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## **FICTIONAL SENTENCES AND THE PRAGMATIC DEFENCE OF DIRECT REFERENCE THEORIES<sup>1</sup>**

**SUMMARY:** According to Adams and his colleagues, fictional sentences, i.e. sentences featuring fictional names, lack any truth value. To explain intuitions to the contrary, they refer to the pragmatics of fictional assertions and claim that sincere utterances of those sentences generate some conversational implicatures. They argue that all who take fictional sentences to have a truth value tend to mistake implicatures of assertions of such sentences with their literal content. The aim of the paper is to show that this argument is not convincing. The challenge being that it doesn't provide any satisfactory explanation as to what is negated in seemingly genuine disagreement cases in which fictional sentences are asserted. Sentential negation usually doesn't affect (i.e. negate) a proposition which is conversationally implied, especially when it comes to the manner implicature. And, as I argue, an advocate of the pragmatic defence should maintain that this is the kind of conversational implicature that the assertion of fictional sentences generates.

**KEYWORDS:** pragmatic defence, direct reference, conversational implicature, fictional names, fictional sentences.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Although mythological and fictional names are intriguing to any theory of natural language semantics, they are especially challenging for any theorist who wishes to defend the conviction that these kinds of names are truly empty or

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vacuous. For, on the one hand, sentences containing at least one such name (hereafter fictional sentences) seem true or false, but, on the other hand, if they do not refer to anything, they fail to express any complete proposition and, in consequence, lack truth value. Thus, the theorist is to maintain not only that all such sentences lack truth value, but that any two sentences of the kind don't differ with respect to their semantic content or cognitive significance. However, for many, this consequence is hard to accept. Most of us would probably agree that

- (1) Sherlock Holmes is a detective
- (2) Harry Potter is a detective
- (3) The present Queen of Canada is a detective

have (i) different semantic contents, hence (ii) different truth values, and (iii) on some occasions they can be used to sincerely express someone's beliefs. These points might seem straightforward and obvious, and sometimes we take them for granted without any further justification. Only (1) is true, one might insist; the others are simply wrong or false, since they are about different objects—some real, some not—which have the property of being a detective or not. Some would probably add that (1) is true, but it is only true because it describes some fiction, or it is true within a fiction or is a consequence of what someone has written in a fiction: that Sherlock is not a real detective, but only fictional, that he has never existed in the real world, but only in a fictitious world created by A. Conan Doyle. Most of us would probably find these claims true and unquestionable; it would be a surprise to many if anyone were to challenge these facts. But, as it turns out, there are theorists who do argue against this conventional wisdom. They claim that all fictional sentences lack truth value.

To wit, some authors (Adams & Stecker, 1994; Adams, Fuller & Stecker, 1997; Adams & Dietrich, 2004; Adams & Fuller, 2007) reject common intuitions and in return propose an interesting explanation for (i)–(iii) without committing themselves to a belief in fictional objects. Their proposal, hereinafter referred to as “pragmatic defence”, is simple and, even if not provided in full detail, definitely not without initial credence. It is even appealing, for it promises a simple, general and unitary view on semantics of all types of proper names and sentences containing them. In a nutshell, they hold that these are conversational implicatures of assertions of fictional sentences that are commonly mistaken for their semantic content. It is conversational implicatures generated by assertions of fictional sentences that are to blame, for they give us the impression of the meaningfulness of the sentences and of their being true or false. However, as exciting as it may seem, this proposal is not convincing. The main goal of this paper is to offer an argument against the pragmatic defence of direct reference theories. Nevertheless, it is not the objective of the paper to refute these theories themselves. I believe that the approach to semantics which they propose is generally correct, even in regard to fictional names, but I firmly believe that the challenge

that fictional sentences poses to them is to be resolved differently, i.e. without referring to conversational implicatures. Nonetheless, in what follows, I would like to concentrate on fictional names and the problems they evoke, setting aside mythological or other types of empty names, and leaving the problem of an adequate solution for fictional sentences from the perspective of direct reference theories for another occasion.

### FICTIONAL NAME AND FICTIONAL SENTENCE

It is not altogether easy to say what makes a name fictional. Is any name occurring in a work of fiction fictional? Is “Napoleon” a fictional name in *War and Peace* by Tolstoy? What if the author of a novel thinks that a name she uses has a real referent, but she is plainly wrong and the name is empty? Does it make the name fictional? To answer these issues, Jerzy Pelc (1983, p. 202) set forth the following definition of a fictional name expression (my translation from Polish): “Any expression containing an empty name in a given usage, where its user knows that it is empty, is fictional in that usage.”

