

Frege on Fiction

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1 Preliminaries

Frege scarcely suggested any positive theory of fictional discourse. One can find no chapter entitled “The Semantics of Fictional Discourse” in any of his numerous works on semantics. What we can find at most are just sketchy remarks on some particular features exhibited by expressions occurring in fictional discourse. In fact, virtually everything Frege said about fictional discourse is negative in a sense. This is a pretty typical locution:

In myth and fiction thoughts occur that are neither true nor false. Logic has nothing to do with these (Frege 1979d, 198).¹

This quotation merely suggests what fictional discourse is *not* like. I suspect that Frege’s notes on fictional discourse are primarily designed to highlight certain features of factual discourse rather than to contribute

1 Frege often speaks about myth and fiction; what he has in mind, I guess, is a special sort of context, written or spoken, rather than some world of myth and fiction (whatever it might be). My term “fictional discourse”, which I take to cover both myth and fiction, is supposed to highlight this fact.

to a theory of fictional discourse *per se*.² Essentials of factual discourse are made more lucid by occasional allusions to fictional one. Therefore, it is by no means surprising that what we find are but fragmentary pieces scattered here and there in some of his papers. I try to put them together and identify the main features exhibited by fictional discourse, as presumed in Frege's official semantic theory.

1.1 *The Fundamentals of Frege's Semantics*

First of all, we should review the most important features of Frege's mature semantic theory which will be our basis for interpreting Frege's remarks on fictional discourse.³ Concerning factual discourse, the following seems to hold without exception:

- a) There are two basic kinds of expression – *proper names* and *concept-words*. Every sentence can be split up into an (unsaturated) concept-word having at least one empty place and a required number of (saturated) names filling the empty place(s).⁴ Assertoric sentences are names as well (cf. Frege 1984a, 163).
- b) The semantic content of an expression subdivides into two parts; it consists of a *sense* (*Sinn*) expressed by expression and a *meaning* (*Bedeutung*) denoted by expression. The sense is a *mode of presentation* of the meaning; the sense is said “to illuminate only a single aspect of the thing meant” (Frege 1984a, 158).⁵
- c) There are two basic kinds of entities – *objects* and *concepts*. Objects are meanings of names while concepts are meanings of concept-words (cf. Frege 1984b, 183, 187, 193).

2 The term “factual discourse” covers both scientific discourse and everyday serious communication without irony, metaphor, etc.

3 What I label “Frege's mature semantic theory” is his post-1890 theory. However, some of its ingredients occur also in the pre-1890 period. Anyway, I shall not go into deep exegesis.

4 This thesis became a corner stone of Frege's theories as early as in 1879; cf. Frege (1967, 22). Instead of concept-words (and concepts), Frege speaks there about functions. Cf. also Frege (1984b).

5 Throughout the paper, the terms “sense” and “meaning” will be used in Frege's technical senses.

- d) A sentence is *true (false)* provided the object(s) denoted by the constituent name(s) fall(s) under the concept denoted by the constituent concept-word; otherwise it is false. The True and the False are objects; they are meanings of (assertoric) sentences (cf. Frege 1984b).
- e) The sense of a complete (assertoric) sentence is called a *thought*. Constituent words occurring in the sentence contribute their individual senses into the whole and form the thought expressed by the sentence. Thoughts are primary bearers of truth-values (cf. Frege 1984a, 162 – 165; 1984c).
- f) The thought expressed by a sentence should be distinguished both from the *judgement* one makes when he or she recognizes the thought as true as well as from the *assertion* one makes when he or she manifests this judgement in uttering a suitable (assertoric) sentence (cf. Frege 1984a, 164 – 165; 1984c, 355 – 356).
- g) Both the sense and the meaning of a compound expression are derived compositionally from the senses, or meanings, respectively, of the constituent words (cf. Frege 1984a, 162).
- h) If an expression occurs in an indirect (*ungerade*, opaque, non-extensional) context, its ordinary sense (i.e., the sense *expressed* in ordinary, extensional, context) plays the role of the expression's indirect meaning (cf. Frege 1984a, 159).

