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Why do we accept a narrative discourse ascribed to a “third-person narrator” as true? The classical, and a cognitive approach

Abstract: The aim of the present paper is to discuss the question of why readers accept a literary narrative discourse attributed traditionally to an “omniscient third-person narrator” unconditionally as true. I will advocate two theses. First, that this characteristic of narrative comprehension is a consequence of a grammatical feature of the narrative discourse, namely, the absence of the “narrating-I.” This format mimics what Cosmides and Tooby label as scope-free representation, i.e., a representation that is not bound by scope-operators and thus treated by a cognitive architecture as architecturally true. Second, narrative discourse ascribed traditionally to a third person narrator should be understood as the linguistic representation of the true states of affairs of a narrative world.

Keywords: third-person narrator; truth-claiming, Genette; Cosmides and Tooby; metarepresentations; architecturally true representations

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1 Background and introduction: The traditional understanding of the third-person narrator and its psychological criticism

The majority of the *traditional* narratological explanations, implicitly or explicitly, take a *binary pragmatic model*, derived from the idea of a *fictive communication situation*, as the *basic model of the narrative texts*.¹ According to this model,

¹ The above model tries to offer a standard view on different traditional (communicational) concepts of narratives. In this aim it corresponds to the accounts provided by Bernáth 2006, Patron 2006, 2012, and Margolin 2009, 2011. Bernáth distinguishes between *communicational* and *constructional* or *poetic* accounts, Patron differentiates between *communicational* and *non-communicational* or *poetic* theories of narrative fiction, Margolin proposes a *three-component model* to describe the diverse concepts in a systematic way.

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narrative texts consist – within the frames of fiction, and only there – on the whole of two discourses; on the one hand, of a discourse ascribed to an *anonymous anthropomorphic originator called third-person narrator*, while on the other hand of discourses attributed to the *characters* of the story. It is generally assumed that the two discourses differ with respect to their truth-value. While the utterances of the fictional characters can be either true or false with respect to their own fictive world, the fictional third-person narrator’s utterances are unqualifiedly true and accurate. No one doubts that the family of Dashwood had long been settled in Sussex, as no one questions that their estate was large, and their residence was at Norland Park, in the center of their property, where, for many generations, they had lived in so respectable a manner as to engage the general good opinion of their surrounding acquaintance (cf. Austen 1992 [1811]: 3).²

The reasons behind the above difference in the semantic status of the utterances are seen as relatively identical by the advocates of the traditional model. Theoreticians follow the strategy of *analogical reasoning* and explain the fictive discourse generally by linguistic or philosophical theories that have been evolved for describing real-world speech and real-world communication. Thus, they claim that the truth conditions of the characters’ utterances are analogous to the truth conditions of everyday utterances and can be defined according to the correspondence theories, pragmatist theories or coherence theories of truth. The unquestionable truth of the third-person narrators’ discourse, however, relies primarily on poetic conventions. The readers accept the narrator’s utterances as true and the narrator as authentic and “omniscient” (at least in relation to the fictive world) because of typological and generic norms.³

It is clear even from this short overview that *the central element of the traditional model is the anonymous third-person narrator*. The reason for this lies not only in his distinct role in truth-claiming. Since he, by definition, cannot do anything else but tell the truth, it is his speech that also serves as the basis for the evaluation of the characters’ utterances. It defines the fictional facts of the fictive world in relation to which the content of the agents’ utterances are true or false. Or, to put it another way, it provides the set of propositions with which true propositions cohere and false propositions do not. Consequently, according to this model, the readers’ most important interpretative operation is the identification

² “The family of Dashwood had long been settled in Sussex. Their estate was large, and their residence was at Norland Park, in the center of their property, where, for many generations, they had lived in so respectable a manner as to engage the general good opinion of their surrounding acquaintance” (Austen 1992 [1811]: 3).

³ Cf. Doležel 1998: 149–152.

of the third-person narrator as well as the construction of the communication situation in which he utters.

