.

6. Back to truth conditions

Let us go back to the truth conditions of the indexed token of (1) and take into account the presence of the fictional name.

The indexed token **t** of (1) is true if and only if the individual that the convention exploited by **t** allows us to designate by ‘Sherlock Holmes’ (narrator of **t**, time of **t**, location of **t**) is a detective.

The index of the fictional name is part of the truth conditions of the relevant indexed sentence token. The truth conditions of this token are not metalinguistic. They contain the name and its index only, and neither the token nor its truth conditions are about that name. Every component of the fictional index can be assigned a value, a fictional narrator, a stretch of time and a location, by considering the fiction where the indexed sentence token or fictional name is found. For example, the fictional narrator of the token can be Watson, the location of the token can be London, and the time of the token can be 1890. Two different indexed tokens can be assigned the same values. Value assignation makes it that tokens are not token reflexive anymore. For an indexed token of (1), and an indexed token of ‘Sherlock Holmes,’ we then have the following options.

Narrator of t	Time of t	Location of t
Watson	1890	London
Watson	1890	Location of t
Watson	Time of t	London
Watson	Time of t	Location of t
Narrator of t	1890	London
Narrator of t	1890	Location of t
Narrator of t	Time of t	London
Narrator of t	Time of t	Location of t

Some of these options are token reflexive. Others are not. One can ask whether or not all these options capture the name ‘Sherlock Holmes’ in different indexed tokens. I will come back to this point. What should be done with the fictional ‘Watson’ in the index? The fictional name ‘Watson’ should be assigned a fictional index, and it can also be assigned values containing the name of the narrator of *t*: ‘Watson’ (Watson, 1890, London). The location of the fictional sentence token usually differs from the location of the fiction. The location of the narrator writing (1), Watson, remains unknown, but London, also the location of the fiction, is a plausible place. The location of the fiction could also be Calcutta. Time is rarely emphasized. The time of the indexed token, the time of the writing, usually differs from the time in the fiction. For our example, 1890 will do. The time of the indexed sentence token is usually later than the time of the events described. The narrator in Doyle’s novel, Watson, in writing that Holmes was a smart student, writes that the bearer of this indexed token of ‘Sherlock Holmes’ is a smart student before the time of his own token. Time is needed to make sense of the tense of the verbs in fiction. For example, when Doyle writes that Holmes took a cab, Holmes takes a cab earlier than the time of the utterance, and also the time of the indexed token. Yet, it uses the time of the indexed token as a reference point: Holmes takes a cab before the time of the indexed token. Indexed sentence tokens are not designed to be read with changing values for the index – for an indexed token of (1) with assigned values, the narrator is Watson, the time is 1890 and the location is London. They are assigned a fixed narrator, space and time.

Fictional indices are commonly assigned values by readers, for example, for the indexed token sentence (1)

The individual that the convention exploited by the indexed token *t* of (1) allows us to designate by ‘Sherlock Holmes’ is a detective (Watson, 1890, London).

and for the name ‘Sherlock Holmes’,

‘Sherlock Holmes’ (Watson, 1890, London).

The assigned values are in parentheses. Some values are fictive, Watson, others are not, London. At least one value, the narrator, should be

fictive. Readers assign values to the fictional indices whenever possible. Knowledge of these values depends on more than linguistic competence only. It depends on knowledge of the fiction the sentence or fictional name originates from. Information on the fiction is needed to identify the values of indices. Indexed sentence tokens with assigned values give the truth conditions of a fictional sentence:

The indexed token **t** of (1) is true if and only the individual that the convention exploited by **t** allows us to designate by ‘Sherlock Holmes’ (Watson, 1890, London) is a detective.

I will always mention the fictional index of the fictional names in truth conditions of indexed tokens.