Herein, this characterisation is adopted with respect to “fictional names”, only with one addition. To be a fictional name, in the sense being stipulated, is to be an expression that can only be used as the grammatical subject in a grammatically correct, or well-formed, sentence of the type ‘ $x$  is  $P$ ’. Therefore “Harry Potter” would be a fictional name according to the adopted definition, whereas “a friend of Frodo” would not. It would not be a fictional name, even if it were referentially empty, because it can be used correctly as a predicate in ‘ $x$  is  $P$ ’, unlike “Harry Potter” which can only be correctly substituted for the placeholder variable  $x$ . This is to say that, from a grammatical point of view, fictional names mirror proper names in their grammatical functions. Pelc’s definition includes a condition which, interestingly enough, makes the status of a name dependent on the attitude which its user has towards the name and its semantic status. To decide whether “Napoleon” in Tolstoy’s usage in *War and Peace* is an empty name, one has to establish whether Tolstoy knew whether “Napoleon” in his usage was empty or not. If Tolstoy’s intention was to refer to Napoleon, the emperor of the French, it is not, but if he didn’t have that intention, consequently, “Napoleon” in *War and Peace* is a fictional name (provided it were empty in that case). Also, to complete the terminological setting, I will use “fictional use of a fictional name” to designate an intentional usage of a fictional name to refer to a fictional object; also, I will refer to assertions of fictional sentences with “fictional assertions”. To summarize, I have adopted the following stipulative definitions:

(N-FICT) A name  $N$  is a fictional name in the usage of an agent  $a$  iff (i)  $N$  is empty, (ii)  $a$  knows that (i), (iii)  $N$  can solely be a grammatical subject in a grammatically correct sentence of the form ‘ $x$  is  $P$ ’.

In consequence,

(S-FICT) A fictional sentence is a sentence with at least one fictional name.

From now on, for simplicity's sake, I will use "name" to refer solely to proper or fictional ones.

There are many types of fictional sentences which can pose different problems for different theories of semantics for fiction. To name a few, a fictional sentence used (e.g. written) by its author in a fiction is an intra-textual fictional sentence, whereas a fictional sentence which states the existence of some fictional character (i.e. apparent referent of a fictional name) is an existential fictional sentence. An extratextual fictional sentence (or paratextual as e.g. Manuel Garcia-Carpintero [2015, p. 146] puts it) is a sentence which is not a direct quotation from a work of art, e.g. literature, but it characterizes a fictional character in accordance with some text (e.g. "Sherlock Holmes was a brilliant detective who lived on Baker Street")—it is a consequence which can be drawn from intra-textual fictional sentences (and, possibly, for all we know, if I take it that Sherlock Holmes lived in London, and for all we know, London was bigger in the 19th century than Vienna, we can—in an extratextual fictional sentence—state that Sherlock Holmes lived in a city bigger than Vienna). In some statements the fictional nature of fictional objects is revealed—they can be called metatextual fictional sentences ("Sherlock Holmes is a fictional detective, who was created by Arthur Conan Doyle"). Also, in some sentences, extra-trans-textual fictional sentences, one fictional character is related in some respect to another ("Sherlock Holmes was taller than Hercules Poirot"). Others, belief-fictional sentences, state that some real agent has some belief about some fictional character ("G. W. Bush believes that Sherlock Holmes was a detective").

Interestingly enough, intra-textual fictional sentences are not of concern in the debate about the logical status of fictional sentences. The problem of their truth value is considered less problematic than in the case of other kinds of fictional sentences; in consequence, hardly anyone, maybe except literary critics and scholars and, in the end, readers, is interested in the matter of the truth value of intra-textual sentences. They create, so to speak, some fiction, fictional reality, rather than describe it truly or falsely. From the philosophical perspective, however, the most challenging task is to explain how it is possible for other kinds of fictional sentences to be apparently true or false. This is especially challenging for anyone who believes that fictional names are empty, adopts a principle specifying truth conditions for simple sentences and, in consequence, takes fictional sentences as lacking any truth value.

### THE CONDITION OF TRUTH

When is a simple sentence of the form ' $A$  is  $P$ ' true (where  $a$  is a name)? To address that question in the case of a particular sentence, like "Tobias Boo IV is

an arsonist”, it seems that all it takes is (i) to check what or who the referent of the name “Tobias Boo IV” is, (ii) to understand what it is to be an “arsonist”, what is meant by that predicate, and finally (iii) to check whether the referent has the properties that make someone or something an arsonist (or, putting it differently, whether the referent is among those things called “arsonists”). Therefore, the following principle may seem to capture this intuition in a stricter manner (where  $N$  is a name):

(T-COND) A sentence ‘ $N$  is  $P$ ’ is true under interpretation  $V$  iff  $V(\ulcorner N \urcorner) \in V(\ulcorner \text{is } P \urcorner)$  ( $V$  is a binary function from names to their bearers, from predicates to sets of all their designata, i.e. associates each individual name to a unique object and it associates each predicate to a unique fixed set of entities).<sup>2</sup>

Alternatively, one could adopt:

(T-COND’) A sentence ‘ $N$  is  $P$ ’ is true under interpretation  $V$  iff ‘ $N$  is  $P$ ’ expresses a true proposition represented by the structure  $\langle V(\ulcorner N \urcorner), V(\ulcorner \text{is } P \urcorner) \rangle$  (where  $V(\ulcorner E \urcorner)$  is the designatum of an expression  $E$  under the interpretation  $V$ ),

since direct reference theorists usually prefer to talk about propositions instead of sentences or statements.<sup>3</sup> However, since we are dealing with fictional sentences which may or may not express propositions, complete or incomplete (gappy), we should rather prefer (T-COND) to (T-COND’), as the former better defines direct reference theories’ principle of truth-conditions for simple sentences.