The practice of comprehension, however, is quite different. Already several decades ago, some theoreticians like Banfield (1982), Martínez-Bonati (1991), and Garrig (1993) assumed that readers of narratives are “normally paying attention to the characters and events and not minding the transparent medium of the narrative itself” (Martínez-Bonati 1991: 66). Contemporary discourse psychology confirms this assumption. Using a source-memory test to assess the salience of agents in memory (i.e., examining whether readers remembered who expressed a particular speech act in literary short stories), Graesser et al. carried out a number of tests (1999, 2001; Graesser and Wiemer-Hastings 1999; Graesser & Klettke 2001) that showed that, under normal reading conditions, the anonymous, omniscient, third-person narrator is an entirely invisible agent to the readers.⁴ “The reader is *entirely unable to discriminate exactly what was said by the third-person narrator*” (Graesser et al. 2001: 226, emphasis mine). In contrast, the first-person narrator is very salient and the characters are moderately visible.⁵ The tests have also verified that, despite natural differences among comprehenders in cognitive abilities, social backgrounds, gender, verbal ability or literary expertise, this mechanism is quite uniform.

However, if readers do not even realize the presence of a third-person narrator, nor the communication situation in which he makes utterances, how could they take his discourse as true based on his person’s conventional authority? There must be another reason for this comprehension strategy. In this paper, I try to find a solution to this problem. I will start with the outline of the most comprehensive and systematic reformulation of the traditional model evolved by Gérard Genette, which offers an adequate background for clarifying the traditionally notion of the third-person narrator and for the description of his discourse. In a second step, I will contrast Genette’s insights with the theory of the evolutionary psychologists John Tooby and Leda Cosmides on the functioning of cognitive mechanisms evolved to store and exploit contingent information. Finally, I will draw some conclusions concerning the traditional communicational theories of narrative.

⁴ The researchers selected sentences that could have been spoken by the narrator and by several of the characters.

⁵ “The mean source discrimination parameters were .00, .85, and .46 for the omniscient third-person narrator, the first-person narrator, and the nonnarrator characters, respectively” (Graesser et al. 2001: 266). See also Duchan et al. (1995).

2 Genette's communicational model of narrative and his reformulation of the traditional concept of the third-person narrator

Undoubtedly, one of the most influential descriptive accounts in narratology over the last decades has been formulated by Gérard Genette (1980 [1972], [1988] 1983). Genette does not question the foundational theses of the traditional communicational model of narrative fiction and bases his taxonomy upon four assumptions. (1) The first disconnects the narrative *discourse* (the *text*) from the real *author* and his *speech act* (*pretended assertion*) and says that discourse “is produced by the action of [*fictional narrating*] in the same way that any statement is the product of an act of enunciating” (Genette 1980 [1972]: 26, emphasis mine).⁶ (2) The second repeats the classical narratological thesis according to which discourse contains a *story*. Thus, it can also be regarded as the rhetorical-grammatical extension of one transformation verb or one statement such as *Ulysses comes home to Ithaca* or *Marcel becomes a writer*.⁷ (3) The third connects (1) and (2) and claims that story and narrating exist only by means of the *intermediary* of discourse. Our knowledge of the two is indirect, “unavoidably mediated by the narrative discourse” (Genette 1980 [1972]: 28) that consequently should be understood as the textual manifestation of the generation of a story by means of language. (4) Finally, he concludes that narrative analyses should capture the presence of the narrating and the recounted story in the text – a claim that gave narratology a new direction.

In order to examine the presence of the narrating and the story in the discourse, Genette introduces three autonomous categories, borrowed from the grammar of verbs: voice, mood, and tense. *Voice* follows the traces and marks left behind by the process of narrating in the text. It conveys terms for describing the way how narrating is anchored to deictic centers, consisting of a “narrating-I” the “here” and “now” of the narrating, and a receiver called “narratee.”⁸ *Tense* and *mood* in contrast account for the temporal and modal presence of the story in the discourse. The sub-terms of *tense* designate the way that discourse represents –

⁶ Genette took over the term “enunciating” from the French linguist Émil Benveniste.