1.2 *Fictional Discourse vs. Discourse about Fiction*

As we have already seen, the thoughts expressed by sentences in fictional discourse are neither true nor false. The reason is that (at least) some expressions occurring in such sentences have no meanings. These ideas will be discussed in some details later. For the time being, we should try to precise which discourse is fictional.

Frankly speaking, it is rather unclear how to distinguish fictional discourse from factual one. Frege sometimes speaks as if every sentence that involves at least one meaningless constituent expression belongs to, or forms, fictional discourse. Such sentences cannot be used to express anything true and, therefore, they are irrelevant for knowledge. The first attempt at defining fictional discourse may, thus, consist in pointing to meaninglessness of (at least) some constituent expressions. Unfortunately, this rather sharp criterion is sometimes obscured by Frege's insistence that meaninglessness of some expressions

... arises from an imperfection of language, from which even the symbolic language of mathematical analysis is not altogether free; even there combinations of symbols can occur that seem to mean something but (at least so far) do not mean anything, e.g. divergent infinite series. This can be avoided, e.g., by means of the special stipulation that divergent infinite series shall mean the number 0 (Frege 1984a, 169).

So, sometimes we might be content with expressions being meaningless, but sometimes we might not. Sometimes we feel obliged to provide *conventional meanings* for certain expressions. How should we discriminate when the latter is the case? I am afraid there is no open-and-shut criterion. If pushed to the limits, we might suggest that a sentence be a part of fictional discourse provided we do not care about what it means or whether its constituent expressions mean anything at all.⁶ We deliberately resign to knowledge in such cases.

Now fictional discourse in this sense should be distinguished from the so called discourse about fiction. Fictions are at times subjects of serious communication in textual criticism, for example. It is beyond question that sentences appearing in textual criticism or other seriously taken sentences about fiction *are* either true or false. And if the truth-value of a sentence is derived compositionally from the meanings of its constituent expressions, all proper names and concept-words occurring in the sentence should denote something. Thus, if a sentence involving the name "Odysseus" is used in fictional discourse the name is taken as empty, i.e. as meaningless; on the other hand, if the name occurs in a sentence from factual discourse (about fiction), it should be provided with some meaning or other. So, if such sentences are to be about some meaning or other, what actually are they about? There are at least three possibilities open to Frege:

- a) *The Metalinguistic View.* The sentences featuring empty names or empty concept-words are about those words themselves rather than about anything else. A version of this view Frege adopted for identity sentences as early as in his *Begriffsschrift* – a sentence of the form "a = b" is about the names "a" and "b" rather than about what they mean (cf. Frege 1967, 21). There is one place in which Frege seems to think about this option for factual discourse about fiction: "People certainly say that Odysseus is not an historical person, and mean

6 This is perhaps suggested in Frege (1979c, 192).

by this contradictory expression that the name 'Odysseus' designates nothing, has no meaning" (Frege 1979c, 191). However, in the rest of his papers he is silent about it.

- b) *The Indirect Context View.* The sentences featuring empty names or empty concept-words are to be viewed as prefixed by a non-extensional operator of fiction such as "in fiction it holds that...". If an expression occurs in the range of this operator it denotes what is its ordinary sense in extensional contexts. Such sentences would be about senses. Frege's doctrine concerning indirect contexts is well known but it probably did not occur to him to apply it in the case of factual discourse about fiction.
- c) *The Conventional Meaning View.* The sentences featuring empty terms are about conventionally chosen meanings for them. Frege admits there are various expressions in language (used seriously) which senses are not modes of presentation of anything. This occurs also in the language of mathematics, for example, as suggested in one of the previous quotations. Such expressions would be meaningless and if they are to be used to say something true or false, they are to be provided with some meanings.

Each alternative has problems of its own. However, I shall not discuss their pros and cons in this paper because they are inessential to my present purposes. What I wish to highlight is that factual discourse about fiction is not a subject of my considerations because it concerns truth and conveys knowledge.