How general is (T-COND)? Can it be applied to any simple sentence, no matter whether  $N$  is a proper or fictional name? Assuming this principle, if one uses “Sherlock Holmes” not in order to refer to one’s pet or boat but in trying to refer to a fictional, i.e. not real, entity, then one’s assertion “Sherlock Holmes is intelligent” is true under this interpretation iff there is a referent of “Sherlock Holmes” which is a member of the class of intelligent objects. In other words, to establish the truth value of a simple sentence, all that is required is to check whether the embedded name has a referent, what object it is and what properties it instantiates. The way the object is given doesn’t matter—the name in the sentence refers to it directly, without any mediation, for interpretation  $V$  is a binary function that directly assigns referents to names. The only semantic function of the name is to pick out one object and make it the part of the sentence’s content; it does not have meaning, does not express sense, does not have connotation. Thus a simple sentence containing a name is true of an object only if the name refers directly to

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<sup>2</sup> The exact condition should be stated more precisely, e.g. the role of context should be included, but this loose formulation is sufficient for what follows and gives a precise enough idea of the theories I have in mind.

<sup>3</sup> For a different characterization see Båve (2008).

it. The object designated by a name is the only contribution of that term to the semantic value of statements like  $\ulcorner N \text{ is } P \urcorner$ . Therefore, if, according to a theory, (T-COND) is generally true of all instances of simple sentences, henceforth it will be called “direct reference theory”.

The apparent truth or falsehood of fictional sentences poses a grave problem for (T-COND). For if “Sherlock Holmes” is empty, i.e. has no referent, then the sentence “Sherlock Holmes is intelligent” (or its assertion) is not true. It is not false either, since if it were, the referent would not be a member of the class. But there is no referent for “Sherlock Holmes” under this presumption. This consequence appears to falsify any theory from which it follows, because the truth of “Holmes is intelligent” seems to be apparent and undeniable to anyone familiar with the Doyle’s stories. Some may even insist that any theory which claims that the sentence lacks any truth value should be deemed dubious and as such rejected once and for all.

The puzzle of seemingly truth-evaluable fictional sentences can be easily solved by rejecting the assumption of the referential emptiness of fictional names, yet upholding (T-COND). Easily, but at a cost, one could add, the acceptance of the existence of some fictional world with its fanciful creatures could only be tolerated, and only to some degree, among some gullible people, but definitely not within philosophical or scientific, i.e. critical and logical, circles.<sup>4</sup> The other solution is to give up (T-COND) in general or in particular, i.e. only with respect to fictional names.<sup>5</sup> To wit, in cases where a name is used fictionally, one can consider adopting the following:

(T-COND-FICT) A fictional sentence  $\ulcorner N \text{ is } P \urcorner$  is true under interpretation  $V$  iff under interpretation  $V$ , fictional name  $\ulcorner N \urcorner$  expresses a set of properties (or a definite description or a notion) associated in a fiction with its character (or the meaning of  $\ulcorner N \urcorner$  is the set of properties associated in some novel, film, etc. with its character) and the property expressed (under this interpretation) by  $\ulcorner \text{is } P \urcorner$  is a member of the set (cf. Tiedke, 2011).

So if I used “Sherlock Holmes is a detective” with the intention of talking about Doyle’s fiction (let’s assume that this intention sets the interpretation in that context), my assertion would be true iff the property of being a detective were one of the properties attributed to the character dubbed “Sherlock Holmes” by Doyle. Alternatively, my assertion would be true if I had a notion of Sherlock Holmes, a mental file labelled “Sherlock Holmes”, which included the property of being a detective. Unfortunately, this solution leads to heterogeneous semantics for names, which may seem too high a price to pay. Namely, to establish the truth value of a simple sentence featuring only standard proper names, one has to use (T-COND-S), but for fictional sentences, one must switch to (T-COND-

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<sup>4</sup> For deep and comprehensive insights on this topic, see Sainsbury (2010).

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Tiedke (2011) or de Ponte, Korta, Perry (2018).

FICT). There is another difficulty, especially when one suggests that a fictional name refers to some kind of mental file. In that case it would be difficult to explain why two people discussing Doyle's works and talking about Sherlock Holmes can agree or disagree about this fictional character, since the names they use refer to different mental files (for the content of these files could be different). Also, it has a rather controversial consequence, for if fictional sentences (at least extratextual ones) were true, they would be analytically true in consequence. It would be so because the solution presupposes that a fictional name has a description as its meaning (i.e. the set of properties attributed to the name by its author), and a simple sentence is true iff a predicated property belongs to that description.

