

Bald-faced lies and parafictional beliefs

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A famous counterexample to definitions of lying that involve intention to deceive is what Sorensen (2007) has dubbed the ‘bald-faced lie’. For instance, in *The Godfather II*, Pentangeli testifies in court “I never knew no Godfather”, to ensure that mafioso Corleone is not convicted. However, it is common knowledge in the courtroom that Pentangeli did know the Godfather. Hence, even though we judge that Pentangeli lied, his speech act cannot involve an intention to deceive anyone.

In response, Stokke (2013) has proposed a Stalnakerian analysis according to which Pentangeli does not intend that anyone believes that he knew no Godfather but instead intends that this becomes commonly accepted. I argue that this is not a convincing characterization of the bald-faced lie; Pentangeli does not care if anyone somehow accepts that he knew no Godfather. Rather, Pentangeli’s bald-faced lie is focused on getting on the record that he said the right things in court.

I propose an alternative Stalnakerian framework according to which bald-faced lies are more akin to fictional statements than to stereotypical lies: The ‘workspace account’ (Semeijn, 2017). All statements – fictional statements, assertions and (bald-faced) lies – are modelled as proposals to first update a temporal common ground: the ‘workspace’. At the end of the discourse, ‘assertive’ or ‘fictive closure’ is performed; The content of the workspace is added to the common ground as belief (for non-fictional statements) or as ‘parafictional belief’ of the form “In story S, p” (for fictional statements). Crucially, Pentangeli’s bald-faced lie is aimed at making it common belief that according to the account that Pentangeli gave in court, he knew no Godfather. This is a parafictional belief. Hence, bald-faced lies have a stronger resemblance to fictional statements than to lies: Whereas bald-faced lies and fictional statements result in parafictional belief forming, lies do not.

References: • Semeijn, M. 2017. A Stalnakerian analysis of metafictional statements. *Proceedings of 21st Amsterdam Colloquium*, 415–424. • Sorensen, R. 2007. Bald-faced lies! Lying without the intent to deceive. *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 88(2). 251–264. • Stokke, A. 2013. Lying and asserting. *Journal of Philosophy* 110(1). 33–60.