2 Some Features of Fictional Discourse

Now let us identify the most significant features of fictional discourse. In what follows, I gather certain quotations from Frege's works and try to present a picture of his views on fictional context. In particular, three broad questions will be crucial:

- a) How should we take the claim that sentences in fictional discourse are neither true nor false?
- b) Is it possible for a sentence in fictional discourse to be about something?
- c) What is the general picture of language as used in fictional discourse?

2.1 *Truth-Value in Fiction?*

The fundamental feature of fictional discourse, as opposed to factual one, consists in that

... in fiction words only have a sense, but in science and wherever we are concerned about truth, we are not prepared to rest content with the sense, we also attach a meaning to proper names and concept-words... (Frege 1979a, 118)

The semantic content of an expression occurring in fictional discourse cannot be divided into two kinds as in factual discourse; the level of meanings is excluded from the semantic schema and we should be content merely with the level of senses. In particular, (assertoric) sentences express thoughts without being either true or false. Consequently, it is impossible to make judgements in fictional discourse because we cannot recognize thoughts as true; analogously, we cannot make assertions, i.e. manifest our judgements.

It seems, however, that certain Frege's remarks do not imply such strict conclusions as I suggest. For example, he claims that "[i]n myth and fiction thoughts occur that are neither true nor false" (Frege 1979d, 198). This quotation does not claim that *all* thoughts in fictional discourse are truth-valueless; it just claims that such thoughts occur there, but this does not exclude those that *are* either true or false even in fictional discourse. Similarly, "[t]houghts in myth and fiction do not need to have truth-values" (Frege 1979c, 194). Although thoughts in fiction *do not need to have* truth-values, we may read this remark as allowing thoughts that *are* either true or false in such a kind of discourse. Thus, an alternative reading amounts to saying that *some* of the thoughts expressed by sentences in fictional discourse are either true or false; so, we are allowed to make judgements and assertions in fictional discourse.

Such readings of Frege's remarks are not satisfactory. He himself claims that "[t]he question of truth would cause us to abandon aesthetic delight for an attitude of scientific investigation" (Frege 1984a, 163). Truth is for Frege interconnected with knowledge. When he speaks about fiction he means, as a rule, literary works. The purpose of such works is to provide us with aesthetic delight; the purpose of scientific works is, on the other hand, to provide us with knowledge. Scientific investigation is incompatible with aesthetic delight; a work cannot be both scientific and literary. Frege cannot view fictional discourse as one in which one

may pursue scientific investigations and it makes no sense to speak about knowledge and, hence, truth in fiction. This conclusion goes against the above modest reading according to which some thoughts expressed by sentences in fictional discourse have a truth-value. So, all sentences occurring in fictional discourse are neither true nor false.

It should be also observed that Frege expunges assertions from fictional discourse.⁷ Since assertions are manifestations of judgements, they should be removed from fictional discourse as well. To make a judgement is to recognize a thought as true. So, if it is impossible to make judgements in fictional discourse, we cannot recognize thoughts as true or false. I admit this line of reasoning shows something only about our capacity to recognize thoughts as true, but we may take it as strong evidence for the conclusion that thoughts in fictional discourse themselves are neither true nor false. The reason is that if there is at least one thought that has a truth-value, judgements would be possible (at least in principle).

One final piece of evidence for the negative conclusion is derived from the idea that

... the sense of the sentence 'William Tell shot an apple off his son's head' is no more true than is that of the sentence 'William Tell did not shoot an apple off his son's head'. I do not say, however, that this sense is false either, but I characterize it as fictitious (Frege 1979b, 130).

The thoughts expressed by sentences occurring in fictional discourse are *fictitious* for Frege. He even suggests that

[i]f Schiller's *Don Carlos* were to be regarded as a piece of history, then to a large extent the drama would be false. But a work of fiction is not meant to be taken seriously in this way at all: it's all play (Frege 1979b, 130).