Personally, I don't think that this consequence is hard to accept or its price too high, although without further elaboration it cannot explain the apparent truthfulness of inter-extratextual fictional sentences. This is the kind of fictional sentence that poses a problem for another solution worth mentioning.<sup>6</sup> One can maintain that fictional sentences are elliptical, namely, there is a lexically unarticulated intentional operator "in fiction..." or "according to..." which is a part of the logical form of fictional sentences. This could be a reason for adopting the following truth-condition principle for fictional sentences:

(T-COND-FICT\*) A fictional sentence '*N is P*' is true under interpretation *V* iff there is a fiction *X*, and the sentence '*According to X: N is P*' is true under interpretation *V*.

When someone finds "Sherlock Holmes is intelligent" true, according to this stance, it is because one finds "According to the stories of A. Conan Doyle: Sherlock Holmes is intelligent" true as well. However, for some the price is too high to accept this seemingly persuasive and elegant solution, for it is hard to see how to deal with sentences like "Sherlock Holmes is taller than Hercules Poirot" or "Sherlock Holmes is taller than Angela Merkel" or "Sherlock Holmes is tall, and so is George W. Bush" if there is no work of fiction where these characters appear together. Even if it were true that according to the stories of A. Conan Doyle, Sherlock Holmes was tall, and according to the stories of A. Christie, Hercules Poirot was short, we would need to adopt some special rules of inference to conclude, firstly, that according to the stories of A. Conan Doyle and A. Christie, Sherlock Holmes was tall and Hercules Poirot was short and, secondly, that according to the stories of A. Conan Doyle and A. Christie, Sherlock Holmes was taller than Hercules Poirot.<sup>7</sup> However, without further investigations it is not easy to decide whether from

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<sup>6</sup> See Lewis (1978).

<sup>7</sup> This solution was suggested by the anonymous reviewer.

According to  $X$ :  $p$

and

According to  $Y$ :  $q$

one can arrive at

According to  $X$  and  $Y$ :  $p$  and  $q$ ,

which would license (in the case of inter-trans-textual fictional sentences) the truth of ' $p$  and  $q$ '. Notice that adopting such a rule may be problematic, for presumably we don't want to say that Sherlock Holmes was born in both the 18<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century (i.e. not in 19<sup>th</sup> century), or has only one sibling and only two siblings, even if there was one story according to which he was born in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and had only one sibling, and there was another according to which he was born in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and had exactly two siblings.

There is also another thought-provoking problem. Let's imagine that the opening sentence of the first adventure of Sherlock Homes was "Sherlock Holmes exists, he is a real detective who lives at 221B Baker Street". According to (T-COND-FICT\*), the statement "Sherlock Holmes is a real person" or "Sherlock Holmes exists" is true, which seems doubtful, for some of us decline to agree that Sherlock Holmes exists or is real person no matter what A. Conan Doyle wrote about that. Although one can agree that Sherlock Holmes is a detective (for it seems to describe only fictional reality, it is "true within a story"), it is not equally easy to agree that he exists and is a real person (for it seems that these claims always describe reality). Even if this reservation can be dismissed, the solution—all simple fictional sentences are elliptical—is not so simple any more, for there is a class of fictional sentences where the principle 'A fictional sentences  $S$  is true iff there is a fiction  $X$  and according to  $X$ :  $p$ ' needs to be applied with care or not applied at all: namely, for some sentences of the form ' $X$  exists', this principle may seem applicable on some occasions but for others not. Losing its generality and unitary theory of fictional sentences, this solution loses its elegance and initial appeal.

### PRAGMATIC DEFENCE

Even if these different solutions to the apparent truthfulness of fictional sentences generate problems of their own, they can still be theoretically and philosophically tempting in the face of the failure of direct reference theories (or [T-COND] to be precise). To recapitulate, the main reservation about these theories is the following argument (ARG):

- 1) That a fictional sentence *S* is neither true nor false in context *C* is a consequence of direct reference theory *T* (i.e. [T-COND] and other plausible assumptions [i.e. fictional names have no bearers, there is no unarticulated operator, etc.]);
- 2) However, *S* seems to have a truth value in *C*;
- 3) If, in *C*, a sentence seems to have a truth value, and there is no other plausible explanation for that or convincing argument to the contrary, it is reasonable to accept that it has a truth value in the circumstances;
- 4) There is no other plausible explanation for why *S* in *C* seems to have a truth value, and there is no convincing argument that it doesn't have that truth value;

In consequence

- 5) It is reasonable to accept that *S* has that specific truth value (i.e. it is true or false) in *C*;

Therefore

C) Direct reference theory *T* ([T-COND] or at least one of the other assumptions) is dubious.<sup>8</sup>