⁷ “*I walk*, *Pierre has come* are for me minimal forms of narrative, and inversely the *Odyssey* or the *Recherche* is only, in a certain way, an amplification (in the rhetorical sense) of statements such as *Ulysses comes home to Ithaca* or *Marcel becomes a writer*” (Genette 1980 [1972]: 30).

⁸ Genette emphasizes that “‘I’, ‘here,’ and ‘now’ refer to the spatiotemporal circumstances of that narrating and in no way to the circumstances of the writing” of a narrative work by its real author (Genette 1980 [1972]: 214).

syntagmatically arranges, repeats or spatially depicts – the order, the duration, and the recurrence of the events of the story. *Mood* refers to the modalities of signifying. On the one hand, it provides terms for describing the degree of “mimesis” by producing of speech, thoughts, and events (*distance*). On the other hand, it specifies a kind of information channel for the narrating instance, a situated focus (for example a character) within the here and now of the narrated world (or as Genette labels the “diegesis,” 1988 [1983]: 84) and restricts the narrating to the sort of information that the logic of this situation allows (*focalization*).⁹ Thus, both “distance” and “focalization” are determinants designating the selection of the narrative information with respect to a hypothetical completeness due to specific (e.g., situational) conditions.¹⁰

It is important to emphasize that “each and every narrative is inflected by voice, mood, and tense just as each verb can be categorized in relation to this triad. *She would not have been killed*, for instance, is a passive voice, indicative mood and past conditional tense” (Fludernik 2009: 89). Analogously, there is no connection between a narrative’s tense, mood or voice. These parameters are regulated independently from each other and can be freely combined. The voice narrating “The family of Dashwood had long been settled in Sussex” is anchored to an instance that is external to the spatio-temporal universe of the primary story (it is situated on an *extradiegetic* level), but theoretically it could be tied, for example, to a story-intern instance, as well and appear as a character (as a *homodiegetic* narrator) in the story. And similarly, the utterance is *unfocalized*, which means that there is no restriction of narrative information and the narrating instance has theoretically access to all details concerning the story by generating the discourse. However, his access could be also restricted to the particular perspective of a character situated within the fictive world (*internal focalization*). In this case, the narrator could share only information that this character perceives, thinks or speaks. What’s more, he could even then tell more (paralipsis) or less (paralepsis) that would be logically produced under the type of focalization selected. “Combinability is at its maximum,” as Fludernik notes (Fludernik 2009: 89), and the author is in his invention in no way constrained by the natural limits of human enunciation.

This combinatorial concept of the narratology, as Genette asserts, can point out the failures of some traditional terms like “perspective,” “omniscience,”

⁹ “The instrument of this possible selection is a *situated focus*, a sort of information-conveying pipe that allows passage only of information that is authorized by the situation” (Genette 1988 [1983]: 74).

¹⁰ For a brief historical survey of narratological approaches and the contextualization of Genette’s concept, see Scheffel 2009.

“narrative situation,” “narrator” or “third-person narrator.” The model shows that the narrator is nothing else, but a *purely enunciating instance* (the subject of voice). Genette claims repeatedly that he is *always present*¹¹ and *he is always in a first person*¹², quasi *a fictional narrating-I*. He characterizes him (1) by his presence or absence as a character in the story he tells; (2) by the spatio-temporal coordinates (levels) of his telling; and (3) by his temporal position relative to the narrated story. The model also highlights that questions traditionally concerning the “knowledge” or the “perspective” of the narrator belong under the category of “focalization.” *The narrator knows nothing and perceives nothing, since he is “just” a narrating voice* and not automatically also the source of point of view. It is the particular type of focalization – ultimately “the author himself” (Genette 1988 [1983]: 73) – that (who) regulates what information he is and what he is not allowed to know, perceive, and narrate.