Consider the indexed token **t** of ‘Sherlock Holmes is a detective,’ which comprises the narrator of **t**, the location of **t** and the time of **t**. The fictional index plays a pivotal role in understanding fiction. All different indexed tokens of (1), in thousands of copies of Conan Doyle’s books, have the same fictional fixed index, with the narrator of **t**, time and location of **t** all assigned the same values: Watson, London and 1890. Location and time in the novel are relative to these values. Fictional names occurring in these tokens have the same fictional index and the same assigned values. Interestingly, in keeping with our table, we can also have different assigned values for that sentence and that name, for instance:

Watson	1899	London
Miss Hudson	1999	Calcutta
Watson	2234	Boston

There appears to be no constraints on the values of the index – the narrator of a token could be named ‘Miss Hudson’ or ‘Watson,’ (s)he could be located in 1999 or 2234, in London or Boston. We can use a fictional indexed token **t** of (1), Watson as the fictional narrator of **t** and change the time of **t** to the year 2234, and the location of **t** to Boston. Introducing a distinction between indexed tokens and the indexed-token-assigned values, the name of the narrator or time for instance, opens room for altering these

values at will to obtain different values for fictional indexes, and different fictional names.¹⁷ I have already mentioned that this raise issues I will come back to with respect to name identity in section 8.

We have for (1): ‘Sherlock Holmes is a detective’ (narrator of **t**, the location of **t** and the time of **t**) — and for the fictional name ‘Sherlock Holmes’ (narrator of **t**, the location of **t** and the time of **t**). I call it the cognitive significance of the indexed token sentence and the cognitive significance of the fictional name. Since there are different tokens of the sentence and the name, indexed tokens of (1) and ‘Sherlock Holmes’, in different copies of Doyle’s book, these different tokens have different cognitive significance. We also have, with assigned values, for the indexed token **t** — ‘Sherlock Holmes is a detective’ (Watson, London and 1890) — and ‘Sherlock Holmes’ (Watson, London and 1890).¹⁸ Once again, different tokens of the sentence and the name occur in different copies of the book. However, the fictional index being assigned fixed values is stable. I call it the informed cognitive significance of the indexed token sentence and the informed cognitive significance of the fictional name. It is informed because it takes into account specific, story grounded factors. All indexed tokens of (1) and ‘Sherlock Holmes’, with assigned values, in different copies of Doyle’s book, have the same informed cognitive significance because there are the same sentences and name tokens. The index of a sentence-indexed token, or a fictional name, and its assigned values, as well as its informed cognitive significance, is fixed and it is not designed to individuate a real world entity — a real world token or name. Let us say that an indexed token of a fictional sentence, or fictional name, is a sentence, or name, with a token reflexive index, which is standardly assigned values.

¹⁷ In a fictional story, there can be various fictive narrators — in Akutagawa’s *In the Bush*, or in Inoue’s *The Hunting Gun* for instance. It complicates the issues but does not fundamentally change the basic problem. In cases where there are many different fictive narrators, it is possible that the indexed tokens are not coherent in that they cannot all be simultaneously accepted as true (Akutagawa’s *In the bush*). Of course, different fictive narrators can individuate a name — Watson, or Holmes’ landlady if the latter was writing about Holmes.

¹⁸ It captures Kripke’s idea (2013, Lecture 2) that fictional names are ‘pretended names’. They are introduced in a fiction sentence.

Unfortunately, fictional indexed sentence token as well as fictional names are not always specified as finely as we would like them to be. Sometimes the fictive narrator is not named, the specific location is rarely indicated, if indicated at all, and the time is commonly left in the dark. All the reader can exploit is then the narrator of *t*, time of *t*, location of *t*. Such tokens of sentences have token reflexive truth conditions only. This is the nature of fiction, and it may complicate the task of the reader. The narrator is very important. For simplification purposes, one keeps the narrator of the indexed sentence token or fictional name, and its assigned value only, say, Watson, if there is such a value. It can then be argued that all indexed sentence tokens in Conan Doyle's books for instance have the same narrator and that the same truth conditions of the indexed token apply.