Now, I dub the pragmatic defence any strategy which is to undermine 4) by referring to some pragmatic aspects of speech acts. This approach points out that there is an important but overlooked pragmatic factor in play which misleads us

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<sup>8</sup> The anonymous referee pointed out that (ARG) is not very convincing; in particular, premise (3) is dubious, for it reduces a semantic problem (what the truth value of the sentence is) to an epistemological one (how can one establish the truth value of the sentence). I share this worry to some extent. Before I try to address it, let me point out that this argument is not explicitly formulated by the proponents of the pragmatic defence, and it may be my logical reconstruction of the pragmatic defence that makes it less convincing than in fact it is. To defend the premise, and hence the initial credibility of the pragmatic defence, I can only add that it is common practice that on some occasions we decide to refer to the intuitive judgements of linguistically competent agents in order to establish the merits of a semantical hypothesis. We confront them with some sentence(s) and ask them to valueate those sentences in some specific circumstances. If the result of the experiment is conclusive and undeniable, we conclude—from what it seems to responders—that in specified circumstances those sentences have truth values as judged by competent agents. Unless, of course, someone provides an argument to the contrary by pointing out why those intuitions are misleading or semantically worthless. We can always dismiss intuitive judgements, but I think that doing so needs an argument. And that is what is assumed in the premise (3). Giving benefit of the doubt to the advocates of the pragmatic defence, I will try to show that even if the arguments of the (ARG) kind were acceptable, the pragmatic solution would fail.



imparted by “Holmes does not exist” that we are inclined (mistakenly) to believe that “Holmes does not exist” expresses a truth. (1997, p. 145)

As for the mechanism of associating names with descriptions, it would be illustrative to look at the following remarks from Adams and Dietrich:

On the version of direct reference that we accept, all names (empty or filled) have associated with them various descriptions. None of these descriptions give the meanings of the names. Nonetheless, the descriptions become associated with names by learning. (...) here is lore associated with empty names as well as with filled. Nearly all of us learn the Greek Myths. We learn the Pegasus lore, and, thereby, come to associate “the winged horse of Greek mythology” with the name “Pegasus”. When we utter “Pegasus flies”, although we literally express the incomplete proposition  $\langle \_\_\_, \text{flies} \rangle$ , we pragmatically imply complete propositions that would be expressed by taking a description associated with the name and substituting. So, for example, we pragmatically imply that the winged horse of Greek mythology flies. And if we utter “Pegasus does not exist”, we pragmatically imply that the winged horse of Greek mythology does not exist. We claim that this latter implied proposition is complete, true, and its truth misleadingly inclines us to think that a sentence such as “Pegasus does not exist” says something true. (2004, p. 126)

Due to these illustrative passages, we can generalize these remarks and arrive at the principle tacitly adopted by the advocates of the pragmatic defence:

(GCI-FICT) A speaker  $S$ , by sincerely uttering a fictional sentence  $\lceil N \text{ is } P \rceil$ , conversationally implies that there is exactly one object that is  $F_1, \dots, F_n$ , which is  $P$  (where  $F_1, \dots, F_n$  are properties associated by  $S$  with the fictional name  $N$ ).<sup>9</sup>

There is an imminent, nevertheless, problem with (GCI-FICT). If all implicatures generated by sincere utterances of fictional sentences were of this kind, all of them would be false, unless there were some real objects which by mere coincidence satisfy the descriptions of fictional characters. If these implicatures were

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<sup>9</sup> It is not clear enough whether  $F_1, \dots, F_n$  are properties associated by  $S$  with the fictional  $N$  or whether they are associated with  $N$  by all of the community to which  $S$  belongs. I think Adams and Dietrich (2004) give a good reason to accept the first possibility. They admit that descriptions associated by a speaker with a fictional name can change over time, and so the pragmatic content of her fictional assertion could change. They write (2004, p. 130): “Let’s consider Everett’s cross-temporal utterances of ‘Faust doesn’t exist.’ Everett in 1991 may associate with ‘Faust’ a certain set of descriptions ‘doctor in Goethe’s play’, ‘seducer of a young girl depicted in Goethe’s play’. In 2001, Everett may associate with ‘Faust’ radically different descriptions (...). Suppose that neither of the latter descriptions were associated with ‘Faust’ by Everett in 1991. Now won’t there be different pragmatic implications of the utterances by Everett of ‘Faust does not exist’ over time, due to the differences of descriptions associated? Yes.”

false, however, it would be impossible to explain why some fictional sentences seem true. To solve this complication, we can amend (GCI-FICT) and adopt the following:

(GCI-FICT\*) A speaker *S*, by sincerely uttering a fictional sentence '*N* is *P*', conversationally implies that the property expressed by *P* is one of the properties associated by *S* with fictional name *N*.

