

New Waves in Philosophy of Language

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Linguistic Puzzles and Semantic Pretence

James A. Woodbridge and Bradley Armour-Garb

A central task of philosophy of language is to explain and elucidate the notions of meaning, reference, and truth – put loosely, the problems of intentionality and extensionality. That said, for the most part philosophers of language have approached these issues indirectly, by attempting to resolve certain linguistic (and, in some cases, logical, metaphysical, or epistemological) puzzles. As Bertrand Russell notes:

A logical theory may be tested by its capacity for dealing with puzzles, and it is a wholesome plan, in thinking about logic, to stock the mind with as many puzzles as possible, since these serve much the same purpose as is served by experiments in physical science. (Russell 1905, pp. 484–85)

The same is true of philosophical theories. Indeed, philosophical puzzles arising from particular linguistic cases were the launching pad of modern philosophy of language at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, and they remain the life-blood of its aims and methods. We think, for example, of a range of familiar problems, e.g., negative existential claims, ‘empty’ denoting expressions generally, the informativeness of certain identity claims, the non-substitutivity, *salva veritate*, of expressions with the same semantic-value in certain contexts, the semantic paradoxes, etc.

Still further dilemmas emerge in the philosophy of language once theorizing begins. Tensions arise between our conceptual and our ontological commitments, a clash between a kind of theoretical indispensability and a problematic metaphysics. For example, there are fairly good reasons for thinking that our talk about language and thought commits us to propositions, which are supposed to be the contents of the sentences that we assert and the objects of our mental attitudes. But there is a pressing question as to what propositions could be and, given some possible candidates, how they could do the jobs they are supposed to do.¹ From Gottlob Frege and Bertrand Russell to the present day, philosophers of language have, for the most part,

attempted to resolve such puzzles by appeal to semantic, logical, pragmatic or re-interpretive innovation.

In this chapter, we set out what we see as a novel and very promising approach to resolving a number of the puzzles that provide philosophy of language with much of its subject matter. We will begin by briefly cataloguing a few of the relevant puzzles.

1 The puzzles

Consider the puzzle of how a true identity claim, such as:

- (1) Hesperus is identical to Phosphorus,

could be informative, since *prima facie* it appears to say that some object is identical to itself, which is something we know *a priori* (since everything is self-identical). Or consider our seeming ability to talk ‘about’ things that do not exist – in particular our ability to state (truly) that they do not exist, as in:

- (2) Santa Claus does not exist.

A naïve referentialist view of language that takes it simply to present and relate objects and properties will yield an epistemological puzzle for identity claims and a metaphysical puzzle for negative existentials. It will also create a semantic puzzle about how, since semantic values are compositional, substituting expressions that stand for the same object (e.g., ‘George Eliot’ and ‘Mary Anne Evans’) can yield a change in truth-value in certain sorts of sentences, for instance, the shift from true to false in belief attributions such as:

- (3) Bob believes that George Eliot is a great writer.
 (4) Bob believe that Mary Anne Evans is a great writer.

A naïve take on our discourse about language itself – specifically the putative semantic relations of truth, reference, and predicate-satisfaction, which appear to make out the word-world relation – appears to yield logical and semantic puzzles in certain cases that are properly judged to be *pathological*, such as:

- (6) This sentence is false. (Liar Paradox)
 (7) This sentence is true. (Truth-Teller)
 (8) The expression ‘the least number not denotable in less than 18 syllables’ denotes the least number not denotable in less than 18 syllables. (Berry’s Paradox)

- (9) The predicate 'is not true of itself' is true of itself if, and only if, it is not true of itself. (Heterological Paradox)

Logical and semantic ('soritical') puzzles can also arise from certain ordinary-seeming descriptions, such as:

- (10) Borderline Bob is bald.

when speakers employ a purportedly vague predicate to characterize a supposed borderline case. (This sort of case seems potentially neither true nor false and generates questions about whether our language (or the world) is indeterminate.)

Philosophers of language have attempted to deal with linguistic puzzles like those described before through a variety of theoretical innovations that we can broadly classify according to four approaches: semantic, logical, pragmatic and re-interpretive. While we have learned much from these advances, it is fair to say that few of the original puzzles have been resolved in a fully satisfactory way. Be that as it may, rather than dwelling on the negative, we would like to highlight one feature common to all of these approaches, a feature that we think should be retained, even if none of the four approaches should be. The feature: Each of these approaches maintains in some sense that what is being said (e.g., by a given sentence or expression) cannot be read off of the surface. That is, in one way or another, each of the extant approaches denies a *face-value* reading of some aspects of linguistic discourse.

For what follows, having identified these four approaches, we go on to provide a new kind of view, which, while possessing the aforementioned common feature, is, in important ways, different from the traditional approaches. What is central to the new approach is the postulation of *semantic pretence* at work where these puzzles arise. As we will show, this new approach offers certain advantages to resolving the linguistic puzzles catalogued.

1.1 Linguistic puzzles and theoretical innovations

In this subsection we summarize and review the more orthodox approaches to dealing with the linguistic puzzles that have driven philosophy of language. The aim here is to locate the approach that we want to promote, relative to the better known standard approaches, highlighting the feature common to all such approaches.

1.1.1 *Semantic approaches*

The first theoretical approach for dealing with various linguistic puzzles involves what we will call *semantic innovation*. The basic idea behind semantic innovation is to postulate that there is more to what linguistic expressions mean than the dimension of their semantic-values that is already

recognized from logical inquiry. A prime example of semantic innovation comes from Frege's views, as presented in the article 'On Sense and Reference' (Frege 1892). There Frege attempts to deal with the linguistic puzzles that propelled his inquiry – informative identity claims, sentences employing empty singular terms, non-substitutability *salva veritate* in certain contexts of expressions that pick out the same objects – via the postulation of another dimension of meaning, that of sense, beyond the dimension of reference (or more generally, semantic-value).

The dimension of sense is supposed to provide an aspect of meaning that can differ between co-referring expressions found in an informative identity claim. Sense could also serve as a component of meaning that a singular term still contributed to the meaning of a sentence, even when it lacked any semantic-value to contribute. Frege further explains that a difference in the sense of expressions can account for their non-substitutability *salva veritate* in certain contexts, even when those expressions agree in semantic-value in contexts of primary occurrence. The curious embedded contexts, he maintains, produce a shift in the expressions' semantic-values – from what they are in contexts of primary occurrence to their customary senses. Substituting expressions in the embedded context thus yields a change in the semantic-values of a sentence's component expressions, and thus explains any change in the truth-value of the whole.

1.1.2 Logical approaches

The second theoretical approach involves what we will call *logical innovation*. On this sort of approach, theorists attempt to deal with various linguistic puzzles by postulating a kind of hidden complexity in the form or underlying structure of the expressions in questions. The paradigm example here is Russell's work involving his theory of descriptions (Russell 1905). Russell rejects Frege's semantic innovation involving the postulation of sense and instead postulates a difference in most sentences between their surface grammatical form and their underlying logical form. On his analysis, most singular terms are actually either indefinite or definite descriptions (perhaps 'abbreviated' as common names). Supposedly complete nominal expressions get cashed in for logically complex but incomplete expressions involving quantifiers and predicates. These quantificational expressions essentially have a gap that must be filled in with a predicate to form a complete expression. Russell holds that once we recognized the complex underlying logical forms of most sentences, we will see that there was no need to postulate a dimension of meaning beyond that of semantic-value.

A different form of logical innovation may be found in the work of Saul Kripke (1975), who, in effect, aims to provide a definition of truth by equating the property of being true with possessing the semantic value one.² The theory, if successful, would enable us to define truth by appeal to a

non-classical model theory, the central features of which includes a particular non-classical logic (viz., K_3) and certain inferential rules (Kripke 1975, p. 701), while, at the same time, offering a solution to the liar paradox (and the truth-teller).

1.1.3 Pragmatic approaches

The third theoretical approach involves what we call *pragmatic innovation*. There are a number of familiar pragmatic approaches, from P. F. Strawson's (1950) reliance on use and contexts of use in accounting for linguistic meaning, understood as a rule for the proper use of a sentence or expression, to Keith Donnellan's (1966) distinction between the referential and attributive uses of definite descriptions, through H. P. Grice's (1989) important distinction between the truth of a statement and its conversational acceptability. What is common to these approaches (we think, more specifically, of the latter two cases) is the difference between what is *meant*, in an utterance, on a particular occasion of use (or what is conveyed or communicated, by an utterance, on a particular occasion of use) and what is, strictly speaking, *said* by the sentence uttered. Once the distinction is made, certain philosophical puzzles are said to be resolved.³

1.1.4 Re-interpretive approaches

The fourth approach to resolving linguistic puzzles involves what we call *re-interpretive innovation*, it is in some ways an expansion or extension of the logical approach as employed by Russell. This is true at least for the application of the re-interpretive approach by its most thorough going proponents in the heyday of philosophy of language, the Logical Empiricists. In fact, A.J. Ayer, one of this movement's most celebrated champions, in philosophy of language in particular, is happy to accept Russell's logical innovations as the solution to the puzzles Russell emphasizes. Inspired by what they (or, more specifically, Ayer 1952) saw as Russell's success on those fronts, the Logical Empiricists extended the sort of moves that he made to resolve a number of further puzzles about language (or puzzles that became about language), when various traditional philosophical issues get re-cast in linguistic form. This approach leads to a variety of 're-interpretations' of various fragments of language, designed to dissolve what seem to be philosophical issues about the subject matter of these ways of talking.⁴

While the problems that confront the Logical Empiricists seem to be insurmountable, we maintain (and will make evident in ensuing sections) that there are certain merits to a re-interpretive approach, so long as one is careful not to (i) wed it to other problematic positions or (ii) apply it in a blunt fashion, which takes it to be a brute fact that the sentences from some fragment of discourse express something other than what they appear to express on the surface, with no explanation as to how this might work or why it is so.