Accepting as true fiction indexed tokens containing fictional names, 'Sherlock Holmes is a detective,' is a nice way to describe the reader's attitude toward fiction. The reason for acceptance as true can vary wildly – because it is in Doyle's book, because it is plausible given what is known about Holmes, and so on – as do reasons for rejection as false.¹⁹ However, such reasons are not semantically relevant. Tokens accepted as true also give possible belief contents. The cognitive lives of people who accept as true indexed tokens of (1), with the same assigned values, are identical even if Holmes does not exist: they all believe that Sherlock Holmes is a detective. This belief has truth conditions containing the fictional name itself.²⁰ If such names are objects, then the content or truth conditions of fictional name utterances or indexed tokens, and the belief these utterances are used to express, do contain objects.

The fictional index of 'Sherlock Holmes' in (1) and in

(6) Sherlock Holmes went downstairs

are the same. The name does not refer to an object and hence these tokens of the fictional name cannot co-refer. But the truth conditions of the

¹⁹ I do not need the notion of fidelity – Sainsbury (2005) – except to mention the reasons for acceptance as true.

²⁰ I take belief as an example of an attitude commonly used in the relevant literature. I will not examine other attitudes. My paper focuses on contents, not on attitudes. I let the reader examine implications of my view on other attitudes.

fictional tokens of (1) and (6) cohere if the fictional names are identical, that is, if they have the same fictional index assigned the same values. It is commonly assumed that they are. ‘Sherlock Holmes’ is very finely individuated every time.

You and I accept as true that ‘Sherlock Holmes’ in Watson’s indexed token **t** of (1) is ‘Sherlock Holmes’ in my utterance **u’** of (1), a metafictional use of the sentence, in a conversation about the book. It is the same fictional name. So,

The utterance **u’** of (1) is true if and only if the individual that the convention exploited by **u’** allows us to designate by ‘Sherlock Holmes’ (Watson, London, 1890) is a detective.

The narrator’s indexed token of (1), and my utterance of (1), have something in common. They share part of their truth conditions: the token and my utterance are true if and only if *the individual that the convention exploited by the indexed token **t**, and my utterance **u’**, allows us to designate by ‘Sherlock Holmes’ (Watson, London, 1890) is a detective*. It is also the ‘Sherlock Holmes’ in your utterance **u’’** of (1) in a conversation about the same books.

The utterance **u’’** of (1) is true if and only if the individual that the convention exploited by **u’’** allows us to designate by ‘Sherlock Holmes’ (Watson, London, 1890) is a detective.

My utterance and your utterance share part of their truth conditions: they are true if and only if *the object designated by both utterances of (1) allows us to designate by ‘Sherlock Holmes’ (Watson, London, 1890) is a detective*. As is the case with utterances of ‘Angelina Jolie is an actress,’ different utterances of (1) have different cognitive significance. The fictional index, and the values that individuate the relevant name, is not in the sentence (1) or in utterances of (1). Rather, it is made explicit in the truth conditions of the indexed tokens and utterances of (1). Such tokens and utterances are not assessed as true given facts. For such tokens and utterances, we are solely considering the cognitive significance of tokens and utterances of fiction sentences. Moreover, it is arguable that such truth conditions capture what competent speakers understand in the use of ‘Sherlock

Holmes.’ No entity is needed to account for our intuitions about the truth of tokens of fiction sentences, including intuitions on identity tokens of fiction sentences or utterances of fiction sentences like ‘Sherlock Holmes is Sherlock Holmes’: the individual that the convention exploited by **t** (or **u**) allows us to designate as ‘Sherlock Holmes’ (Watson, London, 1890) is the individual that the convention exploited by **t** (or **u**) allows us to designate as ‘Sherlock Holmes’ (Watson, London, 1890).²¹ However, in conversation, an utterance of ‘Sherlock Holmes is Sherlock Holmes’, or any similar identity sentence utterance, needs clarification before being accepted as true, and cannot be assessed as true, or false, given facts.

Once introduced, fictional names can leave fiction and be used in utterances. I can say ‘Sherlock Holmes never went to Chile’, and my utterance is true if and only if the individual that the convention exploited by the utterance allows us to designate by ‘Sherlock Holmes’ (Watson, London, 1890) never went to Chile. My utterance can be accepted as true, or rejected as false. It is not true or false. There is room for much discussion here. Korta and Perry (2011, 89) would say that my utterance is accurate or not. A 21st century teenager can wonder: would Sherlock Holmes (Watson, London, 1890) use the internet? Any answer to that question is, and remains, very speculative.