But even with this correction, the pragmatic defence is not convincing. Although there were some justified doubts about the merits of the pragmatic defence (Reimer, 2001; Everett, 2003; Green, 2007), I take for granted that its proponents have successfully dealt with all these challenges (Adams, Dietrich, 2004; Adams, Fuller, 2007). However, I believe there is another problem for the pragmatic strategy, which I would like to submit. My argument is designed to undermine the pragmatic defence; in a nutshell, it starts with the observation that all conversational implicatures are non-conventional. I propose a simple test for non-conventionality. The alleged implicatures of fictional assertions don't satisfy this test. The only implicatures that don't satisfy the test are manner implicatures. Therefore, the alleged GCIs of fictional assertions can only be manner implicatures. But if they are, there is no convincing way to explain what a simple exchange of words is about: "A: Sherlock Holmes is brilliant, B: No, he isn't". As we will see, there are no good reasons for claiming that in this exchange *B* contradicts any implicature conveyed by *A*'s words.

#### ARGUMENT AGAINST THE PRAGMATIC DEFENCE

It is accepted that one of the distinctive features of almost all conversational implicatures is their non-conventionality, which may be understood henceforth as follows:

(NON-CONV) If an utterance of a sentence *S* conversationally implicates a proposition *p* in context *C*, then the proposition is a non-conventional part of the content conveyed by an act of asserting *S* iff there is a different context *C*\* in which an utterance of *S* does not conversationally implicate *p*.

For an illustration of what this stipulative definition means, imagine that someone is asked in the evening if she is hungry. She replies with "I've had breakfast", clearly conversationally implicating, i.e. not stating or saying, that she (i.e. the speaker) is hungry, for there is a different context, in which the assertion of the same sentence would not implicate the same proposition. This context takes place in the morning, when she is asked the same question, but the same reply clearly doesn't imply that she is hungry—it is evident that she would be suggesting just the opposite.

If assertions of fictional sentences give rise to implicatures, there must be a context where the same assertions would not imply those implicatures, even if—as is presumably assumed by proponents of the pragmatic defence—the alleged implicatures of fictional sentences are generalized conversational implicatures. Can we describe the conditions under which implicatures are not produced?

Fortunately, we can produce a test to check for generalized conversational implicatures, at least for quantity and relevance implicatures.

(CI-COND) If an assertion of a sentence *S* in a context *C* conversationally implicates a proposition *p*, then *S* is not a direct answer in *C* to a YES/NO question 'Is/Are/Am/Do/Does/Did/Will/Would *S*\*?'<sup>1</sup> (where *S*\* is a proper form of an erotetic sentence transformed from a declarative sentence *S*).

If (CI-COND) is true, then if one answers “Some students passed the exam” to the question “Did some students pass the exam?”, there would not be an implicature that, according to the speaker, not all students passed. That proposition would be implicated if the question were “Did all students pass the exam?” or “How many students passed the exam?” or, perhaps, “Who passed the exam?”. The reasoning behind (CI-COND) is that these are the questions that define not only what the aim of the exchange of words is, but, equally importantly, they specify what the relevant information is and how much information is required in the context. If one gives the answer “Some students passed” to the question “Did some students pass the exam?”, there is no satisfactory argument with reference to the maxim of quantity to calculate the potential quantity implicature that, according to the speaker, not all students passed. And as we learnt from Grice, calculability is probably the most important feature of conversational implicatures. If, in the context (e.g. “– Did some students pass? – Yes, some did”), some conversational implicature is generated, it is not by the reply but by the question alone. We can comprehend the answer as a sign of concurring with the proposition implicated by the question, not as a message conveying a conversational implicature. If the reply implies anything at all, it implies that its speaker doesn't reject some proposition implicated by the question. But the proposition that (the speaker believes) not all students passed and the proposition that the addressee agrees with that belief of the speaker are different; therefore, if the reply implicates anything (which is disputable), it is a different proposition than that which is implicated by the question.

Now let's apply (CI-COND) to the thesis of the pragmatic defence. If “Sherlock Holmes was a detective” were the direct answer to the question “Was Sherlock Holmes a detective?”, then the answer would not conversationally imply anything. And, as such, that answer would not seem to have any truth value. But that is not the case. Clearly, in that context, the sentence seems true.

However, an advocate of the pragmatic defence could point out that not all conversational implicatures are non-conventional. And rightly so, because man-

ner implicatures don't pass (CI-COND). To testify to that, let's consider the following example: It seems that an assertion of "I am not going out to get I-C-E-C-R-E-A-M" generates an implicature (e.g. "Don't use the word 'ice-cream' when children are around"), even if it is a direct answer to the question "Are you going out to get I-C-E-C-R-E-A-M?". So—an advocate of the pragmatic defence could speculate—an assertion of a fictional sentence produces this kind of implicature, and that is why it doesn't satisfy (CI-COND).