In more current philosophy, we find the re-interpretive approach mainly in metaethics, under the guise of various versions of *expressivism*, put forward (e.g.) by Allan Gibbard (1990) and Simon Blackburn (1993). On Gibbard's account of so-called normative judgments, despite its surface appearances, a declarative utterance of this sort does not make an assertion; instead it expresses acceptance of a system of norms that either requires, forbids, or permits the action picked out in the utterance. Blackburn offers a projectivist, 'quasi-realist' account of moral discourse, according to which the seemingly assertoric utterances from the discourse do not actually state putative moral facts (there are none) but instead express approval or disapproval for an action.⁵

Expressivist views face a number of familiar problems raised for non-cognitivist accounts, including the Frege-Geach (or embedding) problem of how such non-factual claims function logically in seemingly valid arguments when they are embedded in conditionals. (For a useful discussion of the problem, see Kalderon 2005, chapter 2).

Another version of applying the re-interpretive approach in metaethics is exemplified by the error-theoretic account John Mackie offers. On Mackie's (1977) view, as for any error theory of any discourse, the re-interpretive move involves interpretation in the propositional logic sense of an assignment of truth-values, rather than the postulation of a different content being expressed or a different speech act being performed. An error-theoretic view of some discourse takes the informational content of the relevant sentences to be just what it seems, while also assigning all the affirmative atomic sentences from the fragment in question the truth-value 'false'.

Error theories raise the following puzzle, which we call *The Problem of Error* (henceforth, *PE*): If some fragment of discourse is actually, and systematically, false, why do competent language users employ that way of talking, uttering sentences that do not express what the speakers aim to express, in asserting what they do? What explains the widespread, systematic error being attributed to such (presumably rational) speakers?

We should note that these are puzzles that error theories raise; they are *not*, at least not on their own, objections to error-theoretic accounts. That said, since, in general, one should not take a widespread attribution of error lightly, we maintain that if some non-error-theoretic account could offer all of the practical and commitment-avoiding advantages of an error-theoretic account, without generating new problems of its own, we should prefer the non-error-theoretic account. As we will show, there is a way of retaining a re-interpretive approach without taking on the commitments of the Logical Empiricists, non-cognitivism, or embracing a Mackie-style error theory.

Before moving on, we return, briefly, to the Logical Empiricists. Despite the problems with Ayer and other Logical Empiricists' brute and blunt application of the re-interpretive idea, we think that this can be an important insight about a way of talking, provided it is separated from a positivistic,

reductionist, verificationist, or otherwise problematic framework. And, while the Logical Empiricists applied the re-interpretive approach mainly to resolve what they took to be further linguistic puzzles (resulting from their linguistic re-casting of what had standardly been taken to be philosophical issues concerning the subject matter of certain ways of talking), we think that the approach's basic idea will actually turn out to be useful for dealing with the linguistic puzzles of interest here. In a pretence approach it is (unsurprisingly) the operation of an element of pretence – a kind of fiction – in an utterance so understood that is held to generate the distinction between what is really being said and what appears to be said. The approach is thus a variety of fictionalism (the relationship between a pretence account and fictionalism is one of species to genus) about some way of talking, but one that is importantly different from what is probably still the more common understanding of fictionalism about some discourse. In order to see this, we turn to fictionalism proper.

2 Fictionalism

Fictionalism about some discourse is primarily a linguistic thesis. It is a response to worries about a supposedly problematic discourse (e.g., one that seems to traffic in metaphysically problematic objects or properties) that aims to resolve the apparent problems there by reanalysis of at least some aspect of the discourse itself. In so doing, a *fictionalist account* of some discourse does not directly address any metaphysical or epistemological problems to which the content of the discourse gives rise, but it is intended to strip the discourse of various problematic commitments, both ontological and epistemic, while retaining certain expressive advantages the discourse might provide in its current form. Even so, fictionalism is thus compatible with both semantic realism and semantic anti-realism about a given discourse on a given subject matter.

2.1 Kinds of fictionalism

The particular approach involving semantic pretence that we aim to explain and motivate here is a form of fictionalism, one that shares some central aspects with the re-interpretive approach to resolving linguistic puzzles. As in the re-interpretive approach, the postulation of pretence at work in a fragment of discourse involves maintaining that the content of an utterance so understood (specifically what we call an utterance's *serious content* – what, if anything, the utterance says about the real world) cannot be read off of the surface, i.e., on a face-value reading of the utterance. A face-value reading will yield only the *pretend content* of a pretence-involving utterance – what the utterance says when it is understood from inside the pretence it involves. We will have more to say about this distinction presently. For now, we note that this is similar to the aspect of a re-interpretive approach,

according to which it turns out that what is really being said (or, sometimes, what is really being *done*; cf. expressivist accounts of ethical discourse) is different from what appears is being said (done) on the surface. To locate the kind of fictionalism we favour within the general approach, it will help to lay out some distinctions between different kinds of fictionalism.

A major distinction frequently drawn within fictionalism at present is that between *revolutionary fictionalism* and *hermeneutic fictionalism* (Stanley 2001). The former sort of view claims that people using some apparently problematic discourse intend to make certain representational claims with the talk, but the discourse (or, at least, the way speakers employ it) is genuinely problematic. However, the revolutionary fictionalist claims, the discourse can be rendered unproblematic and can even be vindicated, by coming to understand it as involving a fiction. (Cf. Field 1980 and 1989 on mathematical discourse.⁶) Revolutionary fictionalism thus offers a reform proposal about how we should come to understand a way of talking.

By contrast, hermeneutic fictionalism claims that some apparently problematic discourse is just that – merely *apparently* problematic. Theories of this type maintain that a proper understanding of how the discourse functions will show that it already involves fiction in a way that renders it unproblematic (maintaining focus on mathematical discourse, Yablo 2005 is a paradigm example here⁷). Hermeneutic fictionalism is thus a descriptive account of how a discourse works, rather than a normative account of how we ought to come to understand it.

The revolutionary/hermeneutic distinction is not particularly important for our purposes here, save for the fact that they enable us to highlight two variants of fictionalism, which are sometimes tied to revolutionary fictionalism and hermeneutic fictionalism, respectively. We will call these variants *Error-Theoretic Fictionalism* (henceforth, *ETF*) and *Pretence-Involving Fictionalism* (henceforth, *PIF*). The variant that interests us, for resolving the linguistic puzzles, is PIF, but to be clear about what a view of this sort does and does not claim, and in order to perceive its merits properly, it is crucial to distinguish it from the other variant, ETF.

2.1.1 *Error-theoretic fictionalism*

ETF is probably the most common form of fictionalism, as the best-known fictionalist accounts of various ways of talking amount to error theories of the discourse. A prime example of this sort of view is, again, Hartry Field's account of mathematical discourse (Field 1980 and 1989). On Field's view, claims involving ordinary number-terms, such as:

- (11) Two plus two equals four.

are uniformly false, since there are no abstract objects of the sort that these terms (e.g., 'two' and 'four') purport to denote.⁸ Field holds that

mathematicians and other competent language users go about asserting things that, in light of his nominalism, are actually false. (Of course, they believe that what they are asserting is straightforwardly true, but Field claims that they are in error about this.) He does allow that we can take claims like (11) to be true in a sense similar to how a claim like:

(12) There is a brilliant detective at 221b Baker Street.

can be true, namely in the sense of being true '*according to a certain well-known story*'. A claim from mathematical discourse like (11) can be considered true 'only in that it is true *according to standard mathematics*' (Field 1989, p. 3). Strictly speaking, however, any such claim is false, hence Field's fictionalism about mathematics is an example of ETF.

Gideon Rosen's (1990) account of possible worlds discourse can also be taken as a case of ETF. According to the view, any claim apparently about possible worlds, such as:

(13) There is a (non-actual) possible world at which there are blue swans.

is false if taken as a straightforward existential claim about reality, just as a claim like (12) is false if taken as a straightforward existential claim. (Rosen 1990, pp. 331–32) However, as for Field, Rosen allows that if the sentence is understood as involving a (possibly elided) 'story prefix' of the form 'In the fiction, F, ...' or 'According to such and such a story ...', then it could turn out to be true.

Following David Lewis (1978), then, both Rosen and Field allow that, while the existence-implications sentences from a fiction-involving way of talking are all, uniformly false, strictly speaking, some sentences belonging to the discourse might turn out to be 'true in the fiction'. This can happen if (and only if) they are offered and understood as elliptical presentations of claims prefixed with some variation on the (sentential) operator 'In the fiction ...' On this explanation, we can understand the sentences only as being about the content of the fiction they belong to, and not about the real world outside of the fiction. If they get the details of the story right, they can turn out to be true (as is the case with (12), understood as a claim about the Sherlock Holmes stories). However, if we take the sentences to be about the real world outside the fiction, rather than the fiction itself, then they all end up being false.