Accepting as true the relevant token of (1), with values assigned to both name and sentence in the truth conditions, I believe that Sherlock Holmes is a detective. Accepting as true the relevant token of (1) with the same assigned values to the token and the name in the truth conditions, you also believe that Sherlock Holmes is a detective. We believe the same thing made explicit by the informed cognitive significance of the indexed token. Holmes does not have to exist to share the same belief about Holmes. Can another individual in Doyle’s novels be named ‘Sherlock Holmes’ without Doyle, or the narrator, telling the reader? There is no answer to that question, and the only ‘Sherlock Holmes’ we have is the detective named

²¹ For ‘Dr. Jekyll is Mr. Hyde’, we obtain, ‘Dr. Jekyll (narrator of **t**, time of **t**, location of **t**) is Mr. Hyde (narrator of **t**, time of **t**, location of **t**)’. The truth conditions of a token of this identity sentence are ‘the individual that the convention exploited by the token **t** allows us to designate by ‘Dr. Jekyll’ (narrator of **t**, time of **t**, location of **t**) is the individual that the convention exploited by the token **t** allows us to designate by ‘Mr. Hyde’ (narrator of **t**, time of **t**, location of **t**)’.

‘Sherlock Holmes’ mentioned by Doyle and Watson. The fictional index and its assigned values are sufficient to individuate it.

7. Indexed tokens and fictional names

Consider a token of (1) in a copy of a Doyle’s novel. As we have seen, competent and informed speakers understand that

The indexed token **t** of (1) is true if and only if the individual that the convention exploited by **t** allows us to designate by ‘Sherlock Holmes’ (Watson, London, 1890) is a detective.

Suppose that we have a discussion about the novel and that I say (1). Which ‘Sherlock Holmes’ am I using? A fictional name, individuated by a fictional index, or a real name individuated by its bearer? What I said needs precision before being assigned truth conditions. I was talking about the novel, used a specific fictional ‘Sherlock Holmes,’ and said that the bearer of ‘Sherlock Holmes’ (Watson, London, 1890) is a detective – where the index individuates the used name. The truth conditions of my metafictional utterance **u** are given by

The utterance **u** of (1) is true if and only if the individual that the convention exploited by **u** allows us to designate by ‘Sherlock Holmes’ (Watson, London, 1890) is a detective.

My utterance is true if and only if the bearer of the fictional name is a detective. The truth conditions of the indexed token of (1) are easy to obtain. If the relevant name is properly individuated, there is no major difference between a fictive and a metafictional use of fictional name sentences. Except for reflexivity to the token and to the utterance, they have the same truth conditions and are, hence, in a sense equivalent. Such reflexivity echoes the fact that Watson is the fictive narrator of the token, and I am the actual speaker of the utterance. Now, consider my transfictional utterance **u** of

(7) Sherlock Holmes is a better detective than Hercule Poirot.

My utterance has truth conditions

The utterance **u** of (7) is true if and only if the individual that the convention exploited by **u** allows us to designate by ‘Sherlock Holmes’ (Watson, 1890, London) is a better detective than the individual that the convention exploited by **u** allows us to designate by ‘Hercule Poirot’ (narrator of **t**, time of **t**, location of **t**).

Suppose that you accept as true my utterance. It is understood that the elements indexing the names are different. Comparing the qualities of Holmes and Poirot is not grounded on facts and it remains a very speculative activity. The important philosophical difference between the fictive, metafictive and transfictive use of fictional names impacts the cognitive significance of indexed tokens and utterances only.

Let us go back to (2), ‘Emma Bovary is a detective,’ which is an English sentence and where ‘Emma Bovary’ is a fictional name. I will not consider the assignment of values to the index. A fictive token of this sentence has truth conditions

The indexed token **t** of (2) is true if and only if the individual that the convention exploited by **t** allows us to designate by ‘Emma Bovary’ (narrator of **t**, time of **t**, location of **t**) is a detective.