So he suggests that not only sentences with names of fictional characters express fictitious thoughts; the same holds also for sentences with names of historical personages provided they occur in fictional discourse. These sentences, if occurring in factual discourse, would be either true or false about Don Carlos. But in fiction this possibility does not arise; the thoughts expressed by sentences in fictional discourse are merely fictitious. This fact excludes that they might be either true or false. When we characterize a thought as fictitious, we thereby imply that the ques-

7 "Assertions in fiction are not to be taken seriously" (Frege 1979b, 130).

tion of truth or falsehood cannot arise for it. This holds for all thoughts expressed by sentences in fictional discourse.

Let us accept that all thoughts expressed by sentences occurring in fictional discourse are fictitious. Now we may wonder how to interpret this observation. If a thought is true, then every sentence expressing it denotes a truth-value. Should we admit that if a thought is fictitious, then every sentence expressing it also denotes something? Does it mean that there is a third truth-value over and above the True and the False?

First of all, Frege is very explicit about the thoughts in factual discourse:

Now leaving myth and fiction on one side, and considering only those cases in which truth in the scientific sense is in question, we can say that *every thought is either true or false, tertium non datur*. (Frege 1979c, 186)

The Law of Excluded Middle holds in factual discourse and there is no room left for a third option. Now the qualification introducing the above quotation implies that the Law of Excluded Middle does not hold for fictional discourse. This remark can be interpreted in two mutually excluding ways. Either the law is invalid in such a kind of discourse because there is a third truth-value or it is such because the thoughts in fictional discourse are truth-valueless. To find an answer we might ask: Is the property being fictitious that is ascribed to the thoughts in fictional discourse of the same kind as the properties being true and being false that are ascribed to the thoughts in factual discourse? If the answer is positive, we may view it as a third truth-value. Anyway, we should answer otherwise.

The truth and the falsehood are the meanings of sentences in factual discourse. They are compositionally determined by the meanings of constituent words composing the sentences in question. Something similar should be true also about the meanings of sentences in fictional discourse, provided they do have meanings. Now if the fictitious value is of the same kind as the True and the False, the sentences would have meanings in fictional discourse. This cannot be the case because Frege is explicit about admitting that (at least some) expressions in fictional discourse are without meaning. I deal with this view later (see Section 2.2). Anyway, we may say that the result to be drawn strongly suggests that if a thought is fictitious it cannot be taken as having a third truth-value. For suppose that this is not the case. Then we should admit there are sentences that are fictitious because being truth-valueless; this

would hold about sentences in which at least one constituent expression is meaningless. On the other hand, some sentences – those composed solely from meaningful expressions – would be fictitious because having a third truth-value. This cannot be tolerated because Frege seems to recognize just one kind of fictitiousness.

Having established that all sentences in fictional discourse are truth-valueless, we may draw some illustrative consequences.

First of all, it does not make sense to classify some sentences as tautologies and some others as contradictions in fictional discourse. Even though we admit that tautologies are true in virtue of their logical form and that contradictions are false for a similar reason, we should abstain from ascribing them any truth-value because we would not obey Frege's wish to take all thoughts in fictional discourse as fictitious in the sense of being truth-valueless.

Analogously, it does not make enough sense to admit that mathematical truths are true or that biological falsehoods are false, for example. We cannot admit that " $2 + 2 = 4$ " is true in fictional discourse; again, we cannot say that " $2 + 2 = 5$ " is false there. If a character in a novel utters " $2 + 2 = 4$ " or "All humans are mammals", he or she fails to say anything true.

Furthermore, there are some expressions in the language that cannot be used in their literal sense in fictional discourse. The verb "to know" is an example. If Dr. Watson utters "Sherlock Holmes knows who the murderer is" he cannot be taken as saying something about Holmes' stock of knowledge. Sherlock Holmes knows something provided he recognizes a particular thought as true. But this is impossible in fictional discourse. The verb "to know" cannot be understood in the sense of having recognized something as true.