By yielding error theories in this way, ETF accounts face the following modified version of PE. While speakers can use sentences from the discourse to make true assertions, these claims can only be about the content of some fiction. This amounts to attributing massive error to speakers regarding the status of their talk, since typically speakers take themselves to

be making true assertions about the world when they employ the discourse that they do. This is in addition to taking the 'problematic' sentences of the discourse itself to all be in error, since they are uniformly false, if taken to make claims about the world. Since such attributions of massive and widespread error are not to be taken lightly – in particular when attributed to presumably rational language users – we take these consequences to be serious enough to motivate the search for a variety of fictionalism that avoids these worries. That is what PIF purports to offer.

2.1.2 Pretence-involving fictionalism

Until fairly recently, ETF was the only form of fictionalism on the theoretical table. Theorists typically assumed that anytime one gave a fictionalist account of some discourse, he or she was giving an error-theoretic account of the talk.⁹ But, again, postulating an error theory of any sort raises the issues belonging to PE, so if a fictionalist account could be put forward that was not error-theoretic, though with all of the expressive and commitment-avoiding advantages of an ETF account, it is to be preferred over its error-theoretic sibling.

Exactly this possibility is what an appeal to pretence forms of fiction provides. In supposedly allowing for the possibility that certain utterances can still be used to make genuinely true assertions even though they involve a kind of fiction, PIF is the usual strategy for a theorist developing a hermeneutic fictionalist account. The notion of pretence is the key factor in such a view because an appeal to pretence – specifically the sort related to make-believe – can block the error-theoretic conclusions that ETF draws. This is because make-believe involves systematic dependencies between the pretence and the real world.

PIF, as an approach in the philosophy of language, has received substantially increased attention over the past 15 years. The central ideas stem largely from Kendall Walton's pioneering work in aesthetics, specifically the role of make-believe in the representational arts (Walton 1990). The sort of PIF account that comes most directly from Walton's work (including Walton's own account of our talk putatively about what does and does not exist, henceforth, *existence-talk*) is specifically *semantic* pretence-involving fictionalism (henceforth, *SPIF*). On this sort of view, pretence is a factor in the semantic functioning of various locutions, at least in certain contexts (e.g., embedded contexts such as belief attributions). A SPIF view is to be distinguished from an account that postulates pretence as a factor in certain aspects of the pragmatics of utterances, rather than in the semantic functioning of certain utterances. We discuss this other variety of PIF, and the problems that it faces, in the sections that follow. For now, we focus on SPIF accounts, with the aim of explaining the role of make-believe in them and the advantages this gives them over ETF accounts.

2.2 The workings of SPIF accounts

The notion of make-believe relevant to SPIF accounts of ways of talking takes off from the sort that is familiar from children's games of make-believe. On Walton's analysis, this kind of pretence typically involves several elements: i) props of some sort, ii) stipulated pretences, and iii) principles of generation. These work together to generate further pretences of a different sort – pretences that depend in part on how things are in the real world.

The principles of generation are rules about how to take real world facts about the things serving as props in the game, along with stipulated background pretences of the game that are *expressly made-believe*, to determine what else is to be pretended (or as we will say here, what further pretences are *prescribed*). These further pretences are thus *generated from reality* (Crimmins 1998, p. 5). The systematic dependency this produces, between whether some pretence is prescribed and whether certain real-world conditions obtain outside of the game, allows for the possibility of exploiting the pretence for serious linguistic purposes.

As an example of how this might work, consider the following case, in which some of the details of the particular make-believe involved are explicit. Say that Dex and Zev are playing a *Star Trek* game of make-believe, where the game involves certain stipulated pretences about various props, including the pretences that Dex is Captain Kirk, Zev is Mr. Spock, cell phones are communicators, flashlights are phaser pistols, the kitchen is the bridge of the Starship Enterprise, the bathroom is the transporter station, etc. Given these stipulated pretences (along with other *background* pretences belonging to the *Star Trek* story or stipulated by the pretence theorists), principles of generation establish further pretences as *to be pretended*, that is, they are prescribed by the game based on what real-world conditions hold outside the game. For example, if Dex drops his only flashlight, it is to be pretended that Captain Kirk is unarmed, and if Zev pinches someone on the shoulder it is to be pretended that he has rendered that person unconscious.

We can take advantage of the dependencies the game established in order to make a serious claim indirectly, by making an utterance that belongs to the make-believe. This amounts to making a 'partially pretend' claim.¹⁰ For example, someone might say:

- (14) Captain Kirk stole Mr. Spock's phaser pistol and hid it in the transporter station.

This utterance involves pretences from the make-believe. In using it a speaker is not seriously talking about a kind of laser gun and a station that 'beams' people (and things) to remote locations. Using (14) to make an assertion puts forward the pretences displayed in the utterance as being prescribed. Given

the principles of generation and the stipulated pretences of the game, the pretences displayed in (14) are prescribed if and only if certain real-world conditions obtain. By asserting (14), one expresses the obtaining of those conditions – in effect, one thereby asserts what she would assert by directly stating those conditions, as in an utterance of:

- (15) Dex took a flashlight that belongs to Zev away from him and hid it in the bathroom.

By presenting certain pretences as prescribed – by putting forward what we call the *pretend content* that an utterance presents on the surface – an assertoric use of (14) says *indirectly* what an assertoric utterance of (15) says *directly*. (15) directly presents the *serious content* put forward indirectly through an utterance of (14). Thus, someone who utters (14) makes a genuinely true claim exactly when (15) is true, which is when the serious content of (14) is true, i.e., when the pretences displayed in (14) are prescribed. In general, then, speakers can use sentences that belong to a game of make-believe to make genuinely true, serious assertions indirectly, exactly when the pretences they display are prescribed.¹¹ Pretence-involving utterances can thus provide a way of engaging in ‘indirectly serious discourse’ (p. 32). This distinguishes PIF from ETF: While an utterance understood in terms of PIF might not be true, when taken literally (if it is possible to do this, and we were to take it seriously at face-value), nevertheless, in virtue of the systematic dependencies make-believe has on the real-world, such an utterance can still be genuinely true, viz., by indirectly expressing a genuinely true serious content. As a result, a game of make-believe can provide a mechanism through which a speaker can, by making as if to say one thing, succeed in making quite a different, albeit still serious assertion about the world.

The forgoing explains how pretence-involving claims can be used for serious purposes and can avoid any attribution of error to the discourse or the speakers using it. Returning to our toy example, one might offer (14) as an explanation for why Zev cannot find his flashlight. An appeal to make-believe thus allows for, rather than undermines, the serious purposes served by a way of talking. And if some talk is problematic when taken at face value, an appeal to pretence might explain how it serves any serious purposes at all. Certain linguistic puzzles might thus be solved by recognizing make-believe at work in ways of talking where it has not been noticed before.

2.3 Distinctions among types of pretence

So far, we have considered an act of overt, or explicit, make-believe. To clarify the specific way that SPIF can provide solutions to our linguistic puzzles, it will help to make some distinctions between different ways that pretence can operate in utterances. The first distinction is between what Walton calls ‘prop-oriented make-believe’ and what he calls ‘content-oriented

make-believe' (Walton 1993). Prop-oriented make believe is exemplified by (14); it is the sort of pretence that is most relevant for SPIF accounts of ways of talking, as it serves mainly to talk about the real features of the props employed in the game of make-believe. It relies on the game's principles of generation, which yield some of what is to be pretended in that game as a function of what occurs in the real world outside of the game. Speakers can then exploit the systematic dependencies, to talk about the real world indirectly (e.g., by making claims about 'phaser pistols' to talk about the properties of certain flashlights). In a SPIF account of some fragment of discourse (e.g., existence-talk or identity-talk) the props are locutions or pieces of language employed in the relevant utterances. The serious content of these utterances thus often ends up in a certain sense being *about* locutions used in the utterance from the discourse.

Content-oriented make-believe is less relevant for our purposes, as it serves more to talk about what the 'world of the game' includes, i.e., what pretences are part of the overall story of the make-believe, and, thus, what is more a matter of stipulation than dependent on real-world conditions. This is the sort of pretence involved in our interactions with novels, plays, films, and other representational works of art. (Walton 1990) We might also use this label to categorize the fictionalism involved in ETF accounts, since that approach restricts fiction-involving claims to being about the content of the relevant fiction, at least in so far as an ETF account recognizes any utterances it covers as usable for making a true assertion. Recall that ETF acknowledges fiction-involving utterances as true only when they are understood to be about the details of the fiction in which the talk is embedded (e.g., as involving a 'story-prefix'), rather than about the world outside of the fiction. That said, some claims from a fragment of discourse for which we provide a SPIF account will involve content-oriented make-believe. What we might call *pretence-framework claims* will express some of the details of the stipulated background story for the make-believe behind the discourse, and thus involve content-oriented make-believe. Even so, the more interesting cases, and the real gain of PIF over ETF, are those where we use utterances from that fragment of discourse to talk about the world, and this is made possible via PIF's introduction of the invocation of prop-oriented make-believe.