The reader will not accept as true the relevant token of that sentence. He can reject as false my utterance of (2) for the same reasons

The utterance **u** of (2) is true if and only if the individual that the convention exploited by **u** allows us to designate by ‘Emma Bovary’ (narrator of **t**, time of **t**, location of **t**) is a detective.

The same goes for (4), ‘According to Conan Doyle’s stories, Emma Bovary is a detective.’

The utterance **u** of (4) is true if and only if according to Conan Doyle’s stories, the individual that the convention exploited by **u** allows us to designate by ‘Emma Bovary’ (narrator of **t**, time of **t**, location of **t**) is a detective.

‘Conan Doyle’ is a real name and, given facts about the utterance, it can be assigned a designata: according to **CONAN DOYLE**’s stories, the person that the convention exploited by **u** allows us to designate by ‘Emma Bovary’ (narrator of **t**, time of **t**, location of **t**) is a detective. It is also an utterance that will be rejected as false.

The semantically determined content and cognitive significance²² of fiction tokens containing fictional names have no echo in official truth conditions or designational content, that is, the truth conditions that are obtained after determining the relevant, referred-to objects once facts about the utterance are taken into account (Perry 2012). Such tokens cannot be truth assessed. For fictional name sentence utterances or tokens, there is no designational content. In contrast to ordinary proper name sentence utterances, fictional name utterances and indexed tokens have utterance, or indexed token, dependent truth conditions only.²³ In this sense, Sherlock Holmes, the detective we all like, could not have existed without Doyle’s books. He is a creature of fiction. There is no content like ‘**SHERLOCK HOLMES** is a detective’ with Holmes himself as a constituent. We could introduce truth conditions with an empty slot. However, if the name is a fictional name, which by design has no referent, then there is no empty slot official content by design.²⁴ Only cognitive significance or informed cognitive significance is relevant to the author and reader. Some call utterances that fail by design to have designational content ‘pretence’ or ‘make-believe’ because they contain fictional names. I simply call it ‘fiction writing.’ Fiction readers consider the narrator’s story, not facts, because there are no facts. My view on fictional names also captures an aspect of fictional indexed tokens, like indexed tokens of

(8) Sherlock Holmes lives in London.

Following our model, if ‘London’ is an ordinary name,

²² Or informed cognitive significance.

²³ In that respect, my view on the semantics of fictional names and fictional name sentences strongly differs from Braun’s.

²⁴ In that respect, my view contrasts with Braun’s and Taylor’s.

The indexed token **t** of (8) is true if and only if the individual that the convention exploited by **t** allows us to designate by ‘Sherlock Holmes’ (Watson, 1890, London) lives in the place the convention exploited by the narrator of **t** allows us to designate by ‘London.’

Given the facts, we obtain

The indexed token **t** of (8) is true if and only if the individual that the convention exploited by **t** allows us to designate by ‘Sherlock Holmes’ (Watson, 1890, London) lives in **LONDON**

LONDON is the city itself. The truth conditions of fiction tokens that are partly about reality – or that have mixed contents – are not captured by the idea that fiction is pretence or make-believe because these truth conditions are too fine grained.

We need cognitive significance only or, better, informed cognitive significance, to understand fictional indexed tokens, and fictional names, and to follow stories. Of course, we can believe such contents. And it is fun. Our belief about fiction has truth conditions, something like *the individual that the convention exploited by ‘Sherlock Holmes’ (Watson, 1890, London) is a detective*. But we do not then believe assessed-as-true content containing fictional objects. Fiction does not require designational content and truth assessment, quite the opposite. In that respect, writers do not pretend that their utterances are true given features of utterances. They can be described as just supposing that the tokens they left are indexed and can be accepted as true. The notion of truth involved in the intuitions mentioned at the beginning of this paper plausibly fits acceptance as true. Let us go back to a token of (1) in Doyle’s novel. It is not true, but it is accepted as true. You can believe, or not, in the existence of Holmes and still accept the token of (1) as true. In our (earlier) discussion, you took ‘Sherlock Holmes’ to be a fictional name and knew that there was no designational content that was assigned a truth-value. I took ‘Sherlock Holmes’ to be a real name and thought that there was a designational content that was assigned a truth-value. This is the cognitive difference between you and me. Knowing what a name is an important aspect of our knowledge of language; knowing that some names are fictional names is also a major aspect of our linguistic competence.