Interestingly, advocates of the pragmatic defence refer to an exploitation of the maxim of manner in explaining why fictional assertions generate the alleged implicatures:

We tend to favor an account involving conversational mechanisms. A possible version might combine the Grice's rules of Relation (Be relevant) and of Manner (Be brief). (...) [Green] suggests that there might be a conversational rule to use "singular terms associated with lore that is relevant to the current purpose or purposes of the conversation(s) in which you are participating" (...). Grice's maxim to be as brief as possible, to "avoid unnecessary prolixity" (Grice, 27), also helps to explain empty-names implicatures in the following way. The lore associated with the name "Santa Claus" may be quite extensive: in other words there may be many descriptions associated with the name. It is much more economical simply to say "Santa Claus does not exist" than to say "There is no unique person who satisfies most of the following descriptions: is fat, is jolly, owns reindeer (including Rudolf), lives at the North Pole, gives presents to kids on Christmas day, is called 'Santa Claus'." (Adams, Fuller, 2007, p. 462)

I think there is also another point overlooked by advocates of the pragmatic defence, in favour of the thesis that if assertions of fictional sentences implicate some GCIs, they are manner implicatures. All conversational implicatures are non-detachable from their semantic content, but manner implicatures are detachable, for they are dependent on lexical form, not semantic content. Non-detachability can be specified as follows

(NONDET) If an utterance of a sentence *S* in a context *C* conversationally implies a proposition *p*, then the proposition is a non-detachable part of the content of the utterance iff an utterance in context *C* of any sentence synonymous to *S* conversationally implies the proposition.

To wit, if an assertion of "Jack is taller" is an answer to the question "Who is the better basketball player: John or Jack?" and implies that the speaker believes that Jack is a better basketball player than John, then in the same context a synonymous sentence (e.g. "John is shorter") would implicate the same. If GCIs generated by assertions of fictional sentences were not manner implicatures, they would be non-detachable. But in that case two different fictional sentences featuring two different fictional names would have the same implicatures, simply because their semantic content is the same, i.e. none, and in that sense

they are synonymous. But an advocate of the pragmatic defence agrees that different fictional assertions could have different pragmatic meanings. Therefore, she must agree with the claim that if there are GCIs of fictional assertions, they must be manner implicatures.

However, even if we take this for granted, there is another difficulty with the defence. Imagine a scenario where two agents, *A* and *B*, disagree about their favourite fictional character. One says “Sherlock Holmes was a drug-addict”; the other vigorously replies, “No, he was not!”. If the proponent of the pragmatic defence were right, there might not be a real disagreement, for a conversationally implied property that drug-addiction is one of the properties she, *A*, attributes to that name, and *B* implies that that property is not among the features she, *B*, associates with “Sherlock Holmes”. Undoubtedly, the properties *A* associates with that name can be the same or can be different than the properties *B* associates with the same name. To respond to this issue, the proponent can, once again, amend his thesis as follows:

(GCI-S-FICT\*\*) A speaker *S*, by sincerely uttering a fictional sentence ‘*N* is *P*’, conversationally implies that the property expressed by *P* is one of the properties associated by the author of the fictional *N*.

But that won’t do. To see why, we must reflect on situations where two sides collide in conversations. What is negated when a simple negation, ‘No, *N* is not *P*’, is the response to the claim ‘*N* is *P*’? It seems that all that is negated is the proposition semantically expressed. But an advocate of the pragmatic defence can’t agree with that. She must insist that it is only some conversationally implied proposition that is being contradicted for there is literally no proposition stated by the assertion of a fictional sentence.

However, if the advocate were right, it would be an exception to the general linguistic practice of negating a proposition.<sup>10</sup> For though we know we can distinguish three different cases where the implied assertion is negated, none of them match the one the advocate must presume in order to explain the disagreement.

Firstly, when some *A* says ‘*N* is *P*’ and the other responds with ‘No, *N* isn’t *P*’, both assertions can generate the same implicature. What is important for evaluating the pragmatic defence is a case typical to contexts where manner implicatures occur. In appropriate circumstances, both “We should go out for I-C-E-C-R-E-A-M” and “No, we should not go out for I-C-E-C-R-E-A-M”, blatantly violating the maxim of manner, would conversationally imply exactly the same proposition. So, if fictional assertions systematically generate manner implicatures, then one can expect that, in such a scenario, both *A* and *B* imply the same implicature, and hence don’t disagree about implicature, albeit apparently

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<sup>10</sup> In Horn (2001), one can find a comprehensive overview on negation and a history of studies of negation.

they disagree about something else. An advocate of the pragmatic defence doesn't explain what it is they disagree about.

Secondly, an assertion of a sentence can generate some implicature that  $p$ , but an assertion of the negation of the preceding sentence will generate neither the same implicature nor its negation. For instance, in some contexts, an assertion of "She can do it" conversationally implies that it is not necessary for her to do it. Clearly, "She can't do it" (with the reference to the same woman and action) would not imply in that context that it is necessary for her to do it.