One final point: The sentence " $2 + 2 = 4$ ", when occurring in factual discourse, is taken as belonging to mathematics. It deals with mathematical entities (whatever they might be) and this is the reason why it belongs to this branch of science rather than to any other one. In fictional discourse, on the other hand, it cannot be about mathematical entities (or anything else). Therefore, we have no reason to class it as a mathematical sentence. So, there is no point in classifying sentences in fictional discourse as belonging to particular branches of science. There is neither mathematics nor physics nor biology in fiction. As a result, the terms like "mathematics" or "biology" should also have some other

sense than in factual discourse. Similar examples might be piled up *ad infinitum*.

2.2 *Aboutness in Fiction?*

The meaning of a sentence is determined by the meanings of its constituent words. If a sentence is provided with a truth-value, it has to be composed of meaningful expressions. This fact is closely related to what Carnap called the *Principle of Subject-Matter* or the so called *Principle of Aboutness* (cf. Carnap 1947). The principle claims that a sentence is about the meanings of its constituent words. Although Frege did not put forward the principle in explicit terms, he often alludes to it in the passages similar to this one:

If we say 'Jupiter is larger than Mars', what are we talking about? About the heavenly bodies themselves, the meanings of the proper names 'Jupiter' and 'Mars' (Frege 1979c, 193).

It is easy to see that the principle cannot be obeyed if expressions occurring in a sentence have no meanings. Such a sentence as a whole cannot be about anything and it would be truth-valueless. This is unacceptable for Frege in the case of factual discourse. To obviate such a conclusion, he insists that every name and concept-word be provided with meaning. In some extreme situations, if the sense expressed by a term fails to be a mode of presentation of anything, Frege is prepared to assign to the term a conventional meaning. The sentences involving such a term would be about its conventional meaning; and it would be either true or false with respect to the conventional meaning.

Now, given the above considerations, it seems that Frege has to rest content with the conclusion that the sentences occurring in fictional discourse are about nothing at all. Such sentences are neither true nor false because there is nothing about which they might be taken to say something true or false. So, Frege's views on the semantics of fictional discourse are rather austere. He is capable to explain the nature of the semantic content without postulating special kinds of creatures of fiction or abstract entities or whatnot. Consequently, he does not need any realm or world in which such creatures might dwell. Frege does not need a fictional world, whatever it might be. There is no world in which Odysseus lives and Homer's poems are not supposed to describe any

such world. Sentences in fictional discourse are not designed to *describe* a fictional world or any other kind of world.

It is pretty obvious that proper names like “Odysseus” name nothing, that definite descriptions like “the wife of Sherlock Holmes” describe nothing and that predicates like “unicorn” predicate nothing. All sentences involving expressions of these kinds are neither true nor false. Such sentences would be about nothing at all and, thus, they are truth-valueless. Now we may wonder how serious Frege should be about this fact.

Let us begin with the following well-known quotation:

The sentence ‘Odysseus was set ashore at Ithaca while sound asleep’ obviously has a sense. But since it is doubtful whether the name ‘Odysseus’, occurring therein, means anything, it is also doubtful whether the whole sentence does (Frege 1984a, 162).

According to Frege, the reason that the sentence “Odysseus was set ashore at Ithaca while sound asleep” is truth-valueless is that the name “Odysseus” has no meaning. On the other hand, the term “Ithaca” does have a meaning (at least in factual discourse) and the same holds also for the complex concept-word “was set ashore at Ithaca while sound asleep”. Now should we admit that these expressions are allowed to be meaningful, if uttered in fictional context, while the name “Odysseus” is meaningless? Neither the positive answer nor the negative one would contradict the claim that the sentence “Odysseus was set ashore at Ithaca while sound asleep” is truth-valueless in fictional discourse.

