Overcoming Violations of Real-World Knowledge in a Fantasy-World Text

Erinn K. Walsh, University of New Hampshire, Durham

Date of Award
Fall 2016

Project Type
Dissertation

Program or Major
Psychology

Degree Name
Doctor of Philosophy

First Advisor
Edward J. O'Brien

Second Advisor
Anne E. Cook

Third Advisor
Karla A. Lassonde

Abstract
Fantasy-text is a genre in which events routinely violate the rules we know to be true in the real-world. In six experiments I explored the inherent conflict between unrealistic fictional events and general world knowledge (GWK) to examine these competing sources of information within the context of extended fantasy-narrative. Experiments I-III demonstrated that fantasy-unrelated violations caused measurable disruption to the comprehension of an extended fantasy narrative despite an abundance of contextual support for real-world impossible events that violate GWK. Experiments IV and V demonstrated that fantasy-related violations caused measurable disruption when they occurred at the local level and the fantasy-context stood in direct opposition to the target sentence. However, Experiment VI demonstrated that measurable disruption can be initially eliminated when readers encountered fantasy-related violations at the global level; but delayed processing difficulty occurred on the spillover sentence, downstream of the target sentence. All six experiments are discussed within the context of the RI-Val model.

Recommended Citation
https://scholars.unh.edu/dissertation/1372

Many fantasy worlds draw heavily on real world history, geography, sociology, mythology, and folklore. Early fantasy worlds appeared as fantasy lands, part of the same planet but separated by geographical barriers. For example, Oz, though a fantasy world in every way, is described as part of this world.[6] Although medieval peasants who seldom if ever traveled far from their villages could not conclusively say that it was impossible that, for example, an ogre could live a day's travel away, distant continents were necessary from the Renaissance onwards for such fantastic speculation to be plausible, until finally, further exploration rendered all such terrestrial fantasy lands implausible.