The second distinction we need to make here is that between cases that involve what we can call *extrinsic pretence* and cases that involve what we can call *intrinsic pretence* (Woodbridge 2005). The central difference here has to do with whether pretence attaches to the utterance 'from the outside', or whether pretence is integral to the operation of utterance in its saying anything at all. In the basic cases of extrinsic pretence (*first-order extrinsic pretence*¹²), we could take the utterance that was made literally. What we mean by this is that a face-value reading of the utterance gives us something that we could also, in some circumstances, take seriously – in

the case of an assertoric utterance, as a genuine, direct statement about the real world. Most metaphors of the form 'A is B' involve extrinsic pretence in this way.¹³

Intrinsic pretence is really what is important for our purposes here because that is what we take most of the cases presenting our linguistic puzzles to involve. In cases of intrinsic pretence, the pretend statement an utterance makes is *not* something someone could offer as a serious statement in any actual circumstances. A face-value reading of the utterance provides something that could only be a pretend statement. We pretend that the utterance is meaningful, when we take it at face value (i.e., without the operation of some pretence), but the only serious content there is to associate with it is the content the utterance puts forward indirectly, in virtue of its role in the pretence. So, unlike sentences that can have both a literal meaning and a figurative meaning (e.g., many metaphors), utterances that involve intrinsic pretence cannot be taken literally. So here it makes no sense to talk about whether the utterance is literally true or false. However, it still might be *genuinely* true, provided the serious content it expresses indirectly says something true, but an intrinsic pretence-involving utterance has no status on the axis of literal interpretation.

Typically, the reason an utterance invokes pretence intrinsically is because there is no way to take some part of it seriously, at face value. In other words, an utterance's lack of literal content *as a whole* usually results from the failure of at least one of its components to have any literal content. This, we maintain, is what is going on in several of the linguistic puzzles under consideration here. To explain what we mean, we now turn to explaining how a SPIF account of the relevant way of talking can resolve the linguistic puzzles it generates.

2.4 SPIF accounts for some linguistic puzzles

For space considerations we confine ourselves here to discussing a particular sort of linguistic puzzle and explaining how a SPIF account of the talk that generates it will resolve the problems that are thought to arise. The puzzle on which we will focus regards our apparent ability to talk 'about' things that do not exist – most interestingly, our ability to state truly that they do not exist (i.e., to make true negative existential assertions). The account of existence-talk we consider here is modelled on the one developed by Walton (1990, chapter 11) and augmented by Mark Crimmins (1998).¹⁴ Certain aspects of this account have been further applied in the development of PIF resolutions of other linguistic puzzles, including informative identity claims and non-substitutivity in attitude ascription (Crimmins 1998), semantic paradox (Woodbridge 2005), worries about possible-world-talk and number-talk (Yablo 1996 and 2005), and metaphysical and epistemological worries about propositions (Woodbridge 2006; Armour-Garb and Woodbridge 2009b).

2.4.1 Empty names in general

Consider first, the use of empty names outside of existence claims. The puzzle that can arise here is how to understand claims that employ empty names, or names that have no bearers, since, *ex hypothesis*, there is nothing that such claims are about. Speakers typically proceed as if names have bearers. If they do not, there are two further sets of circumstances that are relevant. Do the speakers believe the name refers, or do they believe it is empty? In the former case we have what we will call the *knowing use of empty names*. Probably the most common context of the knowing use of empty names involves the special case of fictional names (understood as such). These are names that come from, and are linked to, some work of fiction, such as the name 'Sherlock Holmes'. There are a number of different sorts of claims this name can appear in, even with the assumption that it is known to be empty in place.

The first sort of claim we might make with a fictional name is what Walton calls an 'ordinary statement' concerning a work of fiction. In such cases, a claim like:

(16) Sherlock Holmes lives at 221b Baker Street.

makes a serious assertion about the story that supplies the name. (Walton 1990, p. 403) The games of make-believe that ground our interactions with written works of fiction involve treating the story provided as a prop. In this particular case, call the relevant story that provides the name the '*Holmes'-stories*'. The make-believe involved in interacting with the relevant work of fiction also include a principle of generation that amounts to treating the story presented as a veridical record of real events and states of affairs. As a result, the serious content expressed indirectly through an assertoric utterance of (16) is something like what would be expressed directly by an assertoric utterance of:

(16*) The '*Holmes'-stories* are such that they portray someone named 'Sherlock Holmes' who lives at 221b Baker Street. (Cf. Crimmins 1998)

Another sort of claim that employs a fictional name involves extending its use beyond relating the content of the story that serves as a prop for the make-believe the story generates. For example, one might want to make a serious point by uttering:

(17) Sherlock Holmes is smarter than Sam Spade.

This claim counts as a move in a combined make-believe, involving both the '*Holmes'-stories* and the '*Sam Spade'-stories* as props. The rules of the expanded game prescribe pretending that these two collections of stories are

both accurate records of real event, involving real people, in a single world. This allows us to assess what the collections of stories say and make comparative assessments of various things by relating them to the relevant stories. Following Crimmins, we might analyze the serious content expressed indirectly by an utterance of (17) as what would be expressed directly by uttering:

- (17*) The 'Holmes'-stories are such that they portray a level of intelligence as possessed by someone named 'Sherlock Holmes' and the 'Sam Spade'-stories are such that they portray a level of intelligence as possessed by someone named 'Sam Spade', and the first level of intelligence is higher than the second. (Cf. Crimmins 1998, p. 3)

The last context of use we will consider for fictional names involves what is sometimes called a *meta-fictional claim*. This sort of claim invokes pretence to assert something about the real world that is not drawn out of the *content* of a story. In fact, such a claim typically would be incorrect if understood as expressing part of that content. The paradigm example is an utterance of a sentence like:

- (18) Sherlock Holmes was created by Arthur Conan Doyle.

In this sort of case, the pretence surrounding the role of certain stories as a prop gets extended to include a principle of generation that makes it to be pretended that someone has created a person the story portrays as part of the world if, and only if, the someone is the original author of the stories that serve as a prop in the make-believe. This yields the intuitive result that the serious content of an utterance of (18) is that Conan Doyle is the original author of the 'Holmes'-stories and its use of the name 'Sherlock Holmes'.

Moving from fictional names to non-fictional, empty names, we can model an account of the serious content that attaches to utterances employing the latter on the account for the former. Still assuming that the name employed is known to be empty, we can say that just as the serious content that attaches to an utterance of (16) is about the 'Holmes'-stories, the serious content that attaches to an utterance of a sentence like:

- (19) Vulcan is a planet between Mercury and the Sun.

employing an empty name (here, 'Vulcan') is about the (mini-)theory or 'lore' surrounding the standard use of that name (here, the 'Vulcan'-lore) (Woodbridge 2005, p. 175, n. 82). Thus the serious content that attaches to an utterance of (19) is what would be expressed directly by an utterance of:

- (19*) The 'Vulcan'-lore is such that it describes a planet called 'Vulcan' as located between Mercury and the Sun.

All of the cases considered thus far have assumed contexts involving the knowing use of empty names. However, it is clear that not all uses of empty names will occur in this context. Still, we think that the account offered so far can be extended to unknowing uses of empty names, or at least to the most common ones. These we take to be situations in which a speaker intends to use the relevant name in the same way that her linguistic community does. This deference to her linguistic community, in particular to experts about the use of the name, will make it the case that the name functions in her utterances the same way it does in those of the experts. It functions as a known-to-be-empty name in her speech, although she does not know this, so, via deference of use, the utterances that she makes employing this name inherits the serious content that attaches to the utterances made by the experts who use the name.

In the bizarre and presumably extremely rare (because seemingly pointless) possible circumstances in which a speaker employs a name that is in fact empty, as used by her linguistic community, but where she intentionally rejects deference to expert use and instead stipulates that the name has a bearer, but without any knowledge of an intended referent, then the name functions in her utterances as an arbitrary name. This deviant use leaves it open as to what, if any, serious content attaches to her utterances that employ the name. However, this situation is not peculiar to the SPIF account of empty names we offer here; the same would hold on any account of how names (empty or referring) function in utterances, whether the account involved pretence or not.

2.4.2 Existence-talk

Return to one of the explicit puzzle cases canvassed before, that presented by negative existential claims, such as:

- (2) Santa Claus does not exist.

Postulating make-believe at work in claims like (2) explains how uses of them can produce true assertions. The idea is to recognize that existence-talk is based on a game of make-believe governed by rules like the following:

1. It is to be pretended that every name or singular term has a bearer.
2. It is to be pretended that 'exists' is used to attribute a property ('existence') that some things have and some things lack (a *discriminating* property).
3. The pretence that something has the property of existence is prescribed if and only if attempts to refer with the name 'providing' the 'something' to the game (by 1.) are successful. Otherwise the pretence that the denoted entity lacks the property of existence is prescribed.
4. The pretences displayed in an utterance of [\bar{N} exists] are prescribed iff [\bar{N}] as used in that utterance refers to an object.

So the serious content expressed indirectly via uttering a sentence like (2) assertorically is that the name 'Santa Claus' as used in that utterance of (2) fails to refer to any object.¹⁵

This Walton-inspired account of existence-talk (along with the preceding account of talk employing empty names) amounts specifically to a SPIF account involving *semantic* pretence because the pretence is about the meanings of the expressions involved in the talk (names, singular terms, and the predicate 'exists'). The expressions used in the utterances are themselves props in the relevant game of make-believe, so the prop-oriented make-believe that becomes available for exploitation makes it possible for claims that use the expressions in specific ways to express indirectly serious content about those very *uses* of the expressions. The pretences that back the discourse thus effect a collapse between use and mention, providing a means of performing a kind of deferred ostension that lets us pick out and describe particular kinds of uses of expressions by making utterances that employ (and thus display) the kinds of use in question. SPIF accounts like these thus put familiar kinds of linguistic resources to useful, new purposes, extending the expressive capacity of the language in a logico-syntactically conservative way.