Thus, concerning the traditional term “third-person narrator,” Genette emphasizes that it can be properly defined by the distinction (1). The “third-person narrator,” he claims, is simply a fictional narrating-I who *has never the status of a character in the story told*. Unlike the “first-person narrator” who does appear in the diegetic universe of the narrative as one of the characters, he remains “absent from the story he tells” (Genette 1980 [1972]: 244, emphasis mine). Nothing proves this more than the fact that he can, in principle, at any moment *make himself visible* as a character by using one of the *first person pronouns “I” or “We”* to designate himself like in “The family of Dashwood – this is how we will name a rich family – had long been settled in Sussex.” Or, to give another example, “Their estate was large, and their residence was at Norland Park ... This, however, is of but little importance to my tale.” In connection with this, Genette also mentions that every sentence and every text can be transformed in this way from “third-person narrative” to “first-person narrative” – and conversely, from “first-person narrative” to “third-person narrative.”¹³ This transition does not change the truth-value of the utterances since both narrators may be combined with zero focalization that grants them unrestricted “access to every conceivable region of the storyworld” (Niederhoff 2009: 390).

11 “Narrative without a narrator, the utterance without an uttering, seems to me pure illusion and, as such, ‘unfalsifiable’” (Genette 1988 [1983]: 101).

12 “The narrator can be in his narrative (like every subject of an enunciating in his enunciated statement) *only* in the ‘first person’” (Genette 1980 [1972]: 244).

13 The history of literature is rich also in real transitions: Kafka’s *The Castle*, Jame’s *The Ambassadors*, Dostoevski’s *Crime and Punishment* are examples for crossing from first-person to third, Keller’s *Green Henry* exemplifies a transfer in the other direction. Genette analyses such cases of “transvocalization” in *Palimpsests* 1997 [1982].

Coming back now to the initial question of this paper – why do readers accept a narrative discourse attributed to a “third-person narrator” as true? – Genette’s clarifying of the traditional concept “third-person narrator” shows that the answer is not connected to either the “person” of a fictive narrator, or to his unrestricted perspective (“omniscience”). The former is not relevant for the narratology, while the latter may be combined also with the character-narrator. Genette shows no interest for this question, however, his analysis implicates that the answer of the communicational theories of narrative fiction may be linked to *the difference between the visibility and the non-visibility (hiddenness) of the narrating I as a character*. This assumption seems to explain why “the only agent who [is] invisible to reader(s) [is] the omniscient, third-person narrator” (Graesser 2001: 271). But, it is also clear, that it offers no explanation for why readers accept a discourse ascribed to a hidden narrating instance (of which they are not even aware) as unqualifiedly true, a discourse ascribed to the same (but visible) narrator, however, as not true. *The assumption of an identical (though not always visible) structure of fictive communication behind the two forms of narrating deprives their distinction from any explanatory force*. If, in essence, the two forms don’t differ, there is nothing (except maybe the poetic tradition) that could give rise to the difference in the evaluation of the truth value they are assigned during the course of comprehension.

However, what may cause the above difference in the comprehension strategy of readers? Is there really an invisible narrating-I? Does the text really have the status of a discourse? In what follows I will suggest an argument for the no-narrator position based on the theory of the evolutionary psychologists Tooby and Cosmides on cognitive processing of contingently true information. Only the “non-evolutionary” part of their reasoning is relevant for this paper, that is, the description of the cognitive machinery evolved for regulating the scope of applicability of representations of contingent information. I will argue that behind the “third-person discourse” *there is no hidden fictive narrating-I*. Only this assumption may explain the connections of this kind of text with the notion of truth.