Finally, sometimes all that is negated is not the proposition expressed by semantic or pragmatic means, but, so to speak, the linguistic form of the sentence: "– He is a Polak! – No, he is not: he is Polish". In this dialogue, it is not the propositional content that is objected to but the particular choice of words. All the response expresses is the unassertability of the word "Polak" in a given context. Hence, one may be willing to call this kind of negation a "meta-negation".<sup>11</sup> But it is clear that in the scenario discussed earlier, *B*'s response is not meta-negation: *B* isn't object to *A*'s particular choice of words.

What is particularly interesting here is how one can recognize this apparent meta-negation. When it is not the proposition semantically expressed that is being negated, a compound sentence with an embedded negated sentence is used. This compound sentence consists of a simple negation of the preceding one and a correction that provides the proper or assertible phrase. In that respect it is similar to contexts where a pragmatically conveyed proposition is negated or (to use Grice's term) cancelled. For, obviously, it is possible to contradict the proposition conversationally implied by an assertion; however, in order to do that, one needs to use not just simple negation but a more compounded sentence. If someone conversationally implies something which is in our opinion false, clearly, we can disagree with that implicated proposition, and we have sufficient lexical means to express our disagreement, like "I don't agree with what you are suggesting/implying", etc.

To express disagreement, when it comes to what was conversationally implied, especially when it comes to the manner implicature, it doesn't suffice to simply assert "No" or "No, it is not" or the like, for, as it seems, simple sentential negation of an assertion doesn't affect (i.e. negate) its conversational implicature. To deny something only conversationally implicated by someone, the utterance has to be more lexically elaborate. Otherwise it can't explicitly contradict the implicature. If someone says "Some students are hard-working", implying that not all of them are, one can deny this implicature not by simply saying "That is not the case", but, for instance, "Yes, some are hard-working, and in fact, all of them are" or "No, I think all of them are hard-working" or "I don't agree with what you are implying"; none of the responses are a simple negation of the preceding statement. Saying "That is not the case" would refer to the proposition semantically expressed (or its truth value), i.e. that some students are hard-

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<sup>11</sup> See Horn (1985).

working, and in consequence it would state that no student is hard-working. By briefly replying “That is not the case” to “Some students are hard-working”, one can’t rationally be taken as expressing the belief that all students are hard-working, which would be the case if it were a way to contradict the implied proposition.

In consequence, in the described scenario, if *B* is to deny what *A*’s statement “Sherlock Holmes was a drug-addict” allegedly implies, her response must not be a simple negation of *A*’s utterance, i.e. “Sherlock Holmes was not a drug-addict”. If the alleged implicature is to be denied, a compound sentence would need to be used instead of a simple negation. But if *B* chooses to assert only “Sherlock Holmes was not a drug-addict”, she must be contradicting something that is not a conversational implicature, if this disagreement is to be genuine. And genuine it seems. This shows that the advocate of the pragmatic defence has no convincing answer as to what is contradicted by *B*’s response. In consequence, the pragmatic defence fails.

### CONCLUSION

The aim of the paper was to cast some doubt on the credence of the pragmatic defence. Its advocates either can’t convincingly explain what is negated during disagreements about fiction or they must maintain that the postulated implicatures don’t have their usual properties. Neither is attractive. Presumably, advocates of this stance could argue that in the case where an expression *S* doesn’t have any semantic context and all its usage conveys is an implicature, all that is negated by ‘It is not the case that *S*’ is the implicature. For what else can be negated? Well, it is true that on occasion we use nonsensical expressions to implicate something. During a party, when we gossip about its host, I can utter to my partner “Boo-woo-boo-bleh” signalling clearly to her to change the subject. However, I am not too sure that if she replied “No, it is not the case that boo-woo-boo-bleh”, she would communicate that we should not change the subject. I think I would just be left confused.

For the reasons I have given here, I doubt that the notion of conversational implicature should be used to explain the apparent meaningfulness of fictional sentences. That is not to say that the pragmatic defence is beyond repair. I think it is possible to explain intuitions concerning simple fictional sentences without help from conversational implicatures and without giving up (T-COND), granting that simple fictional sentences are simple and that fictional names are empty. I believe that a promising approach is to maintain that fictional names function similarly to names used metonymically. When one says “John read Quine in a day”, then by “Quine” she refers to something in connection with Quine not to Quine alone. She probably intends to convey that John has read an article or a book or a specific work by Quine. The semantic referent of “Quine” in that sentence is the philosopher, but clearly the speaker reference is different. Her usage of “Quine” is to be interpreted as if it refers to his work. So, in the case of

fictional sentences and assertions, it looks promising to adopt that although “Holmes” has no referent, it is to be interpreted as if it expressed some typical properties attributed to him by A. Conan Doyle. Of course, even if it is promising, it needs further elaboration and work. This approach to fictional sentences faces problems of its own. Can they be overcome? That we must leave for another occasion.

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