At least in the case of existence-talk, some aspects of the prop provided by the locution 'exists' result in the utterances that employ this locution involving pretence *intrinsically*. The main reason for this is that surface appearances have this locution operating like a genuine descriptive predicate that serves to characterize objects. But this role must be one that this expression has only within some pretence, because being a genuine predicate (as opposed to being a grammatical predicate) requires that the expression comes with criteria for something to be in its extension and criteria for something to be in its anti-extension. But while there is a pretence to the effect that 'exists' comes with these criteria and that negative existential claims place particular objects in its anti-extension, all of this *must* involve pretence. The reason is that 'exists' cannot have an anti-extension. By this we do not mean there are criteria for something being in its anti-extension, but as a matter of fact, nothing satisfies those criteria. The expression does not have a contingently empty anti-extension; it does not have an anti-extension at all. Nothing could possibly be in its anti-extension, since it would first have to be, i.e., to exist, and would thus be in the expression's extension. As a result, there are no pretence-free uses of 'exists' – they all involve a pretence that the expression functions as a predicate. This is particularly apparent in negative existential claims, but also holds for positive existentials as well.

The intrinsic pretence involved in existence-talk is what prevents any version of PE from applying to this account. We have seen that instances of existence-talk express indirectly serious content about kinds of uses of what Russell calls *denoting expressions*. There is no bar to the instances of existence-talk being genuinely true in virtue of this serious content they express being

true. But the intrinsic nature of the pretence the talk involves makes it the case that there is no sense in asking for its status on a literal interpretation. Instances of existence talk cannot be taken seriously at face-value because there are no pretence-free uses of the expression 'exists'; so these utterances cannot be taken literally, and it makes no sense to say that they are literally false. As a result, PE gets no grip on this SPIF account of existence-talk.

2.5 Objections to PIF generally

We hope we have laid out the difference between PIF accounts and ETF accounts in enough detail to show how the newer variety of fictionalism avoids the modified PE puzzles generated by the error-theoretic aspect of the older variety of fictionalism. But the move from ETF to PIF generates a new worry: what we will call *The Engagement Problem* (henceforth, *EP*). EP is usually presented as the claim that a given pretence-involving solution to a philosophical puzzle is implausible, since, in general, ordinary speakers, who assert the likes of (1) and (2), do not seem to be aware of, much less actively participating in, any pretence or game of make-believe. (Crimmins 1998, pp. 14–15; Richard 2000, pp. 211–12; Stanley 2001, pp. 46–7).

While we agree that the objection would be serious if it applied, we deny that it creates a problem for SPIF accounts because this approach does not provide an account of speakers' attitudes or activities. A speaker who has uttered (14) (or even (12) or (16)) would most likely think of herself as somewhat engaged in (or at least intentionally alluding to) the make-believe in which the utterance counts as a move, and the same might be true of speakers using metaphors, hyperbole or other figurative modes of speech. But it is not (and certainly need not be) true that people making existence claims think of themselves as pretending anything. The sorts of SPIF analyses we consider helpful in dealing with the linguistic puzzles of interest here do not assume that speakers or hearers are engaged in, or even aware of, such a pretence.

On our understanding of this approach, pretence comes in as part of the account of how the talk functions semantically; it does not enter as part of an account of what speakers intend to do or what hearers take them to be doing. While we can describe a speaker's use of a pretence-involving way of talking as like the use of a figure of speech that is best understood in terms of a possible game of make-believe, that does not mean that the speakers are using language figuratively in the usual intentional sense. A speaker need not engage in the game behind the talk in order to use that talk. Moreover, she does not have to be aware of how or whether the talk's functioning involves pretence. Speakers typically do not (although they might) take *any* attitude towards their talk; they simply use it as a tool to make claims. They proceed on generic assumptions that names and singular terms pick out objects and that predicates serve to characterize objects. They do not endorse universal principles to these effects; they do not feel forced to stop

talking certain ways when confronted with counter-examples (such as negative existential claims like (2)).

Although speakers employing a pretence-involving way of talking need not engage in the pretence, SPIF *theorists* offering an account of that fragment of discourse, will mention pretence, in order to explain what serious claims about the world its instances make (and how they do this). But no one using that discourse needs to engage in, or even be aware of, the games of make-believe that figure in the explanation of how pretence-involving ways of talking function. SPIF accounts thus avoid the EP by keeping all reference to pretence within the *theorist's explanation* of the claim's semantics – of how it ends up with the serious content it has. What a speaker seriously asserts via some pretence-involving discourse makes no mention of pretence at all, and no awareness of the pretence (let alone any engagement in it) needs to be any component of the speaker's attitudes or mentioned in any explanation of what the speaker is doing.

Another objection that some opponents of SPIF accounts make is that pretence theorists are engaged in 'bad old paraphrasing' and, thus, that SPIF accounts suffer the ills that that method endures (Stanley 2001). In drawing an analogy to paraphrase, this objection focuses too much on a single aspect of a SPIF account, namely that it assigns truth conditions to sentences other than the ones those sentences seem, *on the surface*, to have. But the important difference between the paraphraser and the pretence theorist is that, unlike the former, the latter provides an account of how sentences get connected with the truth conditions the theorist assigns. Since the paraphraser's inability to do that is what is really behind the objection, someone giving a SPIF account of some discourse can resist this complaint.

3 Pragmatic PIF and its problems

In a series of papers, Fred Kroon (2000, 2001, 2004) has developed and defended a different sort of pretence account of some putatively problematic fragments of discourse. He defends a *pragmatic* pretence account, which is so described because he contends that speakers exploit the semantic content of certain expressions so as to assert or convey what is not, strictly speaking, semantically expressed through the utterance of sentences. Kroon holds that his pragmatic pretence account explains both the reason why certain parts of various sorts of utterances are problematic and why, and how, speakers manage to convey serious content by, in effect, exploiting those problematic features.

We contend that there are problems with Kroon's proposed account, problems that arise for any pretence account that is suitably characterized as *pragmatic*. Our aim, in this section, is to lay out Kroon's account, to assess it, critically, and set the grounds for embracing a *semantic* pretence account of the sort that we favour over Kroon's pragmatic version of PIF. We will largely

focus on the objections his account faces with the EP, but we begin our critique with a brief discussion of how PE comes back to challenge Kroon's account. But first we turn to the account itself.

3.1 Kroon's PIF account

One of Kroon's primary concerns is accounting for negative existential claims, such as:

(20) Hamlet does not exist.

He claims that the pragmatic features of (20) and its ilk manage to convey serious content, by exploiting the semantic content of 'exists', in order to assert what is not semantically expressed by an utterance of that sentence. Kroon claims that an utterance of (20) (or of (2)) is false, as it is a 'quasi-contradiction' that is roughly of the form:

(20') The individual who is Hamlet and who exists, does not exist.¹⁶

On his view, in uttering (20) a speaker:

...adopts the pretence that the reference determiner underlying his use of the name 'Hamlet' secures reference to some individual, and hence an individual who exists, and uses the resulting interpretative tension to assert that:

[(20*)] Outside of the pretence that the underlying reference determiner (for my use of 'Hamlet') secures reference to an individual, it fails to secure reference to any individual. (Kroon 2004, p. 19)

He further claims that, through an assertion of (20), a speaker may say something true, which a hearer can then come to understand and know, even though what has been uttered is, strictly speaking, false.

In more precise terms, Kroon says that we should understand this asserted content and the way in which the audience works out this content as follows. As he notes, 'There is a striking sense in which the speaker does as if the description correctly describes the intended referent, and that he achieves his communicative purpose partly through knowing that his audience knows that he is doing as if the description is apt' (pp. 12–13). Notice that if Kroon is right, then ordinary speakers and, for the point of such an assertion to succeed, ordinary hearers must (i) be aware of the pretence; (ii) be conversant enough with the notion of a reference determiner to use, or grasp, such a notion; and (iii) be aware of when a speaker is employing it. Accordingly, Kroon maintains that there is a shared pretence between speakers and hearers (and explicit knowledge of this pretence), when the former utter negative existentials, the serious content of which would be conveyed by an assertion of (20*).

Here is the picture that Kroon offers of how pretence factors into the sorts of claims presenting the linguistic puzzles that are of interest here:¹⁷ there is an ‘interpretative tension’ generated by a speaker’s utterance of a claim like (20) that tells her audience that she is only pretending. This interpretative tension arises from the fact that, if her audience takes her literally, they will have to assume that she is trying to assert a contradiction (Kroon 2001, p. 210). Kroon claims that since the speaker cannot realistically be claiming the truth of a contradiction (we assume that the speaker is not a dialetheist!), her audience should recognize that she is engaged in pretence and that, in fact, it is from within that pretence that the statements made by claims like (20) are put forward. As he notes, ‘it is the speaker’s use of the device of a blatant contradiction ... that now allows the speaker’s audience to understand that she is disavowing the thought that the world is, in relevant respects, the way her pretence depicts it to be’ (p. 211).

3.2 Problems with Kroon’s pretence account

As mentioned before, we shall focus on the problems Kroon’s account faces with PE and EP. We will begin with the PE and then turn to EP, or, as will become clear, the engagement *problems*.