3 Cosmides and Tooby on scope-representation systems and the consequences of the theory on understanding narratives

In their seminal paper “Consider the source: The evaluation of adaptations for decoupling and metarepresentation” (2000) Leda Cosmides and John Tooby assert that one of the distinctive features of the human mind is that it can treat

information that is not held widely in space and time. The mind is rather a heterogeneous collection of a great number of highly specialized computational devices or programs, some of which are evolved to extract and exploit information based on relationships that are only true temporarily, locally or contingently.¹⁴

Essential for a computational system that also works with local, transient or contingent facts is to “detect and keep track of which information is applicable where, and how the boundaries of applicability shift” (Cosmides and Tooby 2000: 58). This is important not only because contingent information could be false, misleading or harmful outside the boundaries where it is applicable, but also because it could corrupt valid existing data-sets that it enters into inferences with. Thus, Cosmides and Tooby suppose that there is a large number of adaptations that have evolved to *locate, monitor, update, and represent the boundaries within which each set of representations remains useful*, including a new information format (scope-representation) and a syntax for regulating the scope of applicability of representations about contingent information.

Cosmides and Tooby hypothesize that the human cognitive system stores locally, transiently, and contingently true information like “In the Middle Ages people used to think that the Earth was the center of the universe,”¹⁵ “In Paris it is raining,”¹⁶ “Anne believes that John is honest” in a suppositional format they call *scope-representation*. A scope-representation is a representation that is *cognitively quarantined (decoupled)* by a scope-operator “which describe[s] the *boundary conditions* under which the information is known to be accurate” (Cosmides and Tooby 2000: 63). It involves a minimum of two levels, a subordinate level for the decoupled proposition (“the Earth is the center of the universe,” “It is raining,” “John is honest”), and a superordinate (or ground state) level for the scope information (“in the Middle Ages people used to think that,” “In Paris,” “Anne believes that”) that indicates the boundaries (i.e., the evaluation context) within which they are true.

Cosmides and Tooby stress that this kind of cognitive architecture operates in a way that is similar, in some respect, to natural deduction systems. Operators keep propositions of unevaluated or suspended truth value as scope-bound (that is, as true within the scope). They allow *drawing inferences only on the level that they regulate* while keeping the computational products isolated from each other “until the truth or utility of the suppositions is decided, and the outputs are either integrated [in other knowledge stores] or discarded” (Cosmides and Tooby 2000: 59).

14 For example “Snakes are poisonous” versus “Brown water snakes are not poisonous and bite only when molested.”

15 Example of Zunshine in 2006: 51.

16 Example of Recanati in 2000: 59.

Based on this, and this is where, as I see, the model holds relevant insights for the problem of this paper, Cosmides and Tooby suggest distinguishing *two fundamentally different types of information* inside the architecture of a scope-system. One type consists of information that *the system treats as architecturally true*. Architecturally true information is *scope-free* or *unmarked* information. As such it is “allowed to migrate (or be reproduced) in an unrestricted scope-free fashion throughout [the] architecture, interacting with any other data in the system with which it is capable of interacting” (Cosmides and Tooby 2000: 60–61, emphasis mine). Another type of information is *scope-bound* and tagged as “false” or more precisely as “true from a certain perspective,” “might-be-true,” “true-only-here,” “once-was-true” and so on. It is allowed to enter into inferences only within the boundaries of its operator. It should be emphasized that every architecturally true statement (“it is *p*”) “can be transformed by a scope operation into something scope-limited, as new information about its boundary conditions is learned” (e.g., “it appears that *p*”; “she believes that *p*”; “it is no more *p*”; Cosmides and Tooby 2000: 63). And conversely, scope-limitations can be discharged. Once a fact is established to a sufficient degree of certainty, scope-tags are lost. “For example, most people cannot remember who told them that apples are edible or that plants photosynthesize” (Cosmides and Tooby 2000: 70).¹⁷ Cosmides and Tooby call the mechanism that underlies this transformation the *coupling-decoupling system* and claim that this *highly dynamic mechanism of coupling, decoupling, and recoupling* of information is responsible for information processing and error correction.