Let us go back to the truth conditions of the indexed token of (1). If the name is a properly individuated fictional name, one cannot substitute a different fictional name, ‘Emma Bovary’ for instance, in the token and accept it as true. In any case, any token of ‘Emma Bovary is a detective’ has a different cognitive significance from a token of (1). Consider (1) in a television series, taking place in the 21st century. The name differs from the name in Doyle’s books – because the time of the fictional name is different – and cannot be substituted for the first version while preserving acceptability. The intuition that it can do so needs arguments. I suspect that accepting free substitution of ‘Sherlock Holmes’ depends on focusing on the sequence of letters or phonemes only and disregarding a more fine-grained individuation condition for the name.

8. Fictional names as complex objects

Kripke (2013, 78) evokes issues raised by characters appearing in different fictional stories. The same problems show up for names themselves. Is the name ‘Sherlock Holmes’ found in Conan Doyle’s novels the same as the name ‘Sherlock Holmes’ heard in a film or a television series? Various fictional names can be introduced, by different fictive narrators in different fictions. Ordinary names are simple objects individuated by a sequence of letter or sounds and the referent they are assigned to. Fictional names are complex objects with no assigned referent. Their fictional index, as well as the word itself, can be modified. The same sequence of letters, ‘Holmes’, can be individuated by fictional indexes assigned different values: ‘Sherlock Holmes’ (Watson, London, 1890), ‘Sherlock Holmes’ (Narrator of *t*, Calcutta, 1918), ‘Sherlock Holmes’ (narrator of *t*, Moscow, 1954), and so on. Suppose that you use ‘Sherlock Holmes.’ You plausibly have a specific, well-identified name in mind, be it from Doyle or from 1930s movies. And maybe you do not. If you do not, it *prima facie* does not always really matter in communication. The source can be Conan Doyle’s book or a TV series, and the names can be different. Unless details are needed, there will be no question concerning the specific name used. Due to lack of a specific index for a used fictional name, fictional name sentence utterances very often have no clear truth conditions, lack determined cognitive significance and they cannot always clearly be accepted as true, or rejected as false.

Conversations involving such names frequently show a high degree of indeterminacy. There is room for speculation on name identity and identification in communication that I will not engage in here. Nonetheless, a view on fictional names that does not address the identity and identification of fictional names, and that fails to take into account the many different ‘Sherlock Holmes,’ does not tell the whole story about such names. In so far as the complex object can be altered, we have a manifold of potential fictional names originating from the initial fictional token of ‘Sherlock Holmes’. We have a problem with the identity of names in stories. In this respect, such names contrast with names like ‘Zeus’ and ‘Vulcan.’ I will not explore that metaphysical issue here.

9. Conclusion

Speakers who are semantically competent with names know the difference between ordinary names and fictional names even if they are unable to say to which category a specific name belongs. The cognitive role of a specific name will differ accordingly. Reasoning with an ordinary name sentence or utterance and reasoning with a fictional name sentence or utterance does not have the same scope. My view has no impact on the conceptions of fictional objects; for example, Thomasson’s sophisticated picture of these objects. Reading fiction, we rely on accepted as true indexed tokens and use imagination about fictional objects and characters. However, this is of no semantic relevance. In this respect, my suggestion separates semantics from the ontology connected to fictional names. It binds the category of fictional objects to fiction, not to the semantics of fictional names. Creatures of fiction are motivated neither by semantics, nor by referential issues. Attributing a referential role to fictional names and seeing them as designating objects only help readers to engage with fiction. The point of my paper is that fictional names have a cognitive aspect only, and no referential role. These features, and the role of the reader in identifying names and characters, deserve further exploration.

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