3.2.1 Kroon’s PIF account and the problem of error

As we previously noted, there are a number of puzzles that arise for an ETF account of some fragment of discourse. Kroon’s view on negative existentials is that when a speaker utters a sentence like (20), what she utters is blatantly contradictory – a *pragmatic* contradiction.¹⁸ So, now we have it that the utterance the speaker makes is (pragmatically) contradictory. But why would a speaker go in for talking that way? That is, why utter what is a pragmatic contradiction, if what you wish the hearer to understand is something true (and, hence, non-contradictory)?

Although Kroon does not answer these questions directly, we can infer what he might say in response, given what he wishes to say about the puzzle posed by informative identity sentences. In the case of informative identity sentences (e.g., (1)), Kroon (2001) proposes that ordinary speakers are making a mistake – that they could have uttered other sentences that are not plagued by the problem possessed by utterances of sentences like (1). Moreover, he seems to suggest that such a way of talking is so entrenched that even if speakers were aware of the problem, they would continue uttering these contradictory sentences.

When we turn to negative existentials like (20), Kroon’s claim must be that speakers just cannot but utter sentences, like (20), that result in a pragmatic contradiction, like (20’). This is supposed to explain why, though what they aim to convey is *non-contradictory*, what they utter is contradictory, pragmatically speaking. But to attribute to speakers an utterance of a pragmatic contradiction (or even to take ordinary speakers to utter sentences that are

of a contradictory form), in the interest of expressing something that is true (and, hence, non-contradictory), is to attribute error, even if it is not error in the usual sense.

We are not persuaded, for we are not convinced that such utterances (or assertions) must be construed as pragmatically contradictory and, thus, in an error-theoretic fashion. Such attributions of global error, whether semantic or pragmatic, are to be avoided if possible. Thus, if a non-error-theoretic approach is on offer, one that promises to do what a given error-theoretic account purports to do, it is to be preferred. We have already presented such an account in Section 2, so we take this point as one reason for preferring our SPIF account over Kroon's pragmatic PIF.

3.2.2 *Kroon's PIF account and the engagement problems*

The engagement problem is usually presented as the claim that a given pretence-involving solution to a philosophical puzzle is implausible, since, in general, ordinary speakers, who assert the likes of (1) and (2), do not seem to be aware of, much less involved in, a game of pretence. Call this version of the engagement problem, *EP1*. At base, we take *EP1* to arise because it seems quite implausible that ordinary speakers, through asserting the likes of sentences like (20), are even aware of, much less actively participating in, such pretences. That, however, is how Kroon understands the role of pretence in such claims. He acknowledges speakers' awareness of pretence, when he describes them as 'opportunistically engaged in a pretence', and assimilates the relevant cases to ones where he acknowledges that a speaker 'achieves his communicative purpose partly through knowing that his audience knows that he is doing as if the description is apt'. (Kroon 2004, p. 13) As mentioned, while this might be plausible when speakers are intentionally speaking figuratively, it is problematic for any account of a discourse that speakers do not typically consider figurative, e.g., those of interest here.

The quote in the previous paragraph shows that we can extend *EP1* as directed at Kroon's pragmatic pretence account. He not only contends that speakers are aware of and actively exploiting, a pretence, he likewise holds that *hearers* are aware of the pretence as well. Indeed, it is through understanding that the speaker is actively engaged in a pretence that the hearer is able to extract the serious (and true) content that the speaker manages to convey. But, as noted, such pretence awareness is simply implausible, whether it is attributed to speakers or to hearers.¹⁹

As hinted at before, Kroon's response (2001 and 2004) to this (familiar) problem is that, in at least some cases, speakers just have to be pretending and hearers just have to be aware of the pretence, in order to be in a position to grasp the serious content of what speaker's have managed successfully to convey. That is, in at least some relevant cases, it is implausible in the extreme to contend that speakers (and hearers) are *not* both aware of, and engaged in, such a pretence.

It strikes us as implausible that speakers intentionally and consciously engage in the pretences that Kroon takes to underwrite these communicative acts, or that they take hearers to be aware of, much less to process, such pretences. But we shall leave that concern aside. What we wish to point out now is that if there is a pretence account that does not require this of speakers and hearers while, at the same time, providing an account of the relevant problematic discourse then Kroon's claim would be falsified, in which case, in light of EP1, we would have a reason for favouring this alternative pretence account. We have already explained how SPIF accounts can avoid EP, so this point provides further reason for preferring the SPIF approach over Kroon's pragmatic version of PIF.

One might also claim that EP arises when what is to be pretended is outside of the ken of ordinary language users.²⁰ This leads to a further problem, which Kroon does not address directly – what we might call the *sophistication complaint*. This complaint drives the second engagement problem, what we will call EP2. To see EP2, notice that when Kroon provides the serious content of what is asserted by an utterance of (20), not only does he require that speakers be aware of the hypothesized pretence, he also takes the content of such an assertion to explicitly mention (and, in some cases, quantify over) the pretence. Given the serious content of an assertion of a negative existential, the serious content itself includes the notion of pretence. In fact, understanding the serious content that gets conveyed by such utterances (and assertions) requires understanding the used term 'pretence'. But, EP2 concludes, this attributes too much to ordinary speakers and hearers.

This problem is not restricted to the concept of a pretence, for it is also the case that the serious content of such sentences includes the notion of a 'reference determiner', along with other terms normally restricted to semantics. We are reluctant to grant that ordinary speakers and hearers have knowledge of, much less attitudes towards, the notion (much less the nature!) of reference determiners, whether reference is construed causally, deflationistically, or descriptively, as Kroon would have it. And, even if they did have such explicit knowledge, we find it unlikely that *that* is what they intend to convey through utterances of (20). At the very least, Kroon owes us an explanation as to why the sophistication complaint is not warranted; thus far, no such explanation has been forthcoming (hence, we worry).

We take both the standard engagement problem, EP1, and the sophistication complaint, EP2, to present serious challenges to a pragmatic account of pretence of the sort that Kroon advocates. Our third variant of the problem – EP3 – raises the question of whether Kroon is entitled to put forward a pretence account which, if successful, would serve to resolve certain philosophical puzzles or, at least, some putatively problematic discourse. Here is the problem.

As we have noted, Kroon claims that ordinary speakers and hearers are aware of, and are engaged in, the sort of pragmatic pretence that he proposes.

He argues for this by considering cases in which the existence of a fiction is *overt*, as might occur in a negative existential like

(21) Superman does not exist,

as said by a speaker who is talking about the Superman story. Having defended his pragmatic version of PIF for this kind of fiction-based negative existential, he goes on to claim that ‘...there is no principled difference between fiction-based negative existentials like ‘Holmes doesn’t exist’ and ordinary negative existential like ‘Homer doesn’t exist.’ (Kroon 2001, p. 216) As such, he proposes that his fiction-based solution to the problems that (21) poses should carry over, without remainder, to those for (22), below, which is not fiction-based. One might conclude from this that, because EP seems less of a worry when we consider discourse that is itself fictionally construed, the engagement problems for ‘ordinary’ cases do not seem as pressing. One might thus take Kroon’s success at resolving the problems posed by fiction-based cases to be grist for a solution to the engagement problems.

Whether Kroon’s pragmatic pretence account of putatively problematic fictional discourse is successful or not – we are inclined to think that it is not – what we wish to point out is that there is a disparallel between fiction-based and ordinary negative existential. The issue, we think, turns exactly on the final version of the engagement problem, what we will call *EP3*. As noted, Kroon’s pragmatic pretence account assumes that both speakers and hearers are aware of the pretence. For Kroon, this is a constant, through fiction-based and ordinary cases. The problem we find with this is that, even if it is plausible that fiction-based cases require some awareness of the presence of a pretence – manifest through the awareness that the terms have fictional uses – this awareness is not, and certainly need not be, obvious, in the ‘ordinary’ cases.

To make this point, we will stick with negative existential statements. Contrast (21) with:

(22) Vulcan does not exist,

(where, by ‘Vulcan’, we mean the planet hypothesized in nineteenth century astronomy, not the fictional home of Mr. Spock or any of its inhabitants), as they are expanded into:

(21’) Superman does not really exist

(22’) Vulcan does not really exist.

Notice that, while (21’) seems an acceptable expansion of (21), (22’) does not seem to be an acceptable expansion of (22), at least as ‘really’ is used in (21’). The problem is that (21’) seems acceptable because:

(21’’) Superman does not exist; he is just a part of the fiction

is likewise an acceptable expansion of (21). But (22') does not seem to be an acceptable expansion and, we conjecture, this is because, while:

(22''') Vulcan does not exist; there is no such thing as 'Vulcan'.

appears to be an acceptable expansion of (22),

(22'') Vulcan does not exist; it is just a part of the fiction.

does not appear to be an acceptable expansion of (22). Notice, moreover, that:

(21''') Superman does not exist; there is no such thing as 'Superman'.

likewise does not seem an acceptable expansion of (21). Of course, while there are uses of (21''') that one can imagine, the problem with it seems to be that, for at least some of the uses of (21''') (in particular, those applicable to (22''')), a proper rejoinder might be that there is a Superman, though *it* is just a fictional character.

To summarize, there is an acceptable expansion from (21) to (21'). While one *can* expand (22) to (22') (in the sense that there can be a reading of (22') that coheres with a reading of (22)), this is a very special case regarding a particular reading of (22), one that, as it happens, likewise presupposes that speaker and hearer are cognizant of a given fiction.²¹ The conclusion we draw from this is that there is a principled difference between (21) and (22). As we would describe it, the difference regards the fact that semantic competence with the relevant use of 'Superman' requires awareness that the term is fictional,²² whereas this is *not* the case in the relevant use of 'Vulcan'.