So, how general is Frege’s requirement that the terms occurring in fictional discourse are meaningless? His reply is pretty straightforward, at least for proper names: He claims that proper names like “Don Carlos” in Schiller’s drama, “though they correspond to names of historical personages... are not meant to be taken seriously in the work” (Frege 1979b, 130). If uttered in factual discourse, “Don Carlos” means a particular person. But if uttered in a piece of fiction, it fails to denote anything. Such proper names fail to fulfil the essential role of proper names, i.e., to name something. By parity of reasoning, “Ithaca”, though denoting something in factual discourse, is to be viewed as meaningless in fictional discourse. So, Frege might also say that the sentence “Odysseus was set ashore at Ithaca while sound asleep” is truth-valueless in fictional discourse because both names, “Odysseus” and “Ithaca”, fail to name anything.

There is a general argument justifying the conclusion that *all* expressions in fictional discourse are meaningless. As we have seen, the sentences in fictional discourse express thoughts that are fictitious in the sense of being truth-valueless. The truth-value of a sentence is determined by the meanings of its constituent expressions. If a constituent name denotes an object and a concept-word denotes a concept, the sentence is true provided the object falls under the concept; otherwise it is false. Now if we allow that a sentence in fictional discourse be composed of meaningful constituent expressions, the sentence itself would be meaningful; i.e., either true or false. Thus, all expressions that are meaningful if occurring in factual discourse should be meaningless in fictional one. Suppose the concept-word “was set ashore at Ithaca while sound asleep” has a meaning in fiction. Similarly suppose the term “someone” is meaningful there as well (whatever its meaning be). The sentence “Someone was set ashore at Ithaca while sound asleep” would be either true or false in this fictional discourse. This would contradict the idea that all thoughts are fictitious. And this would be also incompatible with the general purpose of fictional discourse, as suggested in the following quotations:

Of course, in fiction words only have a sense, but in science and wherever we are concerned about truth, we are not prepared to rest content with the sense, we also attach a meaning to proper names and concept-words; and if we through some oversight, say, we fail to do this, then we are making a mistake that can easily vitiate our thinking (Frege 1979a, 118).

But now why do we want every proper name to have not only a sense, but also a meaning? Because, and to the extent that, we are concerned with its truth-value. This is not always the case... The question of truth would cause us to abandon aesthetic delight for an attitude of scientific investigation. Hence it is a matter of no concern to us whether the name “Odysseus”, for instance, has meaning, so long as we accept the poem as a work of art (Frege 1984a, 163).

Anyway, there appears to be one conclusion that sounds paradoxically. It seems that the Odysseus stories are by no means about Odysseus (or anyone else, for that matter). Similarly, the Sherlock Holmes stories are not about Sherlock Holmes. This conclusion should be generalized also for the concept-words featuring in sentences in fictional discourse. The concept-words denote concepts (rather than their extensions, i.e., sets). So, if the sentence “Sherlock Holmes is a detective” appears in

a fictional discourse, the concept-word 'is a detective' is as meaningless as the name "Sherlock Holmes". It fails to denote anything, so there is no detective in the Sherlock Holmes stories. As we cannot say that the Sherlock Holmes stories are not about Sherlock Holmes, so we have to admit that fairy-tales are not about fairies or witches or unicorns, etc. They have to be about nothing at all.⁸

2.3 *Language of Fiction?*

Probably the most elaborated ideas concerning fictional discourse can be found in Frege's posthumous *Logic*. Here is the most complex passage:

Names that fail to fulfil the usual role of a proper name, which is to name something, may be called mock proper names. Although the tale of William Tell is a legend and not history and the name 'William Tell' is a mock proper name, we cannot deny it a sense. But the sense of the sentence 'William Tell shot an apple off his son's head' is no more true than is that of the sentence 'William Tell did not shoot an apple off his son's head'. I do not say, however, that this sense is false either, but I characterize it as fictitious... Instead of speaking of 'fiction', we could speak of 'mock thoughts'. Thus if the sense of an assertoric sentence is not true, it is either false or fictitious, and it will generally be the latter if it contains a mock proper name... Assertions in fiction are not to be taken seriously: they are only mock assertions. Even the thoughts are not to be taken seriously as in the sciences: they are only mock thoughts. If Schiller's *Don Carlos* were to be regarded as a piece of history, then to a large extent the drama would be false. But a work of fiction is not meant to be taken seriously in this way at all: it's all play. Even the proper names in the drama, though they correspond to names of historical personages, are mock proper names; they are not meant to be taken seriously in the work (Frege 1979b, 130).