The connections of this mechanism to one special kind of “false” information labelled as *fictional narrative* are even intuitively recognizable. Cosmides and Tooby assume that readers *decouple* information conveyed in form of fictional narratives¹⁸ from other data structures *and evaluate it in a scope-representational system in a highly dynamic process of couplings, decouplings, and recouplings of propositions*. Based on research, on the one hand, on neuropsychological deficits related to understanding of fiction and on memory-retrieval experiments on the other, they suppose that the scope-representations that are involved in this process are *metarepresentations*. Cosmides and Tooby hold the view that metarepresentations are used to represent source-based representations of *possible states of the actual world* (somebody’s goals and plans, personal past, beliefs, thought experiments) and *parallel actual words or fictions* (word-creations or simulations). They have two distinctive features. First, their operators require as

17 Cosmides and Tooby refer here also to the research of Sperber, Tulving, and Shimamura.

18 More precisely: stories they believe to be fictional.

argument a *source-tag* that represents who it is that believes (plans, remembers, intends, claims, etc.) something concerning the actual world, or creates a fictional. Second, they *suspend semantic relations* such as truth, reference, and existence for the embedded propositions: what is believed, claimed, planned, imagined, created must not be true or exist in the actual world (only in the source's belief world, in the world of fiction, etc.).¹⁹ "Jane Austen created *Sense and Sensibility*" is a metarepresentation because it represents *Sense and Sensibility* as Austen's representation of a fictional world. Similarly, "[Austen created that] / [In the novel *Sense and Sensibility*] Elinor believes that Edward Ferrars has married Miss Lucy Steel" represents a state of affairs that involves Edward Ferrars and Miss Lucy Steel standing in a certain relation as Elinor's belief. "Elinor believes" takes scope over the representation. It tells something about the fictional world created by Austen (cf. also Zunshine 2006).

Thus, Cosmides and Tooby propose that in the interaction with fictional stories readers may behave essentially the same way as in cases where they find themselves confronted with source-dependent contingent information: they *consider the source* and weight truth-values of the decoupled representations originating from different sources (author, characters). Cosmides and Tooby don't examine the evaluation process itself, however. They do not even raise the question concerning the basis on which readers regard scope-bound representations as true, or how they (re)construct the coherent whole of information that describes the state of affairs obtain in a fictional world. They are primarily concerned with the consequences of this computational structure for the adaptive function of (narrative) fiction and its relationships to human improvisational intelligence. Literary theoreticians who base their narrative theoretic approach on the model of Tooby and Cosmides (Iversen 2011) also fail to address this issue. It is clear, however, that the model can offer an adequate frame for answering these questions.

With regard to the problem of this paper – why do readers accept a narrative discourse ascribed to a "third-person narrator" as true? – the model holds four relevant insights. (1) First, it points out that readers may represent sentences like "The family of Dashwood had long been settled in Sussex," or "Their estate was large, and their residence was at Norland Park" as *source-free* or *unmarked representations at the ground state of the representational system* in which they process

19 Cosmides and Tooby give the following example: "Shirley MacLaine believes that she is the reincarnation of an Egyptian princess named Nefru. This can be true without Nefru ever having existed and without it being true that Sherley is her reincarnation" (Cosmides and Tooby 2000: 72). By evolving this statement, Cosmides and Tooby refer to Frege's and Kripke's studies on propositional attitudes.

information of the text. As source-free representations they are treated as *architecturally true*, so they are licensed to migrate anywhere in the architecture, that is, they may enter into inferences in combination with any other ground state data-structure, and may be allowed to interact with subordinated levels, as well. This assumption can properly explain why readers are not able to discriminate exactly what was “said” by the “third-person narrator” in the stories and why they regard these sentences as unqualifiedly true. Presumably, the most crucial element of these kinds of sentences is the lack of a source. This unmarkedness determines that they are processed not as utterances but as representations specifying states of affairs that obtain at the fictional world. Ascribing a source-tag (for example a hidden narrating instance) to them – as the communicational theories of narrative do – fakes their status within the architecture.