If that is right, it explains why a speaker and a hearer would be aware that certain uses of 'Superman'-involving sentences are uttered and understood only given the awareness of the fiction, whereas the same will not be true of ordinary uses of 'Vulcan'-involving sentences, including a sentence like (22). But if a proper understanding of (21) requires awareness of a fictional use, though no such fictional use is supported, much less required, for a speaker (or hearer) to understand an ordinary use of (22), then it is at least not obvious that there is 'no principled difference' between a fiction-based negative existential and an ordinary negative existential. But if that is right then there is a difference between the two sorts of cases, in which case the engagement problem re-emerges. A slightly different version of the same argument is as follows: If a proper understanding of (21) requires awareness that 'Superman' is being used as a fictional term, though no such fictional use is required in order to understand ordinary 'Vulcan'-uses as in (22), then it is false that there is no 'principled difference' between

fiction-based negative existentials and ordinary negative existentials, in which case EP re-emerges.

If, as we should, we take the engagement problem seriously, then we see the problem as posing a challenge to any pretence theorist: Either explain why the engagement problem is not a problem or explain why, although it may be a problem for some views, it is not the *theorist's* problem. One way of explaining why it is not actually a problem would be by showing that it is really the only way in which certain problematic discourse can be resolved. This is Kroon's tack. Largely for the reasons we have provided in this section, we take EP to be an insurmountable problem for any pragmatic PIF account because of where it locates the pretence – in the pragmatics of the discourse, i.e., in factors pertaining to its use, specifically, those involving what speakers are doing with the sentences that they are uttering. As such, any pragmatic pretence approach will have to bite the bullet with respect to EP, at least to some extent, and therefore follow Kroon's tack. Our *riposte* is the provision of a SPIF account that resolves the relevant linguistic puzzles without requiring pretence awareness.

4 SPIF accounts and further objections

The foregoing section on the difficulties pragmatic PIF accounts face with PE and EP provide reason for preferring SPIF accounts, since the latter avoid these objections. To recap, SPIF accounts are not error theories in any problematic sense because the role of make-believe in the functioning of the discourse makes it possible for speakers to use the discourse to make genuinely true claims about the world outside of the pretence at work in the discourse. By the operation of the principles of generation governing the relevant game of make-believe, SPIF accounts can exploit prop-oriented make-believe to make indirectly serious assertions about the real world. It is therefore not restricted in its capacity for making true assertions just to talking about the content of the fiction. And because our understanding of SPIF accounts places all awareness of the pretence involved in the discourse into the theorist's explanation of the talk (and *not* in any attitude speakers have towards the talk they employ), EP does not pose a problem for accounts of this sort.

Admittedly not all proponents of SPIF accounts have been sufficiently clear on this latter issue. In particular, we find that the three most prominent semantic pretence theorists – Walton, Yablo, and Crimmins – each fall victim in some way to a variant of EP. For what follows, we briefly explain the problems these theorists face. After doing so, we return to some further challenges to proponents of SPIF, recently mounted by Kroon.

4.1 Prior versions of SPIF and the EP

We are not claiming that *all* advocates of SPIF fall victim to the EP (as we mentioned, previously, we take it that our account avoids the problem).

Indeed, there is a sense in which each of the relevant fictionalists – including Kroon, Walton, Yablo, and Crimmins – do not have the problem that their accounts *explicitly* commit them to attributing active participation in any game of make-believe to language users who employ fragments of discourse they claim involve pretence. Rather, as we will suggest, our worry is that they have not completely avoided some aspect of EP, or they have, but at the expense of limiting the application of their proposed pretence account.

4.1.1 Walton and the EP

Walton has dealt mainly with figurative discourse (or: discourse that makes up or is *about* works of fiction), so some element of pretence awareness or engagement is to be expected. That said, he is adamant that speakers need not be actively engaged in make-believe (Walton 1990, pp. 406–11). But his pretence account of existence-talk is where he most needs to fend off accusations, not only of engagement but of even any pretence awareness. For one thing, it seems that his only recourse against the charge that he falls victim to an EP is by noting that he rejects introspective psychology, and also that speakers can be pretending *in some sense* without being aware of it.

As we will explain presently, we find even this concession of Walton's to be problematic. In our formulation of SPIF, we get away from engagement entirely by locating the pretence at the level of the theorist, who is theorizing about the relevant discourse (the 'talk'). The theorist may talk about pretence linking up utterances with their serious content, but at no point do speakers have to be engaged in any such pretence. Indeed, just as speakers need not be aware of defence to experts securing reference for natural kind terms, they do not even have to be aware of such a pretence, nor do they even have to be disposed to acknowledge that they are engaged in a sort of pretence if asked.

The problem that we find for Walton is that, even though speakers are not actively engaged in the pretence, it does seem that, on his account, they have to be *pretence-aware* – aware of and alluding to the pretence. So, pretence awareness becomes the real problem for him. In particular, the worry is that he has not adequately answered opponents of the approach who charge that his pretence account ultimately attributes pretence awareness to speakers engaged in the talk at issue.

4.1.2 Yablo and the EP

Yablo (2001 and 2005) is very clear about the EP: He wants to have nothing to do with engagement. In response to the objection that ordinary speakers are *not* pretending, he notes,

we are not just pretending to assert, when we say that the number of planets is 9... [i]f pretending is *making believe*, where 'making' signifies

an act deliberately undertaken, then the objection seems right. (Yablo 2001, p. 90)

Rather than attributing such pretending to speakers, Yablo contends that they are really ‘simulating’, which he describes as being in relevant respects *as if* one believed, while not believing, save *per accidens*. More specifically, he holds that:

[s]omeone is simulating belief that S if although things are in relevant respects *as if* they believe that S, when they reflect on the matter they find that they do not believe it; or at least are agnostic on the matter; or at least do feel the propriety of their stance to depend on their belief that S if they have one. (Ibid.)

Let us call this sort of simulation *dispositional engagement*.

While we are sympathetic to the idea behind this notion of simulation, we worry that it will only really cover certain cases – cases where it would be clear to the speaker (upon reflection) that she is *making as if* certain objects exist and being described in her utterance, whether or not she chooses to believe in their existence and that her utterance offers a description of them. We (2009b) have argued elsewhere for a pretence account of proposition-talk. But, short of claiming that speakers are in relevant respects as if they believe that S, we claim that it is compatible with our SPIF account that such speakers take no attitude towards (their talk about) propositions, nor towards whether anything in proposition-talk commits them to any sort of *as ifness* (nor to whether they feel – or even *can* feel – that the propriety of their stance depends on anything approaching a belief that S).

4.1.3 Crimmins and the EP

Crimmins tries to avoid engagement problems by talking about ‘shallow pretence’ (Crimmins 1998, pp. 10, 14–15). While we agree with what he says about the level of a speaker’s engagement – specifically, her lack thereof – with any pretence a way of talking involves, we worry that characterizing speakers as pretending in any sense (even ‘shallowly’) runs the risk of setting up what can become an impassable stumbling block for certain theorists suspicious of the approach. Crimmins’s discussion still suggests the speakers’ engagement in – or at least awareness of – pretence, despite his intention for it not to do so. Hence, while he is on the right track, he has not done enough to convince the sceptics that EP is not an issue that presses. We are therefore willing to give the detractors the word ‘pretend’ in this context: speakers (other than a rather small minority, including the present authors) are *not* pretending when they use proposition-talk (or existence-talk, identity-talk, or truth-talk). Nor need speakers intentionally allude to or even be aware of any pretence at work in any talk for which we

want to give a SPIF account. Still, at the level of *theorizing* about how the talk functions, we should understand these fragments of discourse to be ‘as if’ ways of talking that involve a systematic dependency on how things actually are. And we should explain the kind of ‘as ifness’ involved in terms of pretence, specifically, games of make-believe.

4.2 SPIF and the modal objection

One further objection recently launched against a semantic pretence account of the sort that Crimmins puts forward has to do with whether such an account (or any SPIF account) can adequately cover the *modal content* of a putatively pretence-involving utterance, that is, ‘what *possible* situations are described by [such an] utterance’ (Kroon 2004, p. 9). Our SPIF account of existence-talk, for example, appears to yield only the *actual* truth-conditions of its instances, namely whether the relevant denoting expression as used in the utterance succeeds in referring to something. The objection is that this account of the serious content of existence claims seems to generate modal intuitions that conflict with our modal intuitions regarding existence-talk. This indicates a difference in modal content between the instance of existence-talk and the postulated direct expression of its putative serious content. So, the objector claims, the SPIF account of existence-talk cannot be right.

The conflict in modal intuitions is supposed to be that assuming (e.g.) that Hamlet does not actually exist, then (following Kripke) necessarily Hamlet does not exist, while, assuming that ‘Hamlet’ as used in an utterance of (20) does not actually refer to anything, nevertheless, it could have referred to something. (p.10) We do not agree that modal intuitions conflict in this way, when the issues are properly understood. Given that ‘Hamlet’ is a name, and it actually does not refer, then, given the orthodoxy that names are rigid designators, that name does not refer in any possible world. This might jibe against an intuition that the name could successfully refer in some non-actual possible world, but we have to remember that the issue is whether the name *as used by us here* in the actual world, to talk *from here* about other possible worlds, refers to anything *there*. So, being a rigid designator, a name that does not actually refer to anything is empty when used by us here to talk about any possible world. Intuitions to the contrary are most likely conflating the possibility of a homophonic name existing in another possible world and successfully referring there. But really that is a different name (or, at minimum, a different use of a name), and so not relevant. If the denoting expression is a non-rigid designator, then it seems right to say that even if it does not actually refer to anything, it could have (unless there are other reasons for rejecting this, as there is for, e.g., ‘the least rapidly converging series’). Thus a SPIF account like ours can avoid the putative modal content problem, if we note that names are rigid designators.