I have already invoked various ideas mentioned in these quotations, but when taken jointly, they point to a certain bold picture of fictional discourse, its language and semantics. I shall try to outline it in somewhat broad strokes.

⁸ Frege seems to admit one exception (cf. Frege 1979b, 130f.). If a term occurs in an indirect context, it denotes its ordinary sense. This holds also in fictional discourse. And since expressions do have ordinary senses in fictional discourse, there is no reason for divesting them of indirect meanings.

As far as I can see, the above quotation suggests what I shall call *the double language hypothesis*. The language of fictional discourse is not, in spite of certain superficial resemblances, identical with the language of factual discourse. In particular, English as it is used in fiction is not the same English as it is used in science or everyday serious communication. The language of fiction is allowed to contain merely *mock proper names*. Mock proper names are *not* proper names; they just resemble them. They are not designed to name anything. Concerning proper names like “Don Carlos”, i.e. those names that have their origin in factual discourse, Frege points out that they merely *correspond* to names of historical personages. Correspondence is not identity. “Don Carlos” as used in fictional discourse and “Don Carlos” as used in factual discourse, though indistinguishable at the surface level, are distinct. The latter one names something; the former one only mimics true names.

As a first shot, we might suggest that natural language, namely English, contains two names which look the same but are distinct. We have, in the same English, both the name of the Spanish crown prince as well as the name of the purported fictional character. But this is not enough. Frege’s remarks can (or, better, should) be generalized to other kinds of expressions. Analogously, the concept-words appearing in fictional discourse should be mock concept-words because they fail to denote concepts. The concept-words like “is human” or the function names like “is the sum of” or “and” denote the respective concepts or functions only provided they appear in factual discourse; in fictional discourse, they denote nothing at all. Or, more accurately, in fictional discourse there are expressions closely resembling those from factual one except for denoting nothing.

In this way we may demonstrate that every expression appearing in factual discourse has its counterpart in fictional discourse. Thus, every English expression from factual discourse can be duplicated. Either we may enlarge ordinary English in order to cover those expressions belonging to fictional discourse as well as those belonging to factual discourse, or we may postulate another kind of English for fictional discourse, as opposed to English for factual discourse. For the sake of simplicity, I opt for the latter alternative and speak about *fictional English* and *factual English*. Anyway, the vocabularies of the two languages are disjunctive and, theoretically, it is possible that someone is capable to use one kind of English without using the other one.

If we distinguish the two languages, some other conclusions are forthcoming: Firstly, the sentences of factual English express thoughts that are either true or false; the sentences of fictional English express merely fictitious thoughts, i.e., so called mock thoughts that are not full-blooded thoughts. It is impossible for the factual English to express a mock thought as it is impossible for the fictional English to express a thought. Mock thoughts are neither true nor false and sentences expressing them cannot be asserted. It is impossible to make assertions in the fictional English. By parity of reasoning, it is impossible to ask questions or issue commands in fictional English. Be that as it may, it can hardly be specified what should be taken as answering questions or fulfilling commands made in fictional English. On the other hand, every utterance made in the factual English can be an assertion or a question or a command, etc.

The double language hypothesis in either of the two available interpretations is rather bold. I do not want to say that Frege would be willing to defend it or that this hypothesis was something Frege was after in his works. On the contrary, I suspect he would deny it, as can be seen from this quotation:

Let us just imagine that we have convinced ourselves, contrary to our former opinion, that the name "Odysseus", as it occurs in the *Odyssey*, does designate a man after all. Would this mean that the sentences containing the name "Odysseus" expressed different thoughts? I think not. The thoughts would strictly remain the same; they would only be transposed from the realm of fiction to that of truth. (Frege 1979c, 191)

It is suggested here that the same thought can be either true or false, if expressed in factual discourse, and truth-valueless, if expressed in fictional discourse. The double language hypothesis has it that this is impossible because sentences in fictional discourse are capable to express merely mock thoughts. And it is supposed that the same thought cannot be both a full-blooded thought and a mock thought.

How should we assess this quotation? Let us suppose that the very same thought can be truth-valueless in one kind of context and either true or false in another kind of context. Now Frege would not admit that the same thought is capable to change truth-value. He is explicit about it at various places, e.g.:

Now leaving myth and fiction on one side, and considering only those cases in which truth in the scientific sense is in question, we can say that *every*

thought is either true or false, tertium non datur. It is nonsense to speak of cases in which a thought is true and cases in which it is false. The same thought cannot be true at one time, false at another. On the contrary, the cases people have in mind in speaking in this way always involve different thoughts, and the reason they believe the thought to be the same is that the form of words is the same... (Frege 1979c, 186)

It is also impossible for a thought to change its truth-value. So, what is going on when we transpose a thought from factual discourse into fictional one? One natural answer is forthcoming: the thought retains its truth-value but in fictional discourse it is utterly irrelevant that it has any truth-value. So, thoughts are allowed to be true or false but we ignore this fact so far as we remain in the realm of fiction. To say that a thought in fictional discourse is neither true nor false is supposed to be tantamount to saying that its truth-value is irrelevant; a thought can be both fictitious and true (or false), but there is no clash between these two options because they operate, so to speak, on different levels. We might say that the question of truth does not arise for the thoughts occurring in fictional discourse, but this is consistent with the view that in factual discourse it does have a truth-value. Given this alternative, we do not need to consider two separated languages, one for factual discourse and another one for fictional discourse. So, what we have here can be labelled *the single language hypothesis*. This hypothesis is rather attractive; it might be more attractive than the double language hypothesis because it is much simpler.

Anyway, we may draw some hints from Frege's works suggesting that even the single language hypothesis need not be the correct one. This hypothesis assumes that a thought retains its truth-value in fictional discourse, but that we ignore that it has one. Now, in numerous places quoted so far Frege suggests that a thought itself is neither true nor false, if it occurs in fictional discourse; he does not suggest that *we* merely *take* it as truth-valueless. The single language hypothesis, if correct, has to demand that what is paramount is not the thought and the fact that it is truth-valueless but *our* attitude according to which the thought, regardless its actual truth-value, is taken *as if* being truth-valueless. However, this demand is scarcely met by Frege's explicit formulations. So, neither the single language hypothesis can be taken as one favoured by Frege.

Be that as it may, both hypotheses provide neat explanations for many phenomena pertaining to fictional discourse mentioned so far. The double language hypothesis may explain them as phenomena aris-

ing for a special kind of language that cannot be used to speak about meanings. The single language hypothesis has it that those phenomena arise when we put our language to fictional use. Anyway, I have not found any direct textual evidence in Frege's works that would give preference to one of the hypotheses. We may just guess that Frege would opt for the simpler one.

3 Conclusion

Let us recapitulate: Frege's views on fiction imply that the thoughts expressed by sentences in fiction are fictitious in the sense of being truth-valueless. Since the sentences in fictional discourse are truth-valueless, the expressions involved in them have to be meaningless. And since such expressions are meaningless, the sentences in fictional discourse are about nothing at all. Moreover, being fictitious is incompatible with being either true or false in that a thought can neither lose its truth-value and become fictitious nor acquire a truth-value and become factual. Therefore, it should not happen that a thought that is either true or false in one kind of context becomes fictitious in another kind of context. This is a simple consequence of certain Frege's claims. As we have seen, however, Frege himself admits also a contrary opinion in some places. Consequently, there is a sort of tension in his views about fiction. Be that as it may, saying that Frege entertained contradictory views would be far from being a correct assessment of his remarks on fiction. As I have pointed out at the very outset, Frege offered no full-blooded theory of fictional discourse. Thus, I would say the seeming contradictions in his views stem from the absence of a complete semantic theory of fictional discourse rather than from inadequacy of such a theory (whatever it be).

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