(2) Second, the lack of a source-tag, however, doesn't mean that these representations are not scope-bound. They are architecturally true representations of a scope-system which is decoupled and subordinated by readers as a coherent whole under a scope operator. The decoupled propositions must be evaluated under the scope which the operator indicates. According to Cosmides and Tooby, in case of fiction the decoupled scope-representational system is subsumed under the operator “[X] creates that ...” or “[X] creates the fictional world that ...”. What follows – and this has crucial consequences for the understanding and interpretation of narratives – is that truth conditions of the decoupled system are given with respect to the tag “creates a fictional word.” As I see it, the distinctive feature of this scope-predicate is that it also *suspends the semantic relation perspective for the embedded propositions*. Sentences like “The family of Dashwood had long been settled in Sussex” or “Their estate was large, and their residence was at Norland Park” are not bound to the subjective perspective of a real-world source, but to the “*perspective*” of the evaluation system given by the predicate “create.” In many respects they are like “‘Apples are edible,’ ‘Water boils at one-hundred degrees Celsius,’ or ‘The sum of the angles of a triangle is equal to two right angles’.”²⁰ These source-free sentences are true according to the actual world. Their unmarkedness is a sign that they are unrestrictedly true in the world.

(3) Third, the model may explain why readers comprehend literary narratives in such different ways. Cosmides and Tooby emphasize that readers use the same scope-syntax to represent scope-limitations of information by source. As shown

²⁰ These are examples in Genette 1980 [1972]: 212. He cites the sentences in the following context: “‘For a long time I used to go to bed early’: obviously, such a statement – unlike, let us say, ‘Water boils at one-hundred degrees Celsius’ or ‘The sum of the angles of a triangle is equal to two right angles’ – can be interpreted only with respect to the person who utters it and the situation in which he utters it.” Cf. also Genette 1988 [1983]: 101.

above, metarepresentations underlie not only representations of fictional narratives, but also representations of personal beliefs, intentions, desires, plans, goals, pretense, deception, personal past, thought experiments, simulations of the physical world or simulations of social interactions.²¹ Thus, readers may more easily subsume and evaluate narratives under different scope tags than “create” and represent them as the author’s personal past, belief, desire, etc. Expressions, such as “Austen thinks that ...,” “The author claims that ...,” and “She intends that ...” are documents of this reading practice.²² Furthermore, due to the same processing structure of metarepresentations inferences may easily arise.

(4) Fourth, the model sheds light on the failures of the traditional taxonomies concerning the different grades of reliability (authenticity) or unreliability (inauthenticity) of the characters of the story. According to this approach, first-person narrators are less reliable than third-person and more trustworthy than characters. It is easy to recognize that reliability and unreliability are not static features of the characters. Information originating from different sources can equally be true or false. It can change its status and source-free information can receive a source-tag. The true value of the representations of a literary text is defined primarily in relation to the scope-boundaries that establish the fictional world.²³

4 Concluding remarks

The aim of the present paper was to answer the question of why readers accept a literary narrative discourse attributed traditionally to an “omniscient third-person narrator” unconditionally as true. This question is well-known in narrative theory since Käte Hamburger published *Die Logik der Dichtung* (‘The Logic of Literature’) in 1957. Hamburger (1993 [1957]), and a few decades later Anne Banfield (1982), Sige-Yuki Kuroda (1973) and Árpád Bernáth (2006) argued on different theoretical bases that there is no fictive narrator behind a third-person text. This paper has developed a cognitive argument for this position. According to this, the truth ascribed to the “third-person text” is a consequence of scope-representational processing and storage of the information conveyed in the form of a fictional narrative.

21 “Once a design that satisfies a particular set of computational requirements exists, natural selections can engineer solutions to new adaptive information-processing problems that pose similar requirements more quickly by modifying the existing design than by creating totally new designs from scratch” (Cosmides and Tooby 2000: 79).

22 Of course, there are some contexts where this approach is adequate (e.g., literary history).

23 For more on this concept, see Bernáth 1980.

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