4.3 SPIF and the problem of meaning

Another possible objection to a SPIF account of existence-talk in particular is that it violates a constraint on ‘the universality of ‘exists’’ (p. 11). This objection can be called the *problem of meaning(s)*. The initial objection is that our SPIF account does not give the expression ‘exists’ a meaning that adheres to the universality constraint. As a result, the objection goes, an account like ours is postulating a second, *pretend* meaning for the expression, in addition to a usual meaning it must have that does adhere to the constraint. Worse still, in some contexts the same expression will have to be used with both its pretend meaning and its usual meaning, to avoid contradiction.²³ ‘But, contradiction or not, the idea that two different meanings are involved surely can’t be right.’ (Ibid.)

We agree that two meanings cannot be involved in the use of ‘exists’, but that is because we reject the claim that ‘exists’ has a ‘usual’ meaning that does not involve pretence. Part of our SPIF account of existence-talk includes reasons for recognizing that this fragment of discourse involves pretence intrinsically because there are no pretence-free uses of its central locution, ‘exists’. Since we still recognize that the expression cannot *really* have an anti-extension, our account does not *really* violate the universality constraint, even though it holds that every use of ‘exists’ involves a pretence that the expression functions as a predicate. Nevertheless, there is still only one meaning for ‘exists’; it is just the meaning this locution gets from the pretences at work in its linguistic functioning. Thus, we deny that the problem of meaning(s) present a real objection to our account.

5 Conclusion

After setting out what we see as the dominant attempts at offering theoretical innovations in the philosophy of language, we landed on a fictionalist account, which bore some relation to what we have called the re-interpretive approach. Having briefly discussed the varieties of fictionalism currently on offer, we focused on our favoured SPIF account, which we presented and defended, as an approach that can be applied to various problematic fragments of discourse – in particular, those fragments that generate various linguistic puzzles that both launched and continue to propel work done in the philosophy of language.

Starting with the particular SPIF account that we provided in Section 2.4, for uses of empty names and of existence-talk, we showed how the account might resolve the litany of linguistic puzzles that these ways of talking seem to generate, and we suggested how the approach might be extended to resolve many of the other puzzles catalogued at the beginning of this chapter. After considering some objections for our SPIF account, we showed the approach to be resistant to various objections, both those that apply to PIF, in general, and some that apply to SPIF accounts, in particular. We take

the approach developed here to offer a promising new form of analysis in philosophy of language, one with a broad range of application and a potential for significant illumination of the way various portions of our language manage to express content, despite certain apparent puzzles that attempting to account for this might generate.

Notes

1. For more on this issue, see Armour-Garb and Woodbridge (2009b).
2. This approach is by no means restricted to Kripke. For a more recent version, see (Field 2008). For a lucid discussion of Kripke's approach, see (Field 2008, pp. 58–65).
3. In addition to puzzles that elicit the referential/attributive distinction, there is work, by Charles Parsons (1974), Keith Simmons (1993), and Michael Glanzberg (2001), on contextual solutions to the liar paradoxes and, by Diana Raffman (1994), Stewart Shapiro (2003), and others, on contextual solutions to the sorites. Contextual solutions to the liar (and the sorites) constitute a sort of pragmatic account, since what gets expressed by the utterance of a sentence is *context-sensitive*. But the very idea of context sensitivity requires the distinction between what's conveyed and what is, strictly speaking, said (by the sentence uttered).
4. Thus Ayer's view includes the following positions on various fragments of discourse: 'analyticism' about mathematics and logic – where the claims have no factual content but instead are really just definitions in use, or stipulations of use principles for certain vocabulary; phenomenalism about external object talk; emotivism about ethics; instrumentalism about scientific unobservables.
5. For a different sort of expressivism in the philosophy of language, consider Robert Brandom's (1994) expressivist semantics.
6. Other examples of revolutionary fictionalism might include Rosen (1990) on modal discourse (although we could understand his account as hermeneutic) and Joyce (2001) on moral discourse. See also Hussain (2004).
7. Other examples might include Walton (1990) on existence-talk, Crimmins (1998) on intentional-attitude ascriptions, Yablo (2000) on talk about abstract or 'platonic' objects.
8. Field goes on to argue that there are nominalistic reformulations of physical theory that do not require the mathematical claims to be correct. Hence, at least that part of science could be done without numbers (contra the Quine-Putnam indispensability arguments). One of Field's important insights is that a theory does not have to be true to be good. He claims that mathematical theories, which are not true, can still be good, in virtue of the fact that they amount to *conservative* extensions of non-mathematical discourse. For worries about whether Field has in fact succeeded, see (Shapiro 1983).
9. Field is an exception here. (Field 1989, p. 2) describes an approach that amounts to ETF, but he also points out that this is not the only way to understand fictionalism.
10. The contrast is with what we call *purely pretend claims*, claims that involve pretence but in a way that makes it the case that they express no serious content. We maintain that a diagnosis of the liar paradox, along with the other cases of semantic pathology, will centre on providing pretence accounts of the traditional semantic notions and recognizing the pathological cases as involving pure pretence. For a brief start on the idea see (Woodbridge 2005).

11. This aspect of pretence-involving utterances is sometimes called 'piggy-backing' (Richard 2000).
12. Higher-order levels of extrinsic pretence are possible, e.g., second-order extrinsic pretence involves merely pretending that it is to be pretended that a is F, etc. Second-order extrinsic pretence involves a change in how we regard the subject in the pretence (from being F to having the features required to be fictionally F in a first-order pretence). Third- and higher-orders of pretence involve a change in subject (from a to games of make-believe themselves) as well.
13. To see this about metaphors, consider the sentence
 - (I) Nevada Gov. Jim Gibbons is the headliner of a bad lounge act.
 One could take this sentence to make a serious statement about the world directly, that is, one could take it at face value. Taking or offering (I) metaphorically involves placing the face-value reading of the utterance in the context of a pretence. Specifically, (I) invokes a pretence consisting of a game of make-believe that prescribes pretending someone is the headliner of a bad lounge act whenever that person actually possesses certain features, features that really have nothing to do with headlining a lounge act. See (Walton, 1993) for the details of the role of make-believe in (much) metaphor. What we are adding here is a specification of the type of pretence many cases involve as extrinsic, in particular, first-order extrinsic. The utterance's non-literal content, the serious claim it makes indirectly (namely, that Gibbons has the pretence-prescribing features), depends on an antecedent literal content that attaches to the whole utterance and the principles of generation that link prescribed pretences to real-world conditions.
14. A related but slightly different account, also based on Walton's work on make-believe, is developed in (Evans 1982, chapter 10).
15. Although we cannot adequately address this point here, it bears noting that the serious content here is expressed in terms of reference, which is a way of talking that will itself get a pretence account. The serious content of instances of reference-talk will, in turn, get expressed in terms of identity-talk, yet another fragment of discourse we hold gets a pretence account. The serious content of the instance of this talk will get expressed in terms of reference (and possibly existence-talk). This indicates a circle of pretence, in which the claims all express serious content *indirectly*, where it turns out that there is no direct, pretence-free way to express that serious content.
16. By contrast, an utterance of
 - (20#) Hamlet exists
 has the force of a quasi-truism, as is roughly of the form
 - (20#') The individual who is Hamlet and who exists, exists.
17. Kroon's actual focus in his (2001) presentation of this picture is plural identity claims, but he holds it for negative existentials as well. See Kroon (2004).
18. If we allow that utterances are *truth-apt*, then his treatment of negative existentials is properly characterized as error-theoretic. But even if not, given that (20') arises from an utterance of (20) in virtue of the presupposition that Hamlet exists, the speaker is still, by Kroon's account, committed to have uttered a pragmatic contradiction.
19. That Kroon is committed to pretence awareness is clear from what he says in his works (2001 and 2004).
20. So, e.g., one might, as we (2009b) have, claim that the serious content of 'proposition-talk' is best construed through a pretence. The detractor might

object if we attributed awareness of the pretence to ordinary speakers and hearers, since, she might argue, it is an open question whether, in a certain sense, they even have the concept of a proposition.

21. Put roughly, one can imagine a circumstance in which 'Vulcan' names a *posited* planet that is understood to be nothing more than an instrumental calculating device (like using geocentric astronomy for nautical navigation). But notice that in order for one to be competent with that use of 'Vulcan' (at least in order to be in a position to expand from (22) to (22')), like one can from (21) to (21'), but unlike a standard reading of (22)), semantic competence demands that she be aware of the fact that this use of 'Vulcan' is stipulated to be part of a fiction. Hence, rather than challenging our claim, this case serves to support it.
22. Indeed, consider someone who memorized *Anna Karenina* but who mistakenly believed that it was a book of non-fiction. Although the person could report lots of 'Anna Karenina events', it is evident that the speaker is not a competent user of that name.
23. Kroon (2004, p. 11) actually makes this claim about an example involving an instance of identity-talk, but it carries over to existence